this criticism. On the other hand, surely writers such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill do care about the human condition.

5) Are in-yer-face plays any good? Peter Ansorge, an early critic of the recent new wave, argues that its plays do not constitute a new golden age because they are not as good as the first new wave of 1956. Although it is easy to dismiss this point of view as hopelessly nostalgic, it does raise the question of how you judge plays which deliberately defy the naturalistic aesthetic which is traditionally the means of rating new plays. Certainly, many 1990s playwrights explicitly question naturalism and their work is often experimental in form, but are their plays of any lasting value? How do you assess true quality in a postmodern age? Perhaps only time will tell.

6) Are in-yer-face plays too introverted? Adrienne Scullion, of Glasgow University, argues that while many Scottish playwrights tackle the big issues, and are "vital in debating and describing our new social and cultural responsibilities", they have a "very different agenda to the fashion-victim, nihilistic 'shopping and fucking' introspection of London." Certainly, there is evidence of a distinct regional divide, which mirrors political and cultural divisions, in British theatre.

7) Is the new drama reactionary? Political plays, as writer David Greig once pointed out, must contain a suggestion that change is possible. In a sense, they have to inspire audiences. In 1998, drama critic Michael Billington argued that even "the most visceral, popular plays of today imply that there is little hope of change: in Patrick Marber's *Closer* the characters end up acknowledging their inviolable solitude, in Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* the 'money is civilisation' ethos murkily prevails, in Phyllis Nagy's *Never Land* the hero is quite clearly the victim of fate." In Britain, Billington concluded, "We are living in an aggressively post-ideological age" and theatre offers only glimmers of hope. It would be ironic indeed if new writers, however radical their subjective feelings, are only able to create a drama which runs around in circles.

What next?

Today, the heady days of in-yer-face outrage are over. Sarah Kane's suicide in February 1999 seemed to close an era. Equally significant was the failure in the late 1990s of Irvine Welsh's vicious *You'll Have Had Your Hole* and, by contrast, the success of Conor McPherson's redemptive *The Weir*. But if the days of shock-fests are gone, the impact of the in-yer-face avant-garde can be felt everywhere. They kicked down the door of complacency, letting through a whole range of new talent, exemplified for example by Charlotte Jones's *Humble Boy*. If the new wave has broken, it has also done its job. In-yer-face drama not only made theatre hip, it had also made it a profitable export. Between 1995 and 1999, there were more than 400 productions worldwide of plays premiered at the Court. In Germany, Sarah Kane is more often staged than Schiller. In Denmark while it took *Hamlet* more than 200 years to cross the north sea, Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* made the trip in two years[3]. The lasting influence of the new drama lies both in restoring British theatre's morale, and in expanding its ambitions and its range. Today, New Writing is not always in-yer-face, but it is healthier and more diverse than ever.

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3) Svetlana Klimenko, 'Brutal Brits and Daring Danes: Sarah Kane in the North', paper delivered at the 'In-Yer-Face?' theatre conference, University of the West of England, Bristol, September 2002.

Violence and the Body: Dissecting Recent British Drama

By Dan Rebellato, Royal Holloway, University of London

'Simon stabs the fork into Clifford's eye ... twists the fork, lets it fall'.[1]

'Laura stands, she takes off her hospital nightgown, she stands in her pants. She feels the fatter parts of her body with the calm of a butcher. She chooses her buttock. She uses the nail clippers to snip a chunk out of her buttock. She winces in pain. She holds the small chunk of flesh up to the light. She walks over to the cooking pot, she puts the chunk of flesh in the pot'.[2]

'Tinker is watching.
He forces Carl to the ground and cuts off his feet.
He is gone.
Rod laughs.
The rats carry Carl's feet away'.[3]

Few people would deny that new British playwriting has had a long fascination with distorting, injuring, mutilating and dissecting human bodies. It goes back as far as the earliest forms of scripted theatre in Britain, in the representations of the Crucifixion from the medieval pageant plays, and of course is evident in the gouging out of eyes in Shakespeare's *King Lear* or the many atrocities that punctuate *Titus Andronicus*. Between 1737 and 1968, such representations abated in legitimate theatre due to the censorship imposed on plays by the Lord Chamberlain, an official of the Royal Household with strict powers to forbid the production of any plays he felt were undesirable.[4] In the Lord Chamberlain's last years, a number of playwrights emerging in the wake of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) argued in favour of artistic freedom and deliberately challenged the censor in the subject matter, content and style of their plays. The most famous of these is probably Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965); in scene six of this play, a group of young lads discover a temporarily abandoned baby in a park; their teasing slowly degenerates into cruelty as they stone the baby to death. It was debate over images of this kind that led to the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's role as theatre censor.

Nonetheless, despite these antecedents, I think it is true to say that images of bodily mutilation on British stages have greatly intensified over the last ten years. Many of the most respected and well-known plays of the 1990s have centrally involved images

1) Martin Crimp. *The Treatment*. London: Nick Hern Books, 1993. p. 77.
2) David Greig. *San Diego*. Typescript. Author's collection. 2001, p. 23.
3) Sarah Kane. *Cleansed*. London: Methuen, 1998, p. 30.
4) For more information on British theatre censorship see John Johnston. *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990, Nicholas de Jongh. *Politics, Prudery and Perversions: The Censoring of the English Stage 1901-1968*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000, and Richard Findlater. *Banned! Theatrical Censorship in Britain*. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967.

of extreme brutality: *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996) and *Cleansed* (1998) by Sarah Kane, Anthony Nielson's *Normal* (1991) and *Penetrator* (1993), Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and *Faust is Dead* (1997), Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* (1995) are just the most famous of them. In the 1990s British drama has regained a cachet and audience that it has not had for perhaps forty years, and a revival of its international reputation for innovation, theatrical challenge and seriousness. Violent images are at the very heart of the shared reputation that these plays have gained. Michael Billington, the *Guardian*'s influential theatre critic, tried to characterise this new generation with the term 'New Brutalists'. The term did not catch on, perhaps because of its association with the least beloved architectural style of the twentieth century, but the centrality of violence in the term is telling. Aleks Sierz's book, *In Yer Face Theatre*, also characterises this generation of playwrights through the images of aggressive confrontation; his label (that gives the book its title) refers less to the violence on stage than to these plays' general stylistic assault on the sensibilities of their audiences: 'It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm'.[5]

In this article, I want to explore the cultural and historical background against which these images appeared; to discuss the theoretical tools we might use to examine them; and consider some questions of staging that might shed light on their function. Throughout, concern is to ask what attitude to violence is embodied in these plays, why the theatre is showing us the body in crisis, and how far it may be trying to look beyond this crisis.

Cultural Background

Quentin Tarantino is sometimes considered to have made violence 'cool'. *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) are both splattered with horrific acts of violence. But these acts take place within a baroque and complex cinematic structure that continually plays off references to popular, trashy, film genres against literary and religious motifs. This perhaps distances us from the action, and provides the films with a patina of cool, ironic, arch knowingness that flatters audiences into believing they aren't 'just' watching a video nasty.

In fact, I think, these films are deceptive in their use of violence. It seems plausible to say that the stylistic conventions that the films play with distance us from the violence, but in some ways the reverse is true. In one famous sequence from *Reservoir Dogs,* the gang member, Mr Blonde (played by Michael Madsen) is left alone with a captured cop. He turns on the radio and opens up a large knife. To the bubblegum sounds of 'Stuck in the Middle With You' by Stealer's Wheel, he cuts off the cop's ear. It was this scene that horrified many of its viewers who flinched at the graphic violence. Oddly, however, the sequence is *not* graphic. As Mr Blonde lunges forward, the camera almost decorously drifts away towards a corner of the room. It is perhaps the implication of what is happening, juxtaposed with the cruelly inappropriate music that creates such a stylistic and emotional jolt.[6]

5) Aleks Sierz. *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001. p. 4.
6) In *Pulp Fiction*, most of the deaths—and despite its reputation there are only seven of them—occur off-screen.

The same was true of *Blasted*. In the first production, directed by James Macdonald in the tiny Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court, most of the violence and sexual images were carefully masked from the audience; there was evidently little desire to force the audience to confront these images directly. However, as I recalled above, all the first critics seemed to see were these same hidden actions, brought out into the open in the reviewers' prurient prose. But if the stage itself was not the source of the shock effect, where might it have come from?

It's indisputable that British culture in the 1990s saw a great intensification of violent images in its culture. In pop music, we might think of the hermaphrodised bodies of Marilyn Manson on the cover of his album *Mechanical Animals* (1988) or of the Aphex Twin on the cover of the single 'Windowlicker' (1999), or the cyborg head on the sleeve of The Prodigy's *Music for the Jilted Generation* (1995). In May 1991, Richey Edwards of the Manic Street Preachers, goaded by a music journalist that his band were all fake, cut the words '4 REAL' into his arm with a knife. In a less dramatic way, the blurred edges of biology were witnessed in the 1980s dance crazes, robotics and body-popping, which mimicked mechanical effects in the body, apparently jerking between programmed positions in movements that recalled industrial machinery far more than human physicality. These dance crazes were short-lived, though they left their mark in the choreographer's lexicon, as may be seen in Michael Rooney's work on Kylie Minogue's video for 'Can't Get You Out Of My Head' (2001).[7]

Similar images to these were visible in British art in the 1990s and it would be useful to pause to examine the uses to which they were put. In September 1997, an exhibition of young British artists opened at the Royal Academy, London. Its title, *Sensation*, captures both the sensation it caused in the press and the direct, visceral assault made by many of the images on visitors to the gallery. The images broke taboos in a number of ways, confronting prejudices, striking at our deepest cultural fears. Sierz's description of 'In Yer Face' theatre fits the *Sensation* artists well: 'questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating

Fig. 1

7) The album covers can be seen at the excellent music reference website, the All Music Guide, http://www.allmusic.com/; an extremely graphic image of Richey Edwards's self-mutilation is at http://homepage.ntlworld.com/goto.manicx/photos/richey/richey40.jpg; Kylie's video can be seen at her official website, http://www.kylie.com/ (visited 8 November 2002).

discomfort … Unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative'.[8]

The painter, Jenny Saville, is one of the most interesting of the Young British Artists. Her work engages very directly with the body as corporeal mass. In an early painting, *Branded* (1992, fig. 1), the eye of the viewer is placed at navel-height, creating a distorted perspective that emphasises the physical bulk of the painting's subject. Giving us a kind of inversion of Descartes's prioritising of the mind over the body, the head here appears puny, shrunken while the belly and breasts dominate the composition. But this is no celebration of carnality or the joys of the flesh. The tissue here appears to be dead, inert biological substance; the colours are grey, blue, slick with oil and appearing almost diseased. The disjunction between body and brain is emphasised in the subject's left hand that grabs a fold of flesh as if testing a piece of meat for freshness.

In *Shift* (1996-7, fig. 2), the colours are more lively, sun-coloured yellows, oranges and reds, but they play across a mass of bodies lying it appears in a pile. But where one body begins and another ends is made more difficult by the uniformity of the colour. Whether these naked bodies are in a heap of post-orgiastic lethargy, or whether they are cadavers from a concentration camp is hard to decide. Perhaps the colour indicates less glowing health than it does cooked meat. In *Fulcrum* (1999, fig. 3), the bodies have become even more distended

Fig. 2

and bloated; their human dimensions are less easy to see, the paint smearing the bodies into one another, almost as if limbs have been attached randomly to create a fusion of three bodies. And we have returned to the greys and blues of *Branded*, only now with, here and there, occasional blistered smears of blood. In Hybrid (1997, fig. 4), we see a single body, of fairly expected dimensions, but the paint is applied in undisguised and sharply divided sections. The lower third of the picture shows the body in pinks and greys, while the upper left and right corners captures the body in bruised yellows. The lines that divide this body evoke a Frankenstein image, a body assembled from scraps of bio-matter.

The distortion, disassembly and reassembly of the body are taken further in the sculptural

8) Sierz *op. cit.*, p. 4.

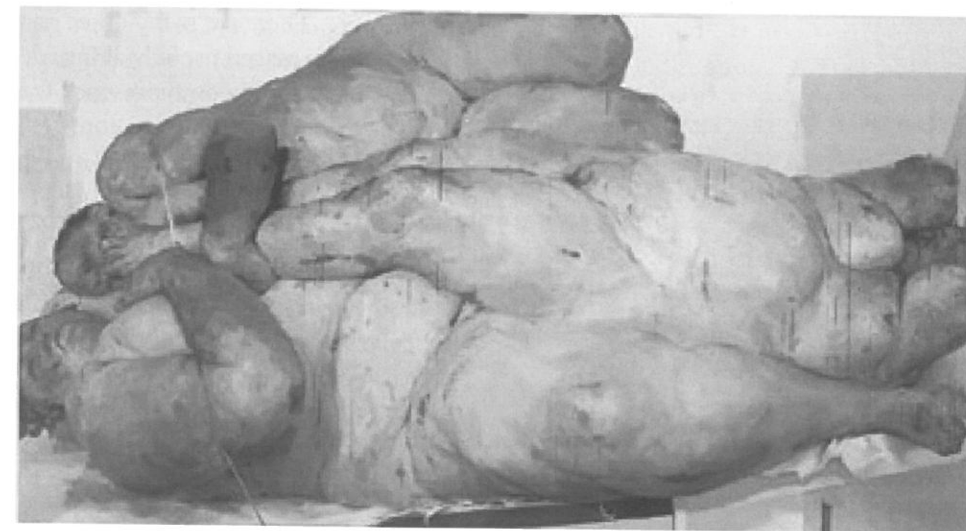

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

work of Jake and Dinos Chapman. In their quirkily-titled piece *Zygotic acceleration, biogenetic, de-sublimated libidinal model (enlarged* H *1000)* (1995, fig. 5), we see a group of children fused together, with sexual organs protruding from and opening up their fused, collective bodies. In this, they were building on similar images in their first major exhibition, *Chapmanworld* (ICA, 1996). In the earlier exhibition, the titles were deliberately coarse and vulgar: *Fuckface, Two-Faced Cunt*, etc. But here the title suggests perhaps a broader historical vision: that this is a flash-forward to the biogenetic future of children,

polymorphously sexualised by our culture, yet oddly unified—and not just in the interchangeable wigs, the uniformly pale, hairless skin, but also in the identical running shoes that they all wear.

Sarah Lucas's *Bunny* (1997, fig. 6) deconstructs the bunny girl into its individual fetishes: the stockings, the hosiery, the languorous 'available' pose. But the absence of the person inside the clothes and the gradual departure from human form as the eye

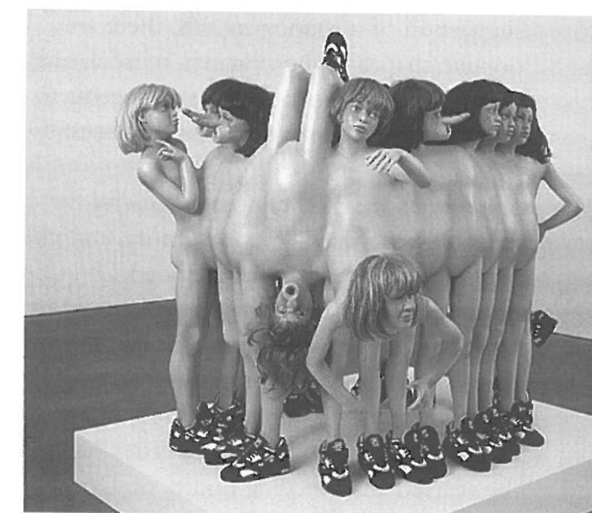

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

travels up the image create an unsettling effect. Fetishising the body fragments its, dismantles it, and here the body seems to have been side-stepped altogether in a psychotic evocation of pure desire. Paul Finnegan's *Untitled* (1995, fig. 7) is another sculpture, an angry mass of plastic, in which the human body seems to be a distant memory; perhaps there is the suggestion of a roaring mouth, there are organic shapes suggesting arm musculature at the sides, and, incongruously, it seems to be wearing a pair of smart leather shoes.

Sensation is one of the most successful British art shows in recent memory, and its images of the mutilated, distended, distorted and re-engineered body should be placed alongside the violently dismembered limbs of Kane's *Cleansed,* and Howard Barker's *The Bite of the Night* (1988), the body cut in two in Jez Butterworth's *Mojo,* the scarred and bleeding bodies of Donny and Pete in Ravenhill's *Faust is Dead,* and many more. There are many other images that could be placed usefully alongside these. But their very omnipresence forces us to ask where these images come from, why they should be so powerful and pervasive.

A post-human world?

It has been claimed by several writers and thinkers that we are entering a new phase in the relationship between humans and technology, and between humans and the rest of the natural world. We are moving from the human to the post-human world.

There are many possible causes of this move. The Human Genome project has mapped and sequenced the 3 billion base units of DNA that make up the 30000 genes which together comprise each person's human genome. This technology is opening up extraordinary possibilities not only for predicting our genetic destinies, but also for intervening in that destiny. At

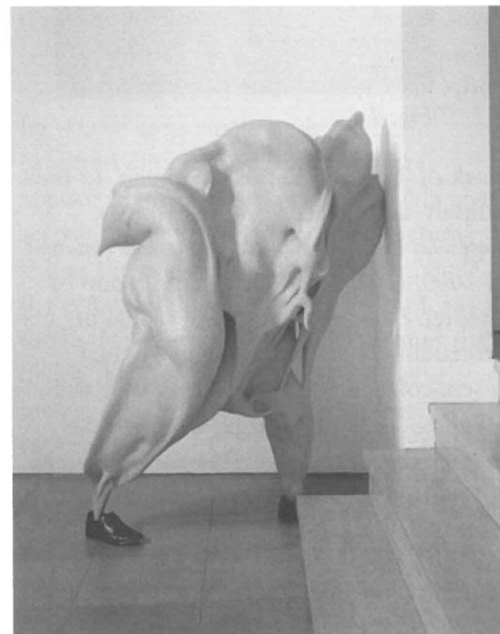

Fig. 7

the most benign, this may mean fighting diseases at the genetic level; more darkly, this may open the doorway to genetic modification and engineering, 'designer babies', human cloning. On a broader level, these discoveries raise the question of what it is to be human. We share too great a proportion of our genetic substance with animals, even with the vegetable world, to make wholly viable any claim to uniqueness. With the possibility of cloning and genetic engineering on the horizon, a range of ethical questions arises: how far should we enjoy complete freedom over our own bodies? Will we still consider ourselves to be fully human? Does cloning threaten the identity, value, and autonomy of the individual?[9] The advocates of a posthuman future suggest that it does.

Of course, the borders between our bodies and technology have been blurred for some time. Medical transplant technology has raised it, though its greater availability over the last twenty years has raised the spectre of the cyborg: how much of the human can you replace technologically before he or she ceases to be human. These issues have been reinforced by the growing availability of implant technology: the 1990s saw widespread use of breast implants, collagen injections, and other near-permanent forms of body modification. In turn, these may be seen as an extension of other kinds of adornment—tattoos, piercings, certain kinds of deliberate scarring—as well as body modification more generally, with dieting, jogging and going to the gym as only the most common examples.

These various phenomena have been celebrated in some quarters, most notably by postmodernist thinkers. Donna Haraway, in her celebrated article 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985) argues that the future for women lies in acknowledging the breakdown of distinction between humans and animals, humans and machines, and between the material and the immaterial. As a result the future will see the hybridization of humans and machines, and we will all be cyborgs.[10] Some go even further: Arthur and Marilouise Kroker in *Body Invaders* (1988) ask 'if, today, there can be such an intense fascination with the fate of the body, might this not be because the body no longer exists?'[11] And this same move from the connection of the body *to* technology to the complete displacement of the body *by* technology is continued in Jean Baudrillard's essay 'Clone Story' where he boldly announces that cloning marks 'the end of

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9) Francis Fukuyama, in *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. London: Profile, 2002, addresses these ethical issues directly. The implications of cloning for the individual are brilliantly addressed in Caryl Churchill's latest play, *A Number* (Royal Court, 2002), published by Nick Hern Books. Jake and Dinos Chapman's work might be generously described as confronting us with the nightmarish possibilities of genetic modification, since their 'tragic anatomies' figures resemble in some sense the outcome of cloning processes that went wrong.

10) Donna J. Haraway. 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,' *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991, pp. 149-181.

11) Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, eds. *Body Invaders: Sexuality and the Postmodern Condition.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, p. 20.

12) Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulations*. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 97.

the body, of this singularity called body'.[12] Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, in their apocalyptic collection of essays, *Posthuman Bodies*, argue that 'posthuman bodies are the causes and effects of postmodern relations of power and pleasure, virtuality and reality, sex and its consequences. The posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image'.[13]

This theme is a fairly familiar one from contemporary British drama: the interface with technology often means a profound confusion over identity, whether this is the opportunities for deception witnessed in the sex-chatroom scene from Patrick Marber's *Closer* (1997), or the mysteries of Anne in Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her Life* (1997) who imagines herself as a screen. All through Ravenhill's work, the Internet is a site of alienation and dysfunctionality, specifically in *Shopping and Fucking*, *Faust is Dead* and *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999).

The displacement of humans by screens was actualised in 1994 with the development of the Visible Human Project. Joseph Paul Jernigan, of Waco, Texas, was a convicted murderer and was executed by lethal injection at the age of 39. Jernigan had signed a donor consent form, and therefore became history's first Visible Human. After his death, the processes of Computer Tomography and Magnetic Resonance Imaging allowed photographic 'slices' to be taken of his body. After one series of pictures, he was dismembered and photographed again. Finally he was frozen and *actually* sliced into 1-millimetre slices. Each slice was digitally photographed and the whole collection of images was placed on the web.[14] And the Visible Human was perhaps also the first true Posthuman, because the 1mm slices of Joseph Paul Jernigan dried out so quickly that no sooner had he been digitally photographed, he literally dissolved into the air.

Historical background

But is the posthuman world new? Catherine Waldby, in her book on the Visible Human Project, suggests that there has always been a blurred interface between technology and the body.[15] But whatever the conceptual difficulties in sharply distinguishing human from technological, it is clear that it is under capitalism that this boundary has been most extensively and intensively breached. Capitalism was, in fact, brought about by the dramatic and large-scale replacement of human-sized technology with a new system that required humans to work around the technology. Mechanization has been the unbroken trend of capitalist development even in its contemporary forms that involve the programmatic conversion of human decisions into machine code.

Exemplary exponents of this process were Fred Taylor and Henry Ford, who gave their names to the processes of Taylorism and Fordism. Fred Taylor was the inventor of time-and-motion study: armed with a stopwatch and notebook, he would watch someone engaged in physical work, noting down the most productive methods, the

13) Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds. *Posthuman Bodies*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 3.
14) There are so far two visible humans, and they can be seen at http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_human.html (visited, 9 November 2002).
15) See chapter three of Catherine Waldby. *The Visible Human Project: Informatic Bodies and Posthuman Medicine*. Biofutures, Biocultures. London: Routledge, 2000.

most efficient moves, eventually producing a card which explained the optimal series of moves to complete the task, with all extraneous movement dispensed with. Samuel Gompers, head of the American Federation of Labor, argued that Taylor 'makes every man merely a cog or nut in a big machine, fixed in the position of hundredth or a thousandth part of the machine, with no need to employ more than a few mechanical motions nor any brain power except the little required in making those motions'.[16]

Henry Ford extended this mechanisation of human activity in his influential adoption of the production line. Under this process, the operations comprising an industrial task were separated out and divided among a line of works. The conveyor belt would pass the object to be worked on down the line at a fixed speed, and each individual worker's job was reduced to the repetition of his or her banal task all day, for as many years as they could stand it. That this also seemed to be turning humans into machines did not perturb him and two early champions of his system blithely admitted that he required people who 'will simply do what they are told to do, over and over again, from bell-time to bell-time'.[17] Small wonder that Ford workers considered themselves to have been treated like machines.[18]

Between 1880 and 1920, Taylor and Ford transformed the lives of industrial workers. Work was shaken free of any traces of its artisan roots, and became deadeningly boring as a result. In addition, the effect of repeating certain movement, from 'bell-time to bell-time', without any extraneous movements had a physical effect, it is clear that the two should be credited with inventing an entire new class of industrial injuries.

These processes are widely felt to have been surpassed by more flexible ways of working in the 1930s, but in fact their methods are still current. George Ritzer, in *The McDonaldization of Society*, has argued that Taylorism and Fordism is alive and well in the fast food industry, and that from there they are once again spreading, and now to fields like health and education. The fast-growing sector of call centre employment is a field where Taylorist surveillance is particularly strong: the telephone technology around which call centre systems are built—the Automatic Call Distributor—and the data collection technologies associated with them provide ways of monitoring your workers' activities that would have made Taylor salivate.

Nonetheless, these advances of Fordism and Taylorism are exclusively in the service sector, and heavy industry in the developed nations is in retreat, as manual labour is transferred to cheaper sectors like China and Southeast Asia. One of the results of this shift is that our bodies are changing. In

16) Quoted in Robert Kanigel. *The One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Enigma of Efficiency*. London: Little, Brown, 1997, p. 446.
17) Horace Lucien Arnold and Fay Leone Faurote. *Ford Methods and the Ford Shops*. Industrial Management Library. New York: Engineering Magazine Company, 1919, p. 41.
18) Ray Batchelor. *Henry Ford: Mass Production, Modernism and Design*. Studies in Design and Material Culture. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 53.
19) See the report on the BBC's website: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/sci_tech/2002/leicester_2002/2246450.stm (visited, 9 November 2002).

September 2002, statistics indicated that since 1980 average weights had increased by 7.25 kilograms.[19] The main reason for this is the decline in industrial production and the rise in consumption as the key economic activities in the west.

As a result, the functional connection between the body and work has been all but abandoned. The body now exists in the sphere of consumption; it is an object on which you can work. Chris Shilling, in his book *The Body and Social Theory* (1993), suggests that advances in technology have made the body far more malleable than it once was and we are now able to extend our consumption of the body through what he calls 'body projects': 'the body,' he writes, 'is a project whose interiors and exteriors can be monitored, nurtured and maintained'.[20] And we do this by dieting, jogging, having tattoos, piercings, etc. The body is something we maintain and adorn, much as English people are notorious for washing their cars on a Sunday and adorning them with sporty wheels and fluffy dice that hang from the rear view mirror. The body has become a *possession*, a commodity that you invest in and keep in good condition, not for the sake of health, but because doing so increases your cultural capital (or in other words, it is yet something else to show off to the neighbours).

Perhaps this is why we are seeing so many images of the body in crisis. The body has no more a functional connection with our necessary life activity. This is why Jenny Saville's *Branded* seems to be asking the question, what *is* the body? The sitter is grabbing a handful of flesh as if questioning what this substance is. The body is alienated from us, something upon which we are induced to act by advertising and other commercial images. And as capitalism moves decisively into its global phase, the body under capitalism also becomes the globalized body; the news is regularly punctuated with horror stories about the international trade in human organs. Just to take a recent example in August 2002, Dr Bhagat Singh Makkar was struck off the medical register for trading in human organs.[21] Legally and illegally, the body is being disassembled and reassembled in new combinations and in global networks of exchange.

Stage Combat

If this is the appropriate context for these extreme theatrical representations, how does it illuminate our understanding of these plays? What stance do these plays and playwrights adopt towards the damaged and dissected bodies of their plays?

I would argue that these plays should not be seen as expressing the characteristic postmodern optimism about technology and any associated delight in the move to a posthuman world. In many ways, I would argue, postmodernism's pleasure at seeing the decline of organic human beings is indistinguishable from the most amoral forms of capitalism. And by so comprehensively undermining the integrity of our notions of the body, postmodernism makes further capitalist exploitation of the body easier. In this sense, in fact, I would argue that postmodernism is the ideological form of

20) Chris Shilling. *The Body and Social Theory*. Theory, Culture and Society. London: Sage, 1993, p. 5.

21) See the report on the BBC's website: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2225357.stm (visited, 9 November 2002).

global capitalism.

Because what we find in these plays is no real delight in the dissection of the body. In several plays, we see the motif of self-mutilation, cutting, self-harm (the shadow image of bodily adornment) yet it is striking that these terrible acts seem to be attempts not to celebrate the end of the body, but a means of finding the body again. In Ravenhill's *Faust is Dead*, Pete is so numbed to the world by the bland pleasures of consumerism that he feels forced to cut his body to get any kind of physical reaction. Perhaps this is also a response to the removal of the body's link to necessary life processes, and its replacement in the sphere of consumption. The same happens in *4.48 Psychosis*, where it is the sudden reunion of mind and body in an act of self-harm that 'feels fucking great ... feels fucking amazing'.[22] The same could be said of moments from David Greig's *San Diego* (2002) and Ravenhill's *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2001).

And while global capitalism is making possible all kinds of new global disassembly of the body, these plays often seem to reverse this process. In Howard Barker's *Victory* (1983), the widow, Susan Bradshaw, travels the play trying to reassemble her dead husband's scattered organs. This is a part that was played at University by Sarah Kane, and a similar process may be seen in her work. In *Cleansed*, Carl's body is gradually dismembered, but in our culture there seems to be no bottom line to the manipulation of the body. Postmodernists, at least, would seem to be suggesting that even the complete annulment of the human is acceptable. Yet in *Cleansed*, dismemberment is a prelude to the rediscovery and reaffirmation of love.

There is another important cultural manifestation of the mutilated body, in 'body art'. Performance artists like Ron Athey, Franko B, Orlan and others use their own bodies as the substance of their art. Franko B pierces his body on stage, using his dripping blood to create trails and traces of his performance that are for him the artwork itself. Orlan has submitted to a series of surgical interventions in a way that seems to be a commentary on the violence within our ideas of beauty. Ron Athey places sado-masochistic acts at the centre of his performances, in one famous case cutting his partner's back and making a series of prints from the blood.[23]

But there is a substantial difference between these kinds of performance and the plays I have been referring to. There are two principal reasons: the first is that pain is a subjective experience and however flamboyant the performance of pain, its spectacle does not make for human communication. We can flinch at, certainly not share, the experience of an artist cutting designs into their arms. The playwright, on the other hand, who writes a stage direction like 'Hippolytus's bowels are torn out and thrown onto the

22) Sarah Kane. *4.48 Psychosis*. London: Methuen, 2000, p. 15.

23) For more information on these and other body artists see Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones. *The Artist's Body*. London: Phaidon, 2000, Amelia Jones. *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998., and Kathy O'Dell. *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

24) Sarah Kane. *Complete Plays*. Introduced by David Greig. London: Methuen, 2001, p. 102.

barbecue'[24] is turning an experience of pain into language, which must then be turned once again into visual representation. In the process, the experience must be shared through the active imaginations of all involved.

Secondly, violence on stage almost always looks ridiculous. And this is a good thing. When someone stabs someone else on stage, when a razor is called upon to slash open a face, when a hand or foot is to be lopped off, the effect is rarely 'convincing'. But this is because we know the event is not really taking place, and so we are immediately directed to look at how the effect is being produced. This means that coexisting in each moment of dismemberment in these plays we have superimposed the image of the whole and undismembered body that once again provides a reversal of the global disassembly of the body.

Sarah Kane was always insistent that she did not want to write for television or film.[25] Her determination on this point is interesting because on almost every page of *Cleansed* or *Phaedra's Love* there are stage directions that would be infinitely easier to show on film, with the computer-generated images that digital technology allows. But to do so would be a mistake, as was Peter Zadek's legendary and failed attempt to train rats to perform in his production of *Cleansed* (1998).

Realism always attempts to close the gap between the means of representation and the thing represented; these plays all foreground the means of representation in some way—partly by submitting to the backwardness of stage effects in relation to other artistic forms. In doing so, they provide ghostly images of bodily integrity that is quite counter to the violence that they represent. These playwrights are not celebrating the end of the body, nor are they trying to make violence 'cool'. These images of violence are intended to confront us, to reassert the value of the body, to resist it being swept up by the forces of global capital.

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25) She did so only once, writing the short film *Skin* (Channel 4, 1997). I understand that in her final letter she left instruction that no television, film, or radio rights were ever to be assigned for her five stage plays.

Playing for Readers: Anxiety about the Written Word in Modern British Theatre

By Svetlana Klimenko

Svetlana Klimenko is Associate Research Professor at the Department of English, University of Copenhagen. She is the author of numerous publications on modern British drama. Her Ph.D. thesis, "The Stuff that Plays are Made of: Linguistic Approaches to the Interpretation of Post-war British Drama with Special Reference to the Linguopoetic Method" will be published by Multivers Forlag, Copenhagen, in November 2002.

Diary

This semester began for me with four theatre trips to Britain in rapid succession. The first was to Edinburgh. I spent five evenings viewing productions selected from the 52 page theatre section in the Fringe Programme. I went to one of the two Festival offerings of *Crave* – Sarah Kane's most poetic play. I also saw a new play, called *Outlying Islands*, by the rising star of Scottish drama, David Greig. It was produced at the Traverse Theatre, internationally famous for its campaign to promote new drama. It was an enchanting performance about provincial British sensibilities just before the outbreak of World War II. My choices, at least partly, were predetermined by my professional interest in modern drama, and targeted, as it were, at the fringe of the Fringe. The real theatricality of the Festival unfolded itself along the Royal Mile, where weird-looking persons of mysterious origin were entertaining passers by with their clowning - artful, nonchalant, exotic, foolish, mostly amateurish, but reassuring in any case. Come and see our show, madam! But what show could possibly live up to the atmosphere of that street? ... It was a family trip for us, and the children really got the most out of the city, with its Russian musicians, Chinese acrobats, black dungeons and bright, open-topped double-decker buses.

Then I went to Bristol for a conference: "In-yer-face theatre? British drama in the 90s". There were around 80 delegates, and we spent two days debating, mostly, Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, whose *Shopping and Fucking* is in-yer-face theatre *par excellence*: it is a modern, violent and sexually explicit exploration of modernity, violence and sex. My own paper was on the reception of Sarah Kane in Denmark. The London critic who championed 'the arena of in-yer-face sensibilities', Alex Sierz, was present and made a powerful speech