STAGE VIOLENCE, POWER AND THE DIRECTOR

AN EXAMINATION OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CRUELTY FROM ANTONIN ARTAUD TO SARAH KANE

by

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STAGE VIOLENCE AND POWER:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CRUELTY FROM ANTONIN ARTAUD TO SARAH KANE

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This exploration of stage violence is aimed at grappling with the moral, theoretical and practical difficulties of staging acts of extreme violence on stage and, consequently, with the impact that these representations have on actors and audience. My hypothesis is as follows: an act of violence enacted on stage and viewed by an audience can act as a catalyst for the coming together of that audience in defense of humanity, a togetherness in the act of defying the truth mimicked by the theatrical violence represented on stage, which has the potential to stir the latent power of the theatre communion. I have used the theoretical work of Antonin Artaud, especially his "Theatre of Cruelty," and the works of Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, and Sarah Kane in conversation with Artaud's theories as a prism through which to investigate my hypothesis. Through these production and script analysis, I have attempted to justify violence as a tool for empowering an audience, and, also, I have highlighted a few of the pitfalls in this work with brutality. This written examination acts as the first half of sharpening my personal understanding of theatrical violence as a stage director. This will lead into the second half of my research, my direction of a production of Sarah Kane's 1998 play *Cleansed* as praxis: a practical testing of these theories of violence and cruelty. This production, which will take place

from April 11-15 in the Studio Theatre of the Cathedral of Learning[1], will act as the final part of my thesis project, which will include and apply much of the theoretical work throughout this paper. Through this analytical work (notably a new understanding of Brook's insertion of Brechtian meta-theatricality into the Theatre of Cruelty) in conjunction with my direction of *Cleansed*, I argue that a respect for the contract of mimesis is of the utmost importance in maximizing the potential of violence to empower and in minimizing its potential to paralyze. That is: by setting aside the ostensible goal of fooling an audience with the "reality" of an act of violence, the visceral impact of this representation becomes more honest and, paradoxically, more effective.

[1] After the writing of this Abstract and due to the escalation of bomb threats to the University of Pittsburgh campus, my production of *Cleansed* was effectively canceled. A week after its cancelation, I decided to put the show on in an invited dress rehearsal format, so it was only seen once by an audience, on April 17th, 2012.

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1.0 A MORAL IMPERATIVE FOR VIOLENCE

"Art is Violence."

- Anne Bogart, from *A Director Prepares*

This examination focuses on sharpening my personal understanding of theatrical violence as a stage director. My goal is to dig into the subject of representations of violence on stage and ultimately to discover what is so fascinating and powerful about this ever-present cultural force and how I can use it appropriately and effectively in my own work as a director. This project will culminate in my direction of a production of Sarah Kane's 1998 play *Cleansed,* which will be my practical effort to put the forthcoming theories and thoughts to use.

Ultimately, I intend for this to be more of a personal journey than a research paper. I certainly intend to use the works of others to propel myself through this investigation, but I do not mean to write a dissertation about Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty or Jerzy Grotowski's work with actors. What I mean to do is place myself in the spectrum of directors, playwrights and dramatic thinkers, to glean what I can from their insight and to synthesize their theories into knowledge that can inform my own process, understanding, and practice as a stage director.

Before I begin, I feel that I must address those who may feel that violence, especially explicit violence, has no place on the stage or in art at all. It is apparent that there are those who believe that violence in culture (especially in movies and videogames) has a negative effect on its consumers (especially children and teens) and on society at large. While I obviously disagree with this sentiment by and large, I must

agree that there are innumerable examples of tasteless violence in our culture (modern horror films being the prime example), but I feel that these are misguided artists who do not understand the power of violence and therefore use it carelessly.

I intend to argue that violence, used with moral consciousness and care, is a powerful artistic tool that can be used to positive ends. With that said, I have no intention of justifying thousands of years of violent drama, nor do I feel that it is in my purview to defend the works of notoriously violent dramatists like William Shakespeare or Euripides. I simply intend to justify why it is that *I* feel violence is an important and urgent tool of the theatre practitioner.

The obvious argument is simple: violence is a part of life ergo it must be a part of art, as art is almost always a response to life. Of course, this point is at least partially indebted to Aristotle's *Poetics*, especially to his idea of art as "mimesis," or imitation of life. Aristotle, the father of Western dramatic theory, argued that good art by nature needs to imitate life, and that this imitation must purify and heighten the life being mimicked. For Aristotle this purified simulacrum of life is the best way to cleanse his audience (his hallowed catharsis), to purge them of negative emotions through the tragedy of the characters being presented. While there are arguments against the second part of this rule, (I must point out that most of the dramatists and artists I will be studying disagree with this idea of art as idealized and therefore condescending life), it seems self-evident that art, while it may not "imitate and *better*" life, must at the very least not neglect it. Where is there good art that neglects life?

The best argument though, it seems to me, deals with the moral and ethical imperative to examine violence in art, which for me is found most eloquently detailed in Edward Bond's writing. Bond, the enfant terrible of the British theater scene before Sarah Kane, once wrote, "People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence" (Bond viii). In this preface to his play *Lear*, Bond argues that violence *is* "our time" and "us," that violence and contemporary life are bound together inextricably. Writing from the 1960s in the aftermath of that first ultraviolent half of the 20th century, Bond had grown up in a world fraught with violence, and with the dawning of nuclear weaponry (one of Bond's obsessions) a world in which violence ruled supreme.

When Bond speaks of violence, he is talking about a very specific negative force he perceives in society. For Bond, violence is defined by its destructive nature. He explains this distinction by comparing the violence of the human race to the violence of animals. "Human aggression has important features that make it more *destructive* than the aggression of other animals" (xi, my italics). His argument is that both humans and animals are, by nature, capable of violence, which is inevitable, but he argues that the violence of animals never threatens their own existence. With humans, Bond believed we had reached a point (remember he is writing amidst the Cold War) where our potential for destruction had nearly outstripped our potential for survival. For Bond, dealing with the violence of our race is of paramount moral importance because of the danger that real life violence poses to our very existence as a species. For him, dealing with violence in art is a necessary step towards figuring out how to transform our

destructive ways. "We need a *method* of change" (xiii). His work attempted to probe humanity for that crucial method.

It is impossible to deny, even now in the aftermath of the Cold War, that violence does not hold a place in our world's personality, even if you disagree with Bond's characterization of the problem. You need only to look to the violent regimes of the Middle East and the revolutions against them, to the genital mutilation and tyranny in parts of Africa to clearly see the violence humans are capable of *in the present day*. In the modern West, it is easy to point to these things, or even to our own barbarous past with condescension and reason that we are pacifist by comparison, but we need simply to examine modern violent crime rates to find that violence pervades every single society on earth. Human beings everywhere on our planet are capable of great acts of violence, and this is one reason to explore this negative facet of the human character through art, a safe zone for the science of the human soul.

While Bond's statement may go too far (violence may not be our whole life) it would be naïve and irresponsible to argue that it does not hold a powerful place in it. From my American point-of-view, our war still rages on, whether you agree with it or not, and across the world humans continue to kill, maim, rape, and torture one another. Human life is, undoubtedly, violent at times, perhaps not all the time, perhaps not everywhere to the same extent, but humans are undeniably violent creatures.

I will admit that my interests do not perfectly align with Bond's. I am more interested in the impact of violence on the audience than I am in finding a method of change in the human character. Bond's theatre is extremely socially and politically

conscious, and a lot of his work speaks to his specific political goals and opinions. Personally, I have no interest in explicitly political or didactic theatre. I am less interested in the political power of violence and much more interested in its effect on the individual human being, how a person (specifically an actor or an audience member) reacts emotionally, spiritually, viscerally, and intellectually in a theatre to acts of great violence. Though, in the end, our goals are the same. Bond, after all, is interested in probing the age-old relationship between the human race and the violence it perpetrates on itself, just on larger scale.

When it becomes clear that art must be aware of life and that life has at least the potential for great and harrowing violence, the pertinent question becomes: where does violence fit into the spectrum of art? How can this monolithic force in our world be represented on stage, and, if it can be, why should it be? To what purpose? What power does it have on stage? Towards what goal should this power be aimed? And as Bond would ask, how can this violence being represented on stage impact the lives of those who perform it and of those being asked to witness it? These questions will begin to form the spine of this exploration into the dramaturgy of violence, and, hopefully, they will lead me to a deeper understanding of the influence of representations of human brutality on stage.

2.0 THE POWER OF THEATRE AND VIOLENCE

"Now we need the theatre of people and people."

- Edward Bond

For the purpose of clarity throughout the rest of this thesis, I feel that it is necessary to define the two words that impact it the most, Theatre and Violence, and to define them as I intend to use them, from my perspective. These words, so common but so vague and varying in definition, are the backbone of what I'm interested in exploring here, so it feels only appropriate to explore and classify them individually before I attempt to synthesize them.

I'll start with Theatre, and, to be precise, what I intend to define here is what Theatre means *to me*.

The word itself is derived from the Ancient Greek "theatron" or "seeing place," and every single one of the nuanced dictionary definitions of the word refer to its standing as a physical place, either as an amphitheater, the theatre building itself, or the stage, theatre as a specifically tailored building or platform for a performance. For my purposes, this definition is not useful, for the Theatre I speak of is the act of the art, not its place, especially not a designated (read: restricted) area.

So I will begin my definition with the basics: actor and spectator. As Jerzy Grotowski says, "all other things are supplementary" (32)[2]. Also those parties, performer and audience must be *willing* participants in the act. This is an extremely important

[2] For Grotowski, the supplementary includes all design aspects of theatre as well, and, while I agree with that in theory, by no means do I intend to limit myself to Grotowski's anemic "Poor Theatre."

distinction for me: that these two parties have chosen voluntarily to be together. This will be of great importance to my thought process when I begin to blend theatre and violence together. Of course, yet another (and the most obvious) defining characteristic of the Theatre is that these two willing and conscious parties must be in proximity to one another. They must be in the same "empty space" together, in the same physical space at the same time.

There is left, it seems, one more problem to be ironed out here, one more vagueness. Concerts, sports events, political rallies, and (while it may be a stretch) religious services all fall into the current definition of Theatre that I have built. And more too, so there is still a gray area here. A preacher performs in the same space as his audience, so do football teams, musicians, and politicians. So now what must be made clear in this is the nature of what is being shared between the performer and the audience.

What is it that differentiates theatre from all these other similar forms? For me, the answer is the empathy found through mimesis. Theatre demands *true* human empathy where these other events do not, and this is found through a simulation of humanity that is unreal but that retains the truth of life. In sports, the purpose and focus is never human empathy, and the product has no mimesis. In sports, the goal is to win the game or to have *your team* win the game, and the players are real. Does a sports fan ever truly care in the moment of action about the true nature of the man who throws the touchdown? In religion, the ability to understand and share another human being's humanity is present but only peripherally; the ultimate purpose is to serve God (who is by nature inhuman), and, therefore, the purpose is not empathy, and, again, this act is devoid of mimesis; the preachers, the choir, and the congregation are all real. With politicians,

the empathy is false. Perhaps, this is the cynic in me speaking, but the empathy of the politician is a means (to garner the support of the populace, to gain political office or keep it, to help pass a bill, etc.). The empathy of the theatre is the end. We go to the theatre to experience this human phenomenon. In music, that most emotional of arts, there is not always empathy because the vehicle of communication is often an inanimate object and the language of communication is ineffable, and of course and again there is no mimesis. In music, that inhuman vessel, the cello or piano or the guitar, acts as a barrier between performer and audience. Theatre speaks directly through the human body (another tenet). (With that said, I may agree that a person singing to another is, in fact, a kind of Theatre.) Mimetic empathy, spoken through the human body, is the final precept in my personal definition of Theatre.

So, I will define Theatre in this thesis by these tenets: (1) performer *and* audience present, (2) both willing and aware, (3) in the same place at the same time, (4) with the goal of mimetic human connection, (5) communicated through the human vessel. This is the Theatre for me.

While these are the things that are needed for an act of theatre to take place, I will go one step further in defining the nature Theatre for myself, to add an addendum with the purpose of defining why it is that I feel the Theatre is important in our day and age. For every theatre artist in the 21st century, the question that must be answered is: Why theatre? Why not television or film (those nearly comparable arts)? What does it have to offer that those mediums do not?

The spectacle of the Theatre has been long surpassed by the technology of film and television, but there are two things that the Theatre can offer that television and film cannot and could never: proximity and the present tense. Only in the theatre is the audience in the same space as each other and the performer, and it is the theatre, by virtue of being a live event, that offers the present tense, which is impossible in film (an inherently past tense medium). We know as viewers that the things we see in movies have already happened, that the very fact of it having been filmed is proof that these things have already happened and are not *happening*, and the disconnectedness, the staggering sense of distance between audience and actor in film (they are even bigger than us) present a much different and more detached experience than the directness of the stage. Even in live television, the distance remains. I feel that these distinctions are necessary to make because they influence how the form of Theatre can be used to its fullest potential. For example, it would be foolish, I think, for the Theatre to strive towards greater spectacle when film has clearly outstripped the technology of the stage.

Finally, to delve one last step deeper into why I believe the Theatre is an *important* and *relevant* art form and social institution, I will turn to Hannah Arendt, the renowned political theorist. In explaining and defining her view of political "Power," Arendt refers to a "space of appearance," a place in which the potential for great political power resides, where for instance where the construction of great civilizations is possible. In her book *The Human Condition*, she writes of the "space of appearance" as "wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (199). In her writing, she describes political power as being only present in the forming of a group, but not in the group itself.

Power is found in the coming together of peoples, and I cannot help but to see Theatre vividly enveloped in this argument. Theatre, the one art that strives to bring artist and audience into the same place, is by this definition the only art form that actively empowers the audience. Film, television, literature, painting, and sculpture disperse the latent power of its audience by isolating them from any possible communion with the artists or by filtering this power through a canvas, a book, or a bust. It is this act of empowerment that makes the Theatre important, and also, for me, why the distinction of mutual willingness must be made in the definition of the art form. For me, the power of theatre is found in the rapport between performer and audience, not in one party's domination over the other.

I would like to reiterate that while I've used Bond's and Arendt's *political* theories to bolster my idea and definition of Theatre I am not, like Bond and so many others, interested in an overtly political Theatre. What I mean is that I do not want my theatre to teach politics, to direct the audience toward any political goal. What intrigues me is the idea of the inherent power in the communion of people, not any specific political, governmental, social, or ethical end but for the end of the communion itself. I believe that the communion is precious enough. Human togetherness is valuable indeed and costly. My Theatre it intends to capture this powerful energy of the coming together of humans. I intend not to propel them into the Capitol building or onto the streets with signs in hand but rather to capture that power in the art being made by the Theatre with the goal of elevating that connectedness, that sense of community and togetherness cultivated by an act of Theatre and in doing so hopefully enriching the quality of their lives.

This is the Theatre that I (in the present moment) strive for, a Theatre of conscious togetherness and empowerment. I believe in Theatre as a place with the potential for the reclaiming of humanity, that in this empowerment a returning to the basic human need for gathering, which is after all one of the things that differentiate us from animals, is possible. Animals form packs out of instinct. Humans come together out of a conscious choice for (ideally) the augmentation of the quality of life, and Theatre, above all things, is a clarion call for humans to once again come together. As Oscar Wilde once said, "I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being" ("Brainy Quote").

Now I would like to turn to the next word, Violence. The most utilitarian definition may well be: the use of injurious physical force. Violence: to cut, to punch, to shoot, to blow up, to inflict pain, to destroy by force the body of another person, etc, but this does not suffice for me as I intend to apply it to the Theatre. The definition isn't quite precise enough. If I return to Bond's distinction of violence as destructive, there are many acts of injurious physical force of a constructive nature. When the issue of self-defense (which falls into my imprecise meaning) is recognized and implicated, I must dig deeper. As Arendt, who argues that violence is inherently irrational, says, "to use a gun in self-defense is not 'irrational'" ("On Violence" 66) or destructive. It saves a life, an innately constructive act. What is more appropriate is the categorization of violence as the unjust or unwarranted use of the above mentioned, injurious physical force. Violence

is irrational and destructive. But this also does not quite encapsulate what I (or Bond) mean when we talk of violence.

Is it not violent to hold a knife to someone's throat but not to cut? Is a spoken threat not violent (or an unspoken one)? Is it not violent to make a person aware, however subtly, of the capability we all posses to enact that physical force? I answer yes, it is. So, physical force does not quite summarize what I mean when I use the word violence, injurious or no. A word can be violent or a gesture, even a look. From this I can deduce that physical force is not what makes an act violent, but rather the intent.

I think that an act of physical violence not only makes a victim aware, to some extent, of their mortality, but also of each person's potential to take another's mortality away by use of that physical force. It is a fact that each of us has the ability to take life away from another human being (some more capable than others, of course) and I feel that violence can almost always be categorized, consciously or subconsciously, as a reminder from those of considerable physical ability to those of less, from the person with the gun to the unarmed person, of that simple fact. And if it is not a reminder of the possibility of death, it is certainly the threat of lessening the value of the life they are left with after the act.

So my working definition of violence is: an unjust or unwarranted physical act, gesture, or word that makes clear the possibility of physical violence, which inherently makes the victim aware of the precarious nature of his mortality and the quality of his life. To put it simply: an act of violence is to make a person aware of the fact that you could take his life away or ruin it. But again, I feel the need to add more weight to this

definition for my purposes in applying it to the context of Theatre. What are the implications of this violent act or gesture?

On her way to dealing with Thomas Hobbes (who I will get to in a moment), Hannah Arendt argues, "life itself…is actualized in the practice of violence" ("On Violence" 68). She finds that in the act of making a man aware of the possibility of his own demise, ironically, the value that that man give's his own life is immediately increased. Once a sane man has seen Death, his life *must* become more valuable. To bring this back to the political sphere for a moment, Thomas Hobbes writes that "[One of the] passions that incline[s] men to peace [is]: Fear of Death" (Hobbes). Hobbes believes that it is this Fear of Death (implicit in my definition of violence) that engenders peace in the political sphere, that this Fear drives men together into a kind of solidarity meant to be a strength-in-numbers against the possibility of unjust Death.

While I admit that there are dangerous implications in taking this line of thought to the extreme, there is certainly truth in the sentiment. This catalytic reaction possible in an act of violence is evidenced throughout history. We can look to the Boston Massacre, which played its part in the fostering of the legendary revolution that created the United States of America, to the death and torture of Christ by the Romans, without which the many forms of Christianity would not have made their indelible mark on the world, and even to the Holocaust, from which comes the first grand gathering of the Jewish peoples as their own nation in nearly three millennia.

By no means do I intend to argue that acts of grand violence as mentioned here are virtuous or retroactively justifiable. I simply mean to say that the Human Being may

actually be empowered, in some way, in being victimized by an act of violence. I believe that the possibility of death enriches the possibilities of life. With that said, I am aware that this positive reaction to victimization is not to be taken for granted. There are innumerable cases where the opposite reaction is plainly evident, but, as an artist wielding the *representation* of violence, it seems clear that the former possibility should be the goal of our mimicry.

In Kane's *Cleansed*, this concept of life actualized in an act of violence is a major theme, one that is echoed constantly throughout the play. Many of the characters in the script are brutalized in horrifying ways, but the characters continue to love one another with renewed passion. Grace, the protagonist, is beaten and raped in the "university." She goes through unimaginable tortures and horrors, but these all simply amplify her passion for her true love. They act for her as trials, which she passes and conquers, her love reaffirmed through sacrifice. Carl, perhaps to most obvious example of the empowerment of victimization, has his tongue cut out, his arms and legs cut off, and, ultimately, his penis removed. All of these obstacles do not deter Carl from his true love or the act of loving. When his tongue is cut out and he cannot speak the words "Forgive me," he writes it in the mud. When his hands are gone, he dances his love. When nothing is left, when the true obliteration of his ability to love is removed by the murder of his lover, he turns to Grace for support, for another kind of love to sustain him. The power that Carl exhibits in continuing to love and live through all this is astounding.

I speculate that the truthful representation of violence on stage has the same potential to bring people together as the real-life acts being imitated. Ultimately, I suspect that portraying Violence on stage has the potential to unlock that latent power of the gathered audience I've come to believe in and that that, in my mind, should be its intended objective. The portrayal of violence in the present tense of the Theatre can and should act as the galvanization necessary to unlock that power, and this seems to me to be a perfectly justifiable end in mind for the means of violence on stage.

So my hypothesis is as follows: an act of violence enacted on stage and viewed by an audience can act as a catalyst for the coming together of that audience in defense of humanity, a togetherness in the act of defying the truth mimicked by the theatrical violence represented on stage, which has the potential to stir the latent power of the theatre communion. This is what I suspect to be true, and this is what I intend to explore. In putting this hypothesis to the test by some great minds of the Theatre, by judging my own previous work by these standards, and by applying this hypothesis to my upcoming production of *Cleansed*, I can begin to document the ways in which this metaphysical theory can be put to practical application.

3.0 ARTAUD'S THEATRE PLAGUE AND VIOLENCE

"Furthermore, when we speak of the word "life," it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but that fragile, fluctuating center which forms never reach. And if there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames."

- Antonin Artaud

I was drawn to Peter Brook as a possible source for this exploration because of the impact that *The Empty Space* had on me the first time that I read it. In his section on "The Holy Theatre," I found described (and poetically so) some of what I had been thinking and feeling about the *art* of theatre for most of my brief adult life. When he describes Samuel Beckett's theatre, which I feel a strong connection to (my first full production as a director was Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape),* Brook describes a "Holy" art that I've been aspiring to in my brief work as director and writer for some time. ""[Beckett] forges his merciless 'no' out of a longing for 'yes' and so his despair is the negative from which the contour of its opposite can be drawn" (Brook 58). This philosophy of art as longing for hope in a hopeless world is something that is dear to me as an artist, something that I strive for in everything I do.

I experienced the same phenomenon in his tactful criticism of what he calls "The Deadly Theatre." When I read his criticisms of "Deadly" Shakespeare as "just the right degree of boringness [… as a] guarantee of a worthwhile event" (11), I could remember productions of "classics" I'd seen that had felt wrong to me for this, then unknown, reason. Brook did for me what most great thinkers do: he articulated some great truth I had known but had not yet identified for myself. *The Empty Space* has been a great source of wisdom and inspiration for me since that first reading.

Now, as I am embarking on this exploration into my own fascination with theatrical violence, I have returned to *The Empty Space* to mine this text for insights into my own invisible opinions, and, hopefully, I will be able use Brook's text as crucible in which to test my theories and inclinations about theatre. By funneling my thinking through Brook's thoughts about what is "Holy" in the theatre, I can build a foundation for my future work that is influenced by a tried and tested genius of the theatre but which is solely my own.

With all that said, there is another, more important reason why I've chosen Brook's text as a jumping off point for my exploration into violence and style as a director. I want to investigate Brook because of his practical work and thinking about Antonin Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty." Artaud's manifesto, *The Theatre and Its Double*, is a 20th century landmark work, and, after reading it once, I knew that this exploration and my imminent production of Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* would not be complete without at least testing the waters Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty." Its fierce criticism of the state of theatre and its powerful assertions about the potential of drama are undeniably relevant to my work here, and I am well aware that heretofore in this very study my work has vividly echoed Artaud's style, passion, and philosophy on the art of theatre.

Artaud is pertinent to my inquiry of violence because, unlike nearly any other great dramatic theorist of the 20th century, he imagines a theatre that can be wielded as a spiritual weapon against the masses, which aligns quite nicely with my ideas about violence. He imagines the true theatre as a "plague," an all consuming, degenerative infection that has the potential and the responsibility to wipe clean the broken structures of Man. In his essay "The Theatre and the Plague," Artaud writes:

> In the theater as in the plague there is something both victorious and vengeful: we are aware that the spontaneous conflagration which the plague lights wherever it passes is nothing else than an immense liquidation. (121)

He seeks a ”liquidation” of structures so grand that it constitutes a “social disaster.” His language only gets grander. He refers to the theatre/plague as a “revelation,” “a call to forces,” a theatre to “drain abscesses,” that “causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world,” and above all a theatre that is a “formidable call to the forces that impel the mind by example to the source of its conflicts” and “which is resolved [only] by death or cure.” Ultimately, he imagines a theatre with all of the destructive power of a nuclear weapon, with all the terror of a loaded gun. This is his clarion call. From these ambitious ideas, Artaud offers his “Theatre of Cruelty” as the answer, the path to follow that, ostensibly, ends in “death or cure.”

Another important component of Artaud’s philosophy, for me, is his belief in the power of images and sound and his contempt for language, for talk, for intellectualism. While I disagree somewhat with his disdain for the written word, his beliefs about the visceral power of imagery speaks to me and my work with violence very directly. His philosophizing is galvanizing, inspirational, and truly poetic, in language and in intent. Like Brook, his work has a seemingly endless power to inspire.

There is though a problem with Artaud that must be dealt with. Artaud is not pragmatic, especially in *The Theatre and Its Double*. He deals primarily in metaphysics and poetry and rarely in practice, and when he does it is contradictory, vague, and morally questionable. One of the strangest aspects of his work is his apparent fascination

with the need for a "sacrifice" to reignite the theatre as an institution. Here Artaud explains that the Theatre of Cruelty has been created to "restore to the theater a passionate and convulsive conception of life…which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so," and he goes on to say that cruelty can "be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid" (122). His intended means are sometimes frightening (who can know what "price" he thinks that life demands). His work at times asks for martyrs and at others asks for a destruction of even the vestiges of society, but his basic goal is to bring back a theatre full of passion and teeming with life, a theatre of primeval and epic power.

This is an undoubtedly admirable objective, but Artaud rarely went on to deal in his own words with the application of this philosophy, at least not in any coherent way. He only describes his fervent visions of "Cruelty" in abstractions and metaphors, and this is of no heuristic use to me. As a director, my work must be *practical*. I have to push myself towards the functional, towards the *application* of theory. So, while Artaud inspires me truly and deeply, he is not the way forward to a deeper understanding of violence as a theatrical *tool*, not yet at least. His passion, his poetry, and his unyielding philosophy will be important to me in my broader understanding and passion for violent theatre, but I must find a way to somehow transpose these philosophies and inspirations into actualities.

This Artaudian paradox is why Brook is important to me. In his grappling with Artaud, Brook tries to solve this riddle. He tries to tie the "Theatre of Cruelty" to practice, which will be of great value to this study. But Brook isn't the only one to deal with translating Artaud into the nuts and bolts of drama. Artaud's passion has inspired

countless artists. I suspect that this is due to his obstinate belief in the possibilities of the theatre. The 20th century is full of artists and theatre practitioners who are influenced strongly by his work; his influence has even found its way into literary theory and philosophy.

Jerzy Grotowski, the famous Polish director, also deals with Antonin Artaud's work but from a somewhat different point of view, and he will be the other thinker that I deal with on my way to transposing Artaud's work into practice. So, through reading Brook's and Grotowski's arguments and struggles with Artaud, I can grapple with the "Theatre of Cruelty" as a practical tool to influence my staging, my script analysis, and all the other functional tasks of the director.

When these two men talk about Artaud, I sense a "paradox." Both Brook and Grotowski clearly admire Artaud's passion and his views on the possibilities of the theatre and of its moral imperative. They both devote time in their writings to deal specifically with the man's thoughts and writings. Brook, for instance, talks about Artaud in his section on "The Holy Theatre," but even in this context there is an extreme skepticism present. Brook argues that "Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed" (Brook 54). That is our case in point. Brook acknowledges the beautiful truth of Artaud's writings, but argues that they cannot be realized in full. He accuses Artaud of being impossible, of being an asymptote. Artaud does speak very broadly, very metaphysically, and Brook understands the need to tie Artaud to reality. So does Grotowski. He also describes the dilemma: "The paradox of Artaud lies in the fact that it is impossible to carry out his proposals" (Grotowski 118). Again, Artaud's impossibility is highlighted. Both Brook and Grotowski struggle with the feasibility of Artaud, and it is hard to blame them. I must

admit that it is hard to imagine a truly Artaudian theatre existing in the world as we know it.

When Artaud talks about the theatre as a place where actors are burnt at the stake and signal the power of the theatre through the flames of their death, I feel that paradox quite strongly: a great but oblique truth wrapped in a striking turn of phrase. The metaphoric and metaphysical quality of his prose does wonders for the imagination, but to turn this into actual theory is more difficult. For me, the image brings to mind the self-immolation of the Buddhist Monks in South Vietnam. There is an image that is burned into my mind so intensely that I doubt it will ever leave me. There is immediate recall with that image. The violence of their sacrifice is unforgettable, and I see in that, at least partially, what Artaud is getting at with his assertions. But how is the weight of that image even remotely possible on stage in a live performance?

Does Artaud suggest that we, as artists, must become martyrs to leave the same impression? It would be hard to deny that a literal interpretation of this suggestion would bring about the most powerful and memorable theatre the world has ever seen. Can you imagine it? It is in the awe of that imagination (and others that he inspires), in that image of the actor lighting himself aflame, that Artaud speaks to me profoundly as an artist. But another question that this brings up for me, putting aside for a moment its ethical and practical problems, is: should an act like that even be considered theatre? I do not think so. Again, the necessity for mimesis resonates, and I sense that this is where Grotowski and Brook begin to stray from Artaud's philosophy.

Here I'd like to describe an anecdote I read about in a book titled *Staging Real Things* by Geoff Pywell, which describes a theatrical event that can act as one possible interpretation of Artaud's theatre. Pywell describes a performance art piece that he attended while he was an undergraduate student learning to act. The piece was entitled simply: *Hunchback*. It was comprised of five actors, four women and one man. Pywell recounts how the first three-quarters of the piece constituted an effective and intellectually stimulating piece of theatre, and then he tells the rest. To make a long story short, he witnessed the male actor begin to systematically beat the female actors one by one, smashing their faces into his knee, stomping on them relentlessly. Real violence on stage. Thankfully before too long, the audience rushed the stage and neutralized the actor before he was able to go any further. The police were called and the actors arrested (or taken to the hospital), and thus ended the Real and True Theatre Company's first and final production of *Hunchback*.

What truly, despicably, unforgivably amazing theatre! The RATT accomplished everything that Artaud demands of the theatre, everything that I wish to accomplish myself. The audience was empowered. They rushed the stage, took up their arms and practiced their own humanity truthfully as a group, and there is no doubt that each of them experienced something as unforgettable as that image of the burning monks. The RATT seem to have fulfilled the challenges of the mad prophet Artaud, but, of course, they cheated. They lied. They broke the simple, age-old rules of the theatre. Pywell describes vividly the moment when he realized that what he was watching was not beautifully disguised stage combat but real, vicious violence. He felt betrayed. For him, the act of paying for entrance, of sitting in the darkness, of spike marks on the spots

where the women stood, were the articles in the unspoken contract of the theatre, which does not allow for such acts of genuine brutality. In exchange for his patronage, Pywell expected that necessary tenet of theatre, mimesis, but in return he received real brutality.

The theatre is not a place where actors are beaten, their skulls are not cracked open, and their blood should not be spilled onto the floorboards. It should never be a place where the audience is forced to decide between watching an assault or risking their own safety to intervene. How can it be? And if it is, then what for? If Artaud is asking for this (which I certainly hope and think he is not), then he is asking the stage to become a Coliseum, the director to become the Emperor of Rome, the audience, the bloodthirsty Romans, and the actors those ancient martyrs, the gladiators! How can we ethically enact a theatre so brutal and unforgiving, so lacking in respect for the quality and sanctity of human life? The audience would learn quickly that the theatre is not a safe place, and, while art can be challenging, cynical, accusatory, and ruthless, it simply cannot be violent. There it ceases to be art and becomes something else entirely.

This simple fact is why I assume Brook and Grotowski are skeptical, and rightfully so. This argument can be brought back to Aristotle's idea of mimesis and, in part, that age old maxim of the suspension of disbelief. Theatre is meant to *imitate* life. It mimics life to attempt to get at that true human empathy I've spoken about; it is not meant to be real, nor does it have to be real to be true. Audiences around the world have been led to believe (and rightly so) through centuries of custom at the theatre that however convincing an act of theatre may be it is also an illusion. On the one hand, they suspend their disbelief in an attempt to fall into the magic of the theatre, to get as close as possible to that human connection, but the disbelief has its purpose as well. What

audience member in their right mind would actually wish to see a production of *Titus Andronicus* where the actress playing Lavinia actually has her tongue cut out and her hands cut off on stage in front of them? Again, we can return to the balanced nature of the contract between performer and audience. From this line of thought, I reason that what an audience wants to see on stage is *truthfulness* not *reality*, and that is the fine line to walk when mimetically producing violence on stage.

But Artaud does understand this himself, even considering how often he ponders true sacrifice. "Furthermore, when we speak of the word 'life,' it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact" (35). Even he, the man who inspired the RATT to bloody and break themselves for a new, better theatre, understands that the theatre must be a place where life is present but only metaphorically, never factually, never actually. He too understands the necessity of mimesis.

In the end, I agree wholeheartedly with the "religion" that Artaud espouses, though perhaps not in all of its hyperbole, and never when it tests the waters of sacrifice. Theatre must not become violent in the way that RATT's production of *Hunchback* did, but their goal, Artaud's goal, is correct. I certainly agree that the theatre should be a place where the influence of the art can scorch, can leave scars *in the mind*, but is it possible to reconcile Artaud's harrowing vision of drama with the bond and contract of the theatre? I am honestly not sure. I believe in Artaud's vision, but the path to it (ideally a path *not* strewn with the bodies of actor-martyrs) is unclear. And, unfortunately, Artaud does not offer us this path forward, and, perhaps, he didn't know it himself. But his precarious challenge, the challenge to speak to an audience through the flames of our (mimetic) immolation, remains.

From here, I will return to the writings of Brook as he attempts to deal with this conundrum. Brook writes,

> [Artaud] wanted the theatre to contain all that normally is reserved for crime and war. He wanted an audience that would drop all its defences, that would allow itself to be perforated, shocked, startled, and raped, so that at the same time it could be filled with a powerful new charge. (53)

I, like Artaud, have that urge to forge a new audience with the potential power of theatre, but, even in entire agreement with this agenda, the question continues to be: *how*? How can I create a theatre with the same sublime effect of watching the fiery potency of those monks' ultimate sacrifice without the use of actual gasoline and real and true matches? Where do I even begin? I find at least the beginning of these answers there in Brook's work.

Brook describes the "Theatre of Cruelty" as a "groping towards a theatre, more violent, less rational, more extreme, less verbal, more dangerous" (54). He goes on to talk about what he calls "the snag" in the vagueness of Artaud's theories. Brook revisits an instance when he had an actor fire a pistol at the audience, and he goes on to say (and here's the snag) "for a second I have a possibility to reach [the audience] in a different way…but *unless someone can grab this moment*, knowing why and how and what for – it too begins to wane" (54-55, my italics). He describes this moment, the moment of the firing of the pistol, the breaking down of the perceptual barriers, the "sweeping away [of] the rubbish" as the Happening. It is partially with this new vocabulary that Brook has led me to a deeper understanding of my personal fascination with violence in the theatre. Violence is one possible trigger for the Happening, amongst many others. It can be that

moment when the siege of the audience's mind is won and the barriers broken down and the entrance to the soul is cleared. All the things that Artaud wanted.

But Brook digs deeper. The Happening is not enough. It is a means. For Brook, the ritual of the Happening must be performed "knowing why and how and what for." The opening it creates must be subsequently "filled with a powerful new charge." This is the task of the director. It is not enough to light oneself on fire, but to know why and how and what for. Those are the three items on the checklist as it were. I won't continue with Brook from here because the act of the filling seems to me to be an aesthetic task, one best left to each artist and to each specific Happening, but the simple truth of the matter is that, as with all choices the director makes, the awareness of the act (Brook compares it to the awareness of Zen) and the awareness of its implications and intentions are key. The "powerful new charge" could be anything, but it must be something. The Happening must have a trajectory because there is a fine line between violence as a tool for opening the awareness of the audience and violence used as the RATT did or, even, violence as it is used in horror and action movies, in other words, violence as (and I mean this negatively) simply entertainment (another route to the modern Coliseum).

Bearing these all these discoveries I've made with Brook in mind, I will now turn back to Grotowski's work with actors and his own argument with the works of Artaud to delve even deeper into these mysteries, to challenge Brook with Grotowski, and through the arguments of these three men (Brook, Grotowski, and Artaud) move closer to that personal understanding of how to use violence on stage as a director. Grotowksi's work with Artaud has been aimed toward the actor, toward attaining the "total actor" for what Artaud referred to as the "total theatre," which is somewhat different from Brook's aim.

Jerzy Grotowski defines the actor as "a man who works in public with his body, offering it publicly" (33). He goes further to describe the act as "self-sacrifice" (35). In this definition, Artaud's influence is clearly evident, and the image of those suicidal monks is again evoked by this vision of the actor as a man who sacrifices his body publicly. You could go so far as to say that Grotowski's definition of the actor is eerily similar to that of a true martyr, which again brings us back to the lithium prophet, Artaud. Grotowski even goes so far as to agree with Artaud's sentiments about the actor as a martyr burning at the stake by saying: "[This] phrase holds the very foundation of the actor's art of extreme and ultimate action" (125) (one that is echoed in Kane's *Cleansed*). Grotowski understands the metaphor, and, in his work with actors, attempts to pull from them a kind of emotional immolation.

But where Grotowski strays from the idealist path is in his cogent understanding of the fact that the actor must be able to repeat his task. "He repeats the atonement" (34). He understands that the image of the actor burning on the stake is correct and justified, but he is also aware of the compromises that must be made to enable the practical repetition of the art of theatre. In this, Grotowski begins to illuminate for me the path forward with Artaud. He has clearly begun to tie Artaudian theatre to the practical, which is after all the purpose of this investigation. But the effect is still unclear. How does this definition of the actor elicit that Artaudian response in the audience?

For Grotowski, the answer is that "by setting himself a challenge publicly [he] challenges others […] he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration" (34). For him, the ritual of the actor baring himself to an audience, of the self-penetrating emotional revelation is the way to the audience's

empowerment. This seems simple enough to me. It is almost a perfect echo of Aristotle's catharsis, but for one thing. For Grotowski, the actor is the one who leads the audience to a kind of catharsis, but it is never defined as a cleansing. For Grotowski, the audience should never be made clean by the art; he believes that the art should empower the audience to penetrate, to cleanse themselves.

He goes on to say that for this relationship between the actor and the audience to be formed "there must be some common ground already existing in both of them" (42). He calls these commonalities "collective complexes" or "representations collectives" (42). And here, just as with Brook's Happening, I find that violence is an undeniable link between human beings. It is most certainly a collective complex. We all as humans understand violence not only intellectually but also emotionally, spiritually, and viscerally. It is a link between all cultures on earth.

The last part of Grotowski's writings that seem especially pertinent to this study is what he calls the "conjunction of opposites" (125), and it is in this idea that I have found another small piece of the answer to Artaud's conundrum. Grotowski's "conjunction of opposites" is the balance between "spontaneity and discipline", which can be extrapolated to our unsolved compromise between the intended Artaudian effect on the audience and the "discipline" of the theatrical framework. It is within this "conjunction of opposites" that I must work if I intend to use the power of Artaud's sermons without forsaking the safety and trust of the theatrical contract with my actors and my audience.

These ideas that Grotowski brings to the table resonate with the demands that Sarah Kane makes in her modern take on Cruelty, *Cleansed*. When Grotowski explores

the metaphor of immolation, I see Carl being dismembered; I see Grace being raped. What Kane asks for is an actor capable of taking on the "challenge" of inhabiting painful victimization in an attempt to prod the audience into the exploration of that collective complex, violence. Kane certainly asks for "extreme and ultimate action" from her actors, and she demands that this work be done within that "conjunction of opposites." She demands an actor capable of descending into the depths of pain and despair, of profound self-penetration, of lighting himself on fire, within the disciplined mimetic framework of the theatre. Of course, there is a kind of self-sacrifice in laying bare in public this representation of victimization, of finding in oneself the pain and power of Carl's, Grace's persecution. And, lastly, both Grotowski and Kane understand the need for an actor to approach a character through *the body*. Grotowski work with actors is based in this idea; he worked to exhaust the human body in an attempt to free the emotions, the mind and the soul. Kane asks the same by forcing her actors to access physical pain and sex. Consequently, much of my work on *Cleansed* will be aimed at training my actors to be present in their bodies, in the same way Artaud viewed his audience as bodies.

As a final thought, when Grotowski refers to Artaud's actor-martyr, he writes "These signals [through the flames] must be articulated, and they cannot just be gibberish or delirious, calling out to everything and nothing" (125). (For Carl, these signals speak to the pain of losing his ability to perform his love.) Again, the similarities between Artaud, Grotowski, and Brook are apparent. The Happening, the man at the stake, these images of power and penetration must be used for a purpose. The Real and True Theater

Company did not have a purpose[3], which was their second failure after breaking the age-old contract of disbelief. But Artaud, Grotowski, and Brook are fully aware of the potential for discovery and revelation in an act of violence on stage, but they demand clarity and purpose. They demand all that should be demanded of the true director.

[3] After my defense and after input from my committee (especially Cynthia Croot), I realized that this statement was hasty. Really it was a broad generalization. There are important examples of legitimate performance art that use real violence enacted on the human body in ways that transcend the specific arguments of this section, that use violence against the body as a beautiful and powerful artistic statement, and, in thinking this through, I'm not sure that I fully understood RATT's *Hunchback* at the time of this writing.

4.0 ARTAUD'S *LES CENCI*

At this point after having dealt with a lot of theory, poetics and grandiose philosophizing, I will start off the truly pragmatic side of this examination of violence and cruelty. The goal is to synthesize the aesthetic intent of artists and objective, critical accounts of a few important moments in the timeline of the Theatre of Cruelty into a kind of history for myself to learn from, grapple with, and explore. This should serve as a kind of whetstone for the theories and thoughts that I've been dealing with thus far, and, hopefully, this will lead to a more vivid understanding of transcribing "cruel" theory into practice that will aid in my direction of *Cleansed.*

I will be working through the analysis of three specific examples of theatre that I think speak to what Artaud meant when he coined the phrase "Theatre of Cruelty." These examples, which span the 20th century, are meant to present a kind of progression that I've perceived in the development of "Cruelty" since its inception in the mind of Antonin Artaud so many years ago, albeit a condensed progression. These works, which are Artaud's own production of *Les Cenci* adapted from Shelley (1935), Peter Brook's production of *The Screens* by Jean Genet (1964), and a close examination of the text of Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998), presented from three distinctly different historical moments in the 20th century, are meant to provide a kind of foundation for my work and thinking as a director as I embark on the process of directing Sarah Kane's violent and cruel script.

In 1935, an essay of Antonin Artaud's was published in the Parisian review, La Bete Noire, that attempted to outline the goals and intentions of Artaud's new "Theatre of Cruelty," which would begin with his imminent production of Les Cenci, a play that Artaud himself adapted from Shelley and Stendhal's accounts of the myth. In this essay Artaud wrote, "The Cenci, which will performed at the Folies-Wagram from May 6th onwards, is not yet the Theatre of Cruelty but is preparing the way for it" ("*Les Cenci*" 7). Roger Blin, Artaud's assistant and confidante during the process, affirms this assertion, explaining that this production was "only a half-way point toward his real goal" (Blin) which would've been a staging of Artaud's scenario *The Conquest of Mexico.* This production was aimed at taking the first few steps towards what would have ostensibly become Artaud's true "Theatre of Cruelty."

Admittedly, *Les Cenci* is not the ideal production to examine. Considering that Artaud's production of *Les Cenci* represented only a stepping-stone towards a greater goal, there is an obvious caveat in dissecting its level of effective and profound Cruelty. After all, Artaud himself admitted that it did not reach his goals; he compared the difference between it and the utopian Theatre of Cruelty to the difference between "the unleashing by nature of a hurricane on the one hand and, on the other hand…whatever degree of [its] violence may remain in their image once it has become established" ("*Les Cenci"* 7).

Unfortunately, *Les Cenci* was Artaud's last stage production as a director or dramatist; sadly, he never had the opportunity of staging his beloved scenario. So, *Les Cenci* for all intents and purposes is also Artaud's last step towards that ultimate goal he set for himself, to present a holistic experience to the mind, soul, and body of the

spectator in order to inspire in them a kind of personal revolution, an inspiring goal which has mesmerized and inspired so many theatre artists to come after him. Because *Les Cenci* was effectively Artaud's swan song as a director (excluding a radio play he recorded twelve years later), that I've decided to dig into this production, as imperfect as it may have been. Ultimately, the failures of *Les Cenci* speak volumes about how cruelty and violence can (and did) succeed in the aftermath of Antonin Artaud.

First, I will examine what *Les Cenci* was meant to accomplish by analyzing the rhetoric Artaud used while marketing the production to the Parisian public. With *Les Cenci*, Artaud's goal was to "return the theatre to its true path" and to "enable it to recapture that almost human dignity without which it can only waste the audience's time completely" (9). More explicitly, he wanted to combat what he saw as his era's tendency "to forget to wake up" (11) by "[giving] a jolt to this hypnotic sleep by direct, physical means" (11), as is evidenced throughout his manifesto, *The Theatre and Its Double*. Artaud's main tactic to achieve this monumental change in the actor/audience symbiosis was to view the audience as a body as well as a mind.

The foundation of Artaud's process was the story, the myth of Count Cenci, the infamous, incestuous and godless aristocrat who raped his daughter Beatrice, and of the tragic punishment she received for committing parricide against a man whose paternalism forced the infamous and star-crossed act. Artaud insisted that his *Les Cenci* was not an adaptation of Shelley's play because it approached the subject with such diametrically different intentions. His argument was against Shelley's lyrical, text based form. He wrote, "Shelley added to nature his own style and that language of his which resembles a summer night bombarded by meteors, but personally I prefer nature in the raw" (7). In

actuality, his dialogue was drawn almost exclusively from Shelley and the plot a fusion of the first half of Shelley's stage version and the second half of Stendhal's prose version, but Artaud's interests in the "gravitational movement" of the myth were explicit in *his* adaptation of the script; for him, the myth of Count Cenci was a more than appropriate account to facilitate his goals of visceral impact through the body.

To attain this corporeal immersion, the next step in the process, Artaud attempted to use some relatively novel design techniques, especially in his use of sound and lights. By some accounts, *Les Cenci* was the first production ever to incorporate surround sound, as we know it today. He placed four large speakers hanging in the air at the corners of the theatre in an attempt to shroud the audience in the sonic power of the production. Artaud envisioned a production that would have "enveloped the spectator and brought him to our mercy in a network of vibrations" (Blin). He would've gone further than speakers had he the means. Initially his ambition was to obtain a large cathedral bell to hang in the theatre and ring unbearably loud to attain that "network of vibrations," but, because this choice was not feasible, he mounted those encapsulating speakers and shot the sounds of the bell through them as loud as possible. He was just as utopian in the conception of the lights. Artaud felt that lights were "capable of direct activity on the spectators' nerves" (Blin) and had hoped to develop technologies that could spread great "waves" of light.

Even with all these grand and courageous intentions and innovations, *Les Cenci* was a critical and financial flop, and, while it seems that the bourgeois complacency and the conventional French theatre mindset at the time played a considerable role in

Artaud's failure, there is certainly substance to the negative reviews laid upon the mad prophet's production.

Artaud seems to have made two major missteps during his production of *Les Cenci* that undercut that visceral power he was so focused on attaining: the space and the text. I won't argue here that all of the flaws and subsequent criticism surrounding this production can be simply boiled down into these two talking points. Many point to Artaud's dictatorial directing style and the fear he instilled in his actors as one possible cause of the lack of the show's effectiveness (which seems to be warranted), to his poor casting decisions, and others to his historical context. After all, he was a trailblazer, for better or for worse. And there are many more details that accumulated against him. What I intend to illuminate here are the two mistakes that *most* hindered *Les Cenci*'s ascension to "Cruelty," which will be formative in my analyses of Brook's *The Screens* and Kane's *Cleansed*.

The most obvious, foundational error of the imperfect *Les Cenci* was the theatre that housed the production, the Folies-Wagram Theatre, which one reviewer noted as being "the ugliest theatre in Paris" (Blin). For one, Artaud chose a large proscenium house. Of course this choice seems utilitarian enough, considering that most theatre in Paris at the time was done in that format, but, with his progressive intentions of shocking the audience, of waking them up mind and body, the proscenium barrier opened a chasm between the production and its audience. This chasm appears to have been too wide to bridge. "The stage was far away," wrote one critic in *Le Figaro*, and another review in *Le Journal* summarizes this damning choice best when he describes that *Les Cenci* "Drive[s] a train from hell that *does not affect us"* (Blin). How disappointing that

must've been for Artaud to read. His beloved Theatre of Cruelty left the spectators unaffected! The distance of the stage must have largely affected these sentiments, which summarize the anathema of Artaud's goals. Even taking into account the surround sound and the aggressive lights, the audience was allowed to remain a comfortable distance from the stage, mentally and physically. If the stage were nearer, if that audience were forced to be in proximity to that mythical tragedy (which would have allowed more of their senses to be engaged), perhaps *Les Cenci* would not have appeared so neutered to the viewing public.

Also, with the space came the context of what had come before. As Pierre Balatier notes in his review, "Coming after a light operetta…*Les Cenci* tries again to find inspiration from the great tragedy, and, beyond the story, the work reunites with the old myth" (Blin). Artaud's first production of the Theatre of Cruelty came on the heels of a light operetta! How strange it seems that Artaud attempted to reunite with the old myths on a stage that propped up the very ilk of theatre his Cruelty was reacting to. Perhaps, he was desperate for *somewhere* to accept his production, and the Folies-Wagram was the only to accept. Conceivably, Artaud's intentions may have been to subvert the conventional use of the Folies-Wagram, but even were that the case, his ignorance is apparent. By using the Folies-Wagram, by placing his show next to a conventional operetta and allowing his audience to stay out of danger in those comfortable seats so far from the stage, defended by that minimizing proscenium, Artaud sterilized his work and obliterated his intentions. Kimberly Jannarone puts it best when she writes:

> The utter unsuitability of the Folies-Wagram illustrates the failure of the production's goals vividly and succinctly: Artaud's vision of immersion, menace, and revelation was cramped onto a decorated proscenium stage, where, from the

> comfort of ample gallery seats, the *beau monde* audience viewed the performance as a distant and unthreatening work of 'art.' (162)

This choice reduced what was meant to be a theatre of sensorial immersion and hazard into a kind of avant-garde exoticism for the French elite to scoff at.

The second misstep Artaud made with *Les Cenci* was with the text, that most foundational and formative element in the modern theatre. As I've noted above, Artaud disliked Shelley's lyrical style, and, therefore, in his adaptation attempted to eliminate all of the poetry from the language of the play. His intent with this decision was not meant to be an attack on the validity of language or the spoken word, but rather to reappropriate the language of drama. "'It is not a question of suppressing spoken language,' wrote Artaud, 'but of giving words the importance they have in dreams'" ("*The Theatre and Its Double"* 5).

So there are two things in motion for Artaud in the condensing of the text. The first is the obvious: that Artaud did not believe fully in the visceral impact of words and felt that sound, light, symbol, and movement had more worth. The other is that Artaud believe that if words were to be used they should be used effectively. Perhaps he believed that with lyricism each word becomes devalued in the accumulation of dialogue and imagined a theatre in which each word spoken had an undeniable power. In short, he believed in linguistic concision.

In *Les Cenci* in particular, Artaud attempted to remove all of the subtlety and nuance of Shelley's script. This affected not only the text as a whole but also the characters residing therein, who seemed to lose some of their nuance in the cut. He attempted to "give speech…not just to men but to beings, beings each of whom is the

incarnation of great forces, while still retaining just enough human quality to make them plausible from the psychological point of view" (8). This is reminiscent of Artaud's love of "gravitational movement." He was more interested in forces than men.

Again with Artaud, we run into the difference between theory and practice. While his intention was to balance "beings" with psychological realism, this was not quite accomplished in *Les Cenci*. For instance, this is a speech from the eponymous count: "I feel – I know – that I am a force of nature. For me, life , death, god, incest, repentance, crime do not exist. I obey my own law" (17). In this and in the rest of the play there is, in actuality, no balance between forces and men. Artaud shaved Shelley's play to the bone, leaving only the essences of men, augmented into the forces that act through the play. Many of the reviews of the production claimed that this muddled the cogency of the script, but, in my mind, the worse offense is that, by taking any humanity out of the script, he lessened the impact of the tragedy. To see the remnants of the Cenci family taken away to execution at the end of the play is stripped of its meaning if those victims are dehumanized. Jannarone puts it bluntly and best: "The Shelley play could not withstand such a cut" (164). The critics (and, curiously, the producer of the show) agreed with that sentiment.

The lesson that more is necessary in the Theatre of Cruelty than meets the eye is vividly clear in the history of Artaud's *Les Cenci*. From the negative space Artaud's experiments created, the necessities demanded by a truly "Cruel" theatre come to light. It is clear to me that a Cruel theatre, a theatre that attempts to use violence and sensorial immersion to corporeally affect and jolt its audience needs to take a holistic view of the spectacle being presented. This includes the text that is being presented or modified.

This text must harmonize with all the other facets of cruelty. Artaud was right in believing that lyricism and textual intellectuality are not appropriate tools to viscerally immerse and impact the audience, but excising these things from scripts akin to Shelley's does not a Cruel text make. The text must include and exude all that is inherently Cruel. And this also includes the where and when of the presentation of the spectacle. The proscenium arch is an enemy of the Theatre of Cruelty because of what it represents: a divide between the two parties of the theatre, which limits the possibility of immersion in the art and, worse, undercuts the power of the theatre communion.

5.0 BROOK'S *THE SCREENS*

"The theatre has one precise social function – to disturb the spectator."

- Peter Brook

Nearly thirty years after Artaud began the Theatre of Cruelty with his innovative yet flawed production of *Les Cenci,* another director began work across the English Channel in London on a new installation in the history of that immersive style. That man was Peter Brook. Brook is perhaps most well known for his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970), which is considered by many to be a groundbreaking example of Shakespearean modernity, but Brook did innovative work in the 60s as well blending his Artaudian sensibility with Brechtian influence. This marriage of visceral impact and meta-theatricality will be the hub of this section and why I've chosen this particular production of Brook's. In adding this layer of Brechtian awareness to his work with Cruelty, Brook remodeled and reinvigorated Cruelty in profound and undeniable ways.

In his Casebook on Brook's career, Charles Marowitz describes the time from 1962-1966 as a formative time in Brook's career. In this span, Brook directed a series of projects for the Royal Shakespeare Company's experimental group that encapsulated many of the ideas and theories of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and expanded on them. In fact, one such presentation in 1964 was entitled the *Theatre of Cruelty,* in homage to Artaud, and included scenes from Artaud's *Spurt of Blood* paired with other sketches and vignettes that attempted to explore the limits of Cruelty in praxis. Much of Brook's current fame in the field of directing comes from this period, entitled the "Theatre of Disturbance" by Marowitz (one of Brook's compatriots at the time). This period

included his legendary productions of *King Lear* and *The Marat/Sade* (which eventually won Brook the Tony award for Best Director).

Huddled between these two world-famous productions, Brook's take on Jean Genet's *The Screens*, which will be my focus in the following pages, is an overlooked production that sprang from that early work on the Theatre of Cruelty season. It laid the foundation for the balance Brook found between the work of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht.

The Screens, written by Jean Genet, is, like all of Genet's work, in part an exploration of the validity of "reality." Against the backdrop of the Algerian War of Independence, Said, the tragic protagonist, wades through a world that is half-fantasy, half-reality, though the lines that differentiate the two are blurred and switched and undercut throughout. The tactics of this questioning and, at times, shattering of the "real" is laid out quite vividly in Genet's introductory note to the published version of the script. Genet notes that the set is to be "formed by a series of screens…on which objects and landscapes will be painted," and he goes on to explain that "near the screen there must always be at least one real object (wheelbarrow, bucket, bicycle, etc.), the function of which is to establish a contrast between its own reality and the objects that are drawn" (Genet 9-10). Even at the end of the play, when Said has been executed by the military, his death is robbed of any reality as those characters left "living" clear the stage of the screens (the landscape of the world of the play) and Said's mother, in a fit of denial, asks, "Then where is he? In a song?" (201).

The Screens was the perfect crucible through which Brook could test his ideas about blending Artaud and Brecht, a play that dealt with the violence and power of war

and, in the same breath, the illusionistic nature of representation and reality. *The Screens* "seemed a perfect follow-on to the LAMDA [Theatre of Cruelty] season; its language was harsh but lyrical, it played with flat painted images and three-dimensional objects, it was even more scathing about the European power elite than *Le Balcon* [Genet's previous play] had been" (Kustow 144) observed Michael Kustow, a biographer of Brook's, and the reviews of the production seemed to agree. Tom Milne, critic for *Encore* at the time, wrote of *The Screen's*:

> series of shattering images: as two Colonialists chat cosily about the aesthetics and economics of their plantation, Arab terrorists creep stealthily in to draw tiny flames on the screens behind them; then more Arabs, more flames, until the action seems to dissolve in a sheet of fire…The result is electrifying: naked hatred is present on the stage. In both cases we are presented with an image apparently derived out of fantasy but which, like Picasso's *Guernica*, is a poetic distillation which contains a truth more bright than reality. (Kustow 144-145)

According to this review, Brook, using paint and screens, affected his audience much more powerfully than did Artaud, his predecessor: "Naked hatred is present on stage," as opposed to a "train from hell that *does not affect us*." This variance in reception is of the utmost importance. This section from Milne's review articulates a discovery I've made in reading about Brook's work with the Theatre of Cruelty. He augments the power of Artaud's Cruelty through Brecht's influence, and this has everything to do with the difference that Milne describes here between "truth" and "reality".

Marowitz describes the injection of Brecht into Brook's work on *The Screens*: "The Artaudian exercises had prepared us for Genet's metaphysic, and we now began to apply a Brechtian approach to get at the play's political bedrock" (Marowitz 54). While Marowitz describes using Brechtian exercises (such as giving each scene supertitles or recounting the action of scenes "from the Marxist point of view" (54)) to achieve political

goals, I observe a more profound achievement here, again to do with the difference between "truth" and "reality" and that speaks back to the discussion of suspension of disbelief, mimesis, and truthfulness. As Howard Barker (an English writer who had a great influence on Sarah Kane) puts it, "To tell the truth sincerely is the pitiful pretension of the theatre. To lie sincerely is the euphoria of *the art of theatre*" (Barker 4).

As I've state above, a political (in my words "didactic") theatre does not interest me, but Brecht's influence here adds something else just as notable by highlighting and engaging in the difference between "reality" and "truth." We see this influence in the image described above of the Arabs lighting the plantation on fire. The audience was completely aware of the "lie," the falsity of the representation, but, as Milne said, "naked hatred" was still able to rear its head. Somehow Brook seemed to have balanced a Brechtian distance and an Artaudian response in the same image.

By disengaging with any preconceptions of "reality," by completely acknowledging suspension of disbelief and thereby freeing an audience from the task of adjudicating a production's ability to deceive, by allowing the audience to remain aware of a play's *unrealisms* and thereby allowing them to focus more fully on its truthfulness, I believe that you allow the audience to more entirely engage with the visceral, emotional and spiritual implications of an act of theatre. Brook gave up on realistic representation because he was aware that "naked hatred" could still be present in paint on screens without real fire. This speaks to Grotowski's notion of the *conjunction of opposites*. By using Brecht, Brook freed his audience to be affected more profoundly by Artaud. Also, with Brecht, with setting aside any notions of "fooling" the audience, I believe that the relationship between performer and spectator is made more equal. The bond becomes

more honest and more truthful without deception, and with that honesty comes a more direct way to speak to an audience.

All this praise is not meant to imply that Brook's *The Screens* is the pinnacle of the potential of violence and cruelty on stage; he certainly made missteps. While the Artaudian and Brechtian equilibrium found its way into the mise en scéne, there were small problems with the space. Sally Jacobs' set, described by Kustow as "grist to [the] mill" (144) of the production, placed all the illusionary trickery of the screens in Genet's script within "the Spartan Donmar studio," augmented by atavistic, Artaudian symbols like " a naked articulated tailor's dummy that, festooned with glitzy medals, became an imperial totem" (144). By placing the production in "some sort of vast converted warehouse" (Marowitz 57) as opposed to a beautified Parisian proscenium, *The Screens* at least begins to fix the mistakes made by Artaud but not fully. As Milne goes on to describe, "at one end of the room, tiers of rough planking crowded with chairs for the spectators; at the other, the acting area, dotted with tall white screens on castors" (57). Again!

Again, the audience and the actors are separated by an unbridgeable chasm, the audience condemned to observe from a distance. Of course, the banks of this particular chasm are more similar and therefore more appropriate than those at the Folies-Wagram, but that does not forgive the fact that Brook still allowed his audience too much distance, in every way. After all, a key aspect of Cruelty is *immersion*. Once more, this foundational aspect of Cruelty was underutilized and undervalued, but, for my purposes,

the most noticeable and most consistent fault of this production comes (again) from the script.

Jean Genet's *The Screens* involves many Artaudian aspects, many aspects of violence and immersion and menace, but it also gets caught up in intellectualism and lyricism, ideas antithetical to the impact of the Cruel. To be fair, it would appear that Genet himself had no interest in Artaud or Cruelty, but, for my purposes, it is helpful to dissect it in this way, especially considering Brook seemed to find aspects worthy of exploring in that way as well.

There are two aspects of the text of *The Screens* that I think hindered it, that kept it from becoming the cruel spectacle that Brook imagined. The first I've mentioned briefly, that Genet's level of intellectuality and lyricism is in direct conflict with Artaud's ideas about the power of concision and his ideas about the power of viscera over thought. Marowitz's disdain for the script's heavy-handedness is evident; "Said's salvation through progressive degradation is portrayed with all the relentlessness of a thesis-playwright laboriously proving his point" (55). His sarcasm here speaks not only to his negative feelings against heavy-handed intellectual drama, but more to the confusion and lack of clarity this particular text brought with it (what Marowitz refers to as an "inner fuzziness"). Certainly, Artaud's *Les Cenci* had a kind of fuzziness to it, but that came from Artaud's evisceration of the original text. Genet's fuzziness came from, it seems to me, a dissonance between the highbrow themes in the script and Brook's application of Cruelty, which seems to have a kind of sincerity in its directness.

The second characteristic that felt wrong in the script speaks to an interesting aspect of Cruelty that I had not taken into account before looking through the descriptions

of *The Screens*: simply, its length. Again Marowitz chimes in, "Brook felt, and I concurred, that the first twelve scenes contained all the gnarled genius of the work, and the remaining two and a half hours held only endless out-riding variations" (55). Can you imagine two-and-half-hours at the end of a play that add nothing? It seems to me that concision is important here as well. In my mind Cruelty is similar to an act of violence, which is sharp and quick and to the point. The length and inexhaustible nature of Genet's *The Screens* seems more akin in length to torture. (This idea will return in my analysis of *Cleansed*, a sharply succinct script.)

With *The Screens*, we can see many similar mistakes were made that hindered the blossoming of Cruelty in *Les Cenci*. The stage space, while more fitting than the Folies-Wagram for *Les Cenci*, was still segregated, not allowing the audience-actor symbiosis to truly flourish. To be fair, Genet's text was not written from the perspective of the Theatre of Cruelty, but many similar intentions were at play. In the end, Genet's script is too lyrical, too intellectual, and, frankly, too long to really hold under Brook's application of Artaud's theories. But even with all this criticism, Brook's *The Screens* achieved (and illuminated for me) one extremely important facet of staging violence that will help me in my work as a director: the potential of neglecting "reality" in search of truth. This idea, adapted in part from Brecht, of setting aside the real to focus on the true, echoed in Brook, in Barker, and in Artaud (though he never practiced it fully) can create an audience-actor relationship that is honest and effective. It is the truth of the fire that matters, not that it actually burns.

6.0 SARAH KANE'S *CLEANSED*: ANALYSIS

"The purpose of the Violence in Sarah's plays is diametrically opposed to the purpose of the violence in most other people's plays. The purpose of violence in her plays is to resensitize people to what violence is."

- Simon Kane ("War and Sex")

As I've argued in the previous two parts of this paper, one of the major missing pieces in the progression towards a better Theatre of Cruelty is the lack of the innately Cruel *playwright*. In Artaud's case, his flaws as a playwright/adaptor are self-evident. In the case of Genet, we find a lack of concision and a lack of clarity. To be brief, *The Screens* was a weapon without an edge. What *Cleansed* represents, in concert with Kane's other texts (especially *Blasted*), is a writer's attempt to find *in a text* some of the violence, menace, and aggression inherent in Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. While I will be focusing on *Cleansed* in this analysis because of my imminent production of the play, *Blasted* by Sarah Kane and many other texts from the in-yer-face movement in the 1990s in London speak just as profoundly to this movement toward aggression, immersion, and violence *in the text*. In the following, I'll analyze Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* from the perspective of the Theatre of Cruelty in an attempt to illuminate the best path forward in directing the play.

Cleansed takes place in a "university," which reads much more like an Orwellian mental hospital than a college. It has been said that one of her influences in writing the play was Roland Barthes' quote: "Being in love is like being in Auschwitz." The university/concentration camp is run by a man named Tinker (rumored to be named after a critic who panned Kane's first play *Blasted*), who uses the seemingly absolute dominance of his position as "doctor" to torture his patients by despicable means. Within

the university, each patient is involved in a romance that is tested by Tinker's viciousness, his experiments. Grace visits the hospital to try to reconnect with her brother Graham, who died at the "university." When she arrives, Graham is there, perhaps in her mind, perhaps through the magic of the place, and throughout the play she commits herself to becoming as much like Graham as she can to commemorate him, to bring him back to life through her own body. Through beatings, rape, and sexual reassignment, Grace's body is stripped of its meaning, allowing her to "give" it to Graham, the ultimate sacrifice for love. Carl and Rod are two young men whose love is obliterated by Tinker, who desecrates Carl's body in every imaginable way and murders Rod. Robin, a young boy, is an inmate at the "university" who falls in love with Grace, and commits suicide when he realizes that he will be at the "university" for the rest of his life, in a place where the possibility of love for him is impossible. Even Tinker finds love at the "university," with a stripper who inhabits the place. The play as a whole is a rumination on the question: How much would you endure for love? Grace and Carl are willing to sacrifice their bodies for it, the stripper her name, and Rod his life. Robin's life is revealed to be meaningless without it. In Kane's world, love must be proven through sacrifice, but life is unbearable without love.

It is within this story of the corporeal pain and sacrifice of love that Kane uses Artaudian techniques of Cruelty and extreme violence to affect her audience, to plunge them into this story of human sacrifice and empower them through immersion. The techniques she uses to shroud the audience in her text are many, but I will focus on a few here that I think say the most about Kane's sensibility. Namely, her use of striking imagery (of violence *and* sex), her sparse dream-like dialogue, her use of design elements

to heighten immersion, and her own bodily suffering as the playwright all come together to make *Cleansed* a powerfully cruel text and an exhaustively redemptive one, as well.

Perhaps the most immediately obvious connection between Artaud's goals for the Theatre of Cruelty and Kane's writing is the combination of her use of distilled, concise language that approaches the "importance they have in dreams"[4] and the extreme imagery that accompanies it. As Graham Saunders writes, "It could […] be argued that Kane's startling theatrical imagery and her equally powerful use of sparse but vivid language at times get close to the elements of ritual and magic Artaud called his vision of theatre to 'double'" (16). Kane's language is unrealistically sharp, brief, and to the point. As John Peter, critic for the *Sunday Times*, wrote of *Cleansed*, "[it] is a nightmare of a play, it unreels somewhere between the back of your eyes and the centre of your brain" (Saunders 90).

Kane's dialogue becomes heightened, dreamlike and therefore profound in part because of its situation within Kane's use of those extreme Artaudian images. It is not unlike what we see in Shakespeare: Gloucester's eyes are put out in synchronization with one of the shortest lines in *King Lear*, "Out, vile jelly!" (King Lear 3.7) and thus the text itself has the sharpness of a knife that echoes the imagery it accompanies. Pairing larger-than-life moments of violence and fantasy with one- or two-word lines heightens the power of each word. This augmentation of the importance of a single word speaks to Artaud's thoughts about language with dreamlike power.

While the images of extreme violence and sex do have a hand in heightening the language, they also present a phenomenon that is resonant of Peter Brook's ideas about

[4] From Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*

The Happening and the New Charge. Brook's Happening is a moment when you strike the audience with the danger of a moment in such a way that they are opened up, that the path to their soul is cleared. *Cleansed* is rife with Happenings, which mostly appear through acts of extreme violence. *"Tinker produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl's tongue"* (14). *"[Tinker] takes Carl by the arms and cuts of his hands*" (25). *"An electric current is switched on. Grace's body is thrown into rigid shock as bits of her brain are burnt out*" (31). Each of these moments of severe and aggressive violence will inevitably present that Brookian Happening; they are so dangerous and surprising that they must, and they are only a few examples from a script full of them. But as Brook said, each Happening must be capitalized on, must be filled with a "new charge," and Kane chooses to fill her Happenings with love. As each new horror is shown, the audience becomes more desperate for the hope of love, needs it more than ever, and Kane gifts us with that each and every time. After Carl's tongue is cut off, Grace and Graham dance their love for one another. After Carl's hands are cut off, we see the stripper asking to be saved through love, and after Grace is given electro-shock therapy we see Carl and Rod make love. So in my work, the necessity is to balance the power of these horrors with the more subtle redemptions of love.

By using these ideas of the happening and the new charge, another significant aspect of *Cleansed* emerges, which comes from Kane's corporeal juxtaposition of violence and love. As I've mentioned above, Kane uses her imagery of extreme violence as a Happening, a moment of breaking the barriers in the audience's mind, and fills that with the undying, immortal love of her characters. But this technique also serves another extremely important purpose in the text, to comment on the battle for the body between

cruelty and love. She does this by applying techniques not unlike Brook's use of Brechtian meta-theatre to distance an act of violence from the body. This of course serves two purposes: 1) to make the representation bearable to an audience and 2) to make the representation *possible*. As James MacDonald, the original director of the play, in an interview about the process: "I think it's clear the moment you look at *Cleansed* there's no way you can do it realistically – it would be lethal to perform and unbearable to watch" (Saunders 123).

When Carl is beaten, it is done by unseen Voices: "*Carl is being heavily beaten by an unseen group of men. We hear the sound of the blows and Carl's body reacts as if he has received the blow*" (Kane 12)**.** When Grace is raped, it is also done by those unseen Voices; her body is distanced from the act of violence. In both cases, we get an unrealistic representation of the act, which retains all of the intended visceral impact of the violence.

On the other hand, the love is always immediate, with no distance, body to body. When Grace makes love to Graham, Kane describes in extreme detail the exact spots on the body where the lovers touch, highlighting the importance of physicality, corporeality in love. "*He sucks her right breast. She undoes his trousers and touches his penis...They stand naked and look at each other's bodies. They slowly embrace*" (16). The power of that embrace cannot be overstated. There is intense meaning in the fact that making love is done directly on the body in the "university" and rape, violence distances the act from the body of the victim. It is in this difference that Kane declares the winner in this timeless battle for the body: love.

In this play between violence and love, we are also forced to truly cherish the moments of love and fantasy. As Graham Saunders says, "[the "university"] can become a place where characters simultaneously undergo savage punishment and cruel suffering, yet it is also a place where we can witness moments of magic and bliss" (16). The beautiful moments of magic and bliss are thereby magnified in juxtaposition to the acts of violence. By acknowledging the presence of the horrible and the terrifying, we can more fully appreciate the beautiful. As Kane says, by not representing something "you are denying its existence…and that's an extraordinarily ignorant thing to do" (Saunders 24). It is precious to see a young man smell a sunflower and say, "Lovely." When this happens in a place where people are dismembered, raped, and murdered, it becomes redemptive and hopeful. This small but undeniable hope that lines each of Kane's texts elevates her work above Brook's and Artaud's, in my opinion. For each of them were missing that crucial ingredient in the aftermath of an act of Cruelty, that "new charge." Artaud's was "gibberish" and "delirious," and the intellectual "fuzziness" of Genet's script befuddled Brook's. Kane's is vividly clear; she uses violence to drill a hole in her audience's mind that is filled with the redemptive hope of love, and, as Graham Saunders says, this redemptive love is "as an act of defiance" (92) to the existence of the violence.

Kane also attempts to push the cruelty of *Cleansed* through her use of sound and lights. The inclusion of these design aspects in her script elucidates Kane's intention of immersion. Perhaps the best example of her incorporation of these techniques comes from the final image of the play, "*The sun gets brighter and brighter, the squeaking of rats louder and louder, until the light is blinding and the sound deafening. Blackout*" (47). To highlight the redemptive catharsis of her characters, she presses bright lights,

deafening sounds onto her audience, forcing them to experience the characters' redemption *corporeally*. This image will undoubtedly be burned into the eyes of the audience during the blackout, and, by doing so, she ensures that the play does not stay contained on stage, that the audience is encapsulated if not physically then sonically and visually. This use of lights and sound gets at the immersion that was missing in *Les Cenci* and *The Screens*. [5]

Beyond these textual aspects of Kane's writing, one facet of Kane's writing that is perhaps underestimated is her own self-penetration as a writer, the sacrifice of her privacy with the goal of producing that Growtoskian self-penetration in the audience. In her own way, she rejects the idea of the death of the author; each play speaks to a facet of her and her life, to her own crises, which is the kind of sacrifice and danger that was missing from Brook's *The Screens*. This is perhaps most evident in her last work *4.48 Psychosis*, a rumination on suicide, a play that was posthumously produced after Kane killed herself. Edward Bond wrote of Kane after her death, "She does not write the play, she becomes it" (De Vos, Saunders 217). This act of self-penetration, which Artaud understood in his own way as a mental-health patient for most of his life, testifies to the fact that theatre is *created* through the body. Kane experienced her plays in her own body, not unlike Artaud, and this fact speaks the that Artaudian idea of "total theatre." If the theatre is to be a holistic act, each participant must "sacrifice" herself equally to the cause; the playwright should not be excepted. That Kane, as the playwright, brings herself so fully to her plays is a powerful feature of her own brand of Cruelty.

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[5] As a side note to this immersive quality of the text, I believe that *Cleansed* must be staged in a theatre in which the performers and spectators are in close proximity to each other, literally as close as possible. My production will take place in the University of Pittsburgh's Studio Theatre, a cramped 100-seat thrust, which is not ideal but at least begins to get at the immersive quality the space should bring to a production of *Cleansed*.

Simon Kane, Sarah's brother, said this of his sister's work after her death: "The purpose of the violence in Sarah's plays is diametrically opposed to the purpose of the violence in most other people's plays. The purpose of violence in her plays is to *resensitize* people to what violence is" ("War and Sex," my italics). All that I've written about here, all of her work in *Cleansed* and in her canon can be boiled down to this sentiment that resonates with what Artaud wrote half a century before Kane was born: to *resensitize* the spectator. Both Kane and Artaud understand the innate power of the theatre, of the bond between performer and spectator, and both were working in response to the impotent work being done by the contemporaries. Kane said:

> I was having a fit about all this naturalistic rubbish that was being written and I decided that I wanted to write a play that could never ever be turned into a film – it could never ever be shot for television; it could never be turned into a novel. The only thing that could be done with it was it could be staged, and believe it or not that play is *Cleansed*. You may say it can't be staged, but it can't be anything else either. (Saunders 87)

They both imagined a theatre that had all the power of a hurricane, that could leave scars in the mind, that could propel its audience out into the streets with renewed fervor for life. I believe that this hope is vividly clear in *Cleansed*, a play that uses striking imagery of extreme violence, sex, and sacrifice (all collective complexes, common knowledge to all peoples) to affect her audience in a way that capitalized on the full potential of the theatre to empower.

For me, on the precipice of directing this play, it is of the utmost importance to take all of this into account, the power of each word, the distance of violence hollows an audience to be filled with the intimacy of love, the immersion of the text, Kane's own sacrifice, and it is my goal to incorporate all of this into a production that burns itself into

my audience's mind. Kane puts it best: "No doubt that is why I keep coming back [to the theatre], in the hope that someone in a dark room somewhere will show me an image that burns itself into my mind, leaving a mark more permanent than the moment itself" (Saunders 14). With *Cleansed*, I think that she has given us a text with the potential to do just that, and I hope to achieve that in all its Cruel beauty in my own production of *Cleansed*.

7.0 SARAH KANE'S *CLEANSED*: PRAXIS

7.1 WEEK ONE: LESSONS ABOUT VIOLENCE AND RESPECT FOR THE TEXT

My first week of rehearsal was spent putting the play on its feet, blocking the piece in a basic, foundational way. Simply, my goal this week was to get this production to a place where each scene had a shape, beautiful or not, on which we could build in the coming weeks, understanding that a lot would change and evolve. So, I spent day one blocking scenes 1, 2, and 3; day two blocking scenes 4 and 5; day three blocking 6, 7, 8, and 9; day four blocking 10, 11, 12, and 13; day five blocking scenes 14, 19, 15, and 16; and day six blocking the rest, 17, 18, and 20. With each scene my process was as follows:

1) I began with asking my actors to grab chairs, sit knee to knee and simply speak through the scene. Additionally, I asked them not to gesture, not to use any movement, and I allowed them only one physical act, the choice of eye contact. The point of this exercise was to heighten the actors' awareness of their bodies when they were allowed to use them later. Also, it was helpful for me to hear the scenes read by my actors.
2) Next, I asked them to go through the scene once in the space, in their bodies on impulse. I told them not to worry about what they did, looking pretty, or being logical; all I was interested in was impulse. I gave them some very simple outlines for this process (where on stage the scene would probably take place, spaces on stage they couldn't go, and the beginning and ending images). This process was only set-aside during scenes with beating and rape.

This was because I did not want my actors, even subconsciously, to hold others violent "impulses" against one another.

3) The next step was to begin step two again, this time stopping and starting and making edits myself. The reason I wanted to work this way was to give my actors a sense of agency over the way their bodies moved in this production. It was of paramount importance to me that my actors felt that the blocking came from them, that nothing was forced on them. This speaks to the ideas in my thesis about the contract of the theatre, that each member of a theatre piece should be a willing and cognizant participant of the act. By giving my actors their bodies, I've attempted to maximize their personal investment and responsibility (as well as comfort) to the piece.
4) Lastly, given that I did not exceed time on the first few steps, the rest of blocking time for each of these scenes was given to learning what we had created, and, in one or two cases, I started trying to layer in the rhythm of the text and the acting intentions in these scenes.

The overall effect of this process was meant to accomplish the feats of allowing the actors a great sense of ownership over their blocking, which I hope will lead to a greater sense of comfort in this challenging piece, and also to heighten the actors' awareness of how they use their own bodies and the power/importance of movement.

From this work, I made two discoveries that were quite powerful and important to how I will rehearse through the rest of the process and how I follow through on my concept. I discovered some flaws in my concept involving how I used and augmented the Voices characters in the script and exactly how important the spatial differences between

violence and sex are to this play. Of these two, my Voices "failure" has the been the most challenging for me to work through, but I'll talk about the spatial variance between violence and sex because it speaks in some ways to the problem of the Voices.

As I've said, this first week in the space with my actors' bodies drew tightly into focus just how important the dichotomy of sex (love) and violence are for Kane and how important they must be for me as the director. My concept going in was to try to split the images of violence presented in the text, to stage the two parts of the image on two distinct parts of the stage, and to force the audience to synthesize these parts into a cohesive whole in their mind. This came from what I discuss in my section on Brook's *The Screens,* trying to balance the distance of Brecht with the visceral impact of Artaud, and this has actually worked out in many ways. Of course this concept places a heavy burden on my actors to really sell the acts of violence (else the audience is just completely distanced), but, when they're working hard, these split images tell the story and achieve Artaud's powerful visceral impact at the same time.

More importantly, this distance in the violence has really highlighted the importance of close proximity and touch in the scenes of love for my actors and, ultimately, for my audience who will need relief just as much as the actors and even the characters themselves. With this in mind, I always attempted to spread the violence out on the stage and to contain the love scenes to small portions of the stage, preferably quite close to the audience. Because I worked chronologically through the play, my actors became more and more needy and desperate for the touch of their scene partners in the aftermath of the violent, vicious scenes. They actually were forced by Kane's text (and, I hope, through some of my own work) to find solace in the arms of the other actors. It

was actually quite beautiful, and I believe it speaks really profoundly to the way the play works.

Now to my bigger concern: In my concept I decided to embody the characters Sarah Kane calls Voices, so that I would be able to use them to help facilitate the challenging moments of extreme stage violence. For instance, when Robin hangs himself, I imagined three or four of this Voice ensemble holding him up in the air to suggest a hanging without having to trick the audience into believing it was actually happening while allowing my actor to experience what a hanging might feel like and through him the audience gets that experience as well; again, Brecht meets Artaud in a conjunction of opposites. To be fair, Kane specifically designates these characters in the text as "unseen," and they appear only in two scenes in the script. But for a while I felt that I needed them to help produce the images of violence on my limited budget and that they would help me keep honest to this conjunction of opposites.

My problems arose when I began to extrapolate this idea, partially to justify my choice of corporealizing the Voices and partially out of a concern that these actors would not be given enough to do. The latter being not the wisest of concerns, I know. So, my concept grew to incorporate these Voices in almost every scene, at times using props and incorporating to scenes sonically and at others simply being a presence that indicated the ever-present possibility of violence in the text. All this seemed well and good, until I got to the rehearsal when I began to incorporate these Voices. The reason that Sarah Kane left the Voices unseen smacked me in the face. As I talked about in my analysis of the script, this is Kane's way of finding that conjunction of opposites, of making violence visceral and distanced at the same time. By incorporating the Voices in the way I have

now, I've pushed the violence closer to the action rather than allowing it the distance its given in the script. Beyond this textual reason, the Voices ruined the energy of the room. The scenes of *Cleansed* are so well balanced, so well crafted that they lose something by adding extra bodies, extra energy to the space. I sensed a negative tentativeness to scenes as I added the Voices, and, ultimately, the story was getting muddled.

Because of this discovery, my work in the next couple of weeks will be to heavily edit my inclusion of the Voices, to make sure that what they add to the production heightens and emphasizes what the script is trying to do and not simply to give actors "something to do" or to follow through on my original concept. What this work will become I do not know, but it has of the utmost importance to me to identify this error in the hopes of being able to fix it in the rest of the rehearsal process.

One last danger that I came across in rehearsal this week was a tendency in all of my actors to attach the victimization of their characters (especially during the violent sections) to themselves as people in a very personal way. For instance, during the electroshock scene my actress playing Grace had a memory recall of her own personal experience with seizures. My actor playing Rod had a breakdown in rehearsal while rehearsing the scene in which Rod has to watch Carl be dismembered, presumably attaching it to closely to his own life. There are at least a few other examples of this. This has highlighted for me the importance of my task as the director to keep my actors safe in every way, physically, mentally, and emotionally. When these moments have happened, my process of pulling them out of the depths has been to ask them to do something ridiculous (run around like an airplane, making chicken noises, etc.) to keep them from wallowing. I've followed that up with discussions about what triggered the

response and asking each actor to be aware that this scene or moment has that potential to cause a break and to prepare for combating that in the scene in the future. Lastly, I asked them to run the scene with just blocking and lines, without any acting in an attempt to prove to them that this scene does not *have* to cause a breakdown or flashback, that they are capable of acting in these scenes while staying emotionally balanced.

In the coming week, I will be editing the Voices, working scenes, and ending with our first stumble through, and all of these discoveries will be on my mind throughout the process of this week.

7.2 WEEK TWO: PACE, RAPE, AND SELFISHNESS

This past week in rehearsal my cast and I have spent some time working on incorporating the Voices (my conundrum from last week, which hasn't gotten any better really). This work included the fight choreography of scenes 4 & 10 (when Grace and Carl are beaten by the Voices) and adding them to scenes in which they are involved in the sound design or explicitly in the text. I also spent some time dealing with moments and issues that were not addressed or fully fleshed out in the initial blocking of the scenes during the first week, trying to tighten things up and specifically block moments that had not been worked on last week.

Out of this work I've made a number of discoveries concerning the play itself and directing, and these things have some interesting resonance with the theoretical work I've done so far in the thesis paper. What I will talk about in the following pages is pace, selfishness, and the staging of the rape scene.

Pace is something that needs to be dealt with by every single director in every single production of every single play, and *Cleansed* is no different. Pace and rhythm help to drive a production as much as anything else, and Sarah Kane's play has an extremely precise rhythm that my actors are not quite in tune with yet. This isn't something I'm really worried about, but the reason I bring it up is because this week, watching the scenes under the pace they need to be eventually, I recognized how important my point in the thesis about length truly is. When I wrote about the difference between violence and torture (in terms of how long an act of cruelty on stage takes place), I spoke from a hunch. This week has proved that to me. The scenes with extreme violence need to have the speed of the stab of knife, and that's something I'll be working toward in the coming weeks.

When I use the word selfishness above I'm referring to two things I've noticed in the past week's rehearsal that pertain to my work and to the work of my actors. In my case, this selfishness has manifested itself in moments of forgetting my allegiance to the script that I am staging; for my actors, this selfishness has been manifesting itself in scene work that has either been isolated from other actors on stage or work that has neglected the inevitable presence of an audience. For instance, my actors playing Carl and Rod have developed an exceptional connection. Their work together has been (for the most part) honest, truthful, and present *to each other*, but the problem is that their volume, their physicality, and their warping of the staging has heretofore completely neglected the fact that these scenes are, in the end, meant to be performed for an audience. By whispering to one another, looking down at the floor, by twisting their blocking to be

closer to one another, they've helped to foster a very strong relationship together, but at the same time they getting into some bad habits that I need to break them of. They certainly aren't the only ones falling into these habits, so with all of my actors I'll have to foster a balance between connection with the other actors and connection with the audience, which speaks to my discussions about the bond between audience and actors. By allowing actors to just deal with themselves, I would be fostering a voyeuristic relationship to the audience, which I have no interest in.

As for my own selfishness, I've forgotten at moments what it is I'm staging, and I need to keep reminding myself that Kane's script has everything in it that we need to tell the story. I guess the bad habit started with my decisions to cut the rats (in scenes 8, 13, 16, and 20) and to cut the moment in scene 10 where Grace and Graham touch one another and blood sprouts from the touch. I cut these moments mostly because they seem impossible for me, and I've attempted to funnel the meaning and the intention of the moments into what's left of the scene. I've also decided to add in a brief transition scene in which I stage the sexual reassignment surgery (another moment not presented in the script). This choice I believe in because I think it really sells the story of the sexual reassignment that is difficult to tell otherwise. Beyond these decisions, which I am still in defense of, I've made a few other decisions to add to or take away from the script that are not doing the same work of telling the story as written. I'm planning on excising all of these things. I just needed this week to teach me that the script has what I need in it, that I need to trust Kane as much as I'm acting my actors to trust me and trust themselves.

On to my concerns and difficulties with staging the rape scene. First of all, I want to put on the record that it's an unbelievably uncomfortable thing to do, walking actors through the motions of how they will brutalize each other, especially with something so horribly personal as rape. Staging all of the scenes of violence has proved to be difficult, but the tricky part of the rape scene is naturally the volatility of the subject matter. Rape is something I've never experienced, something that (to my knowledge) none of my cast members have experienced. So, as with many things the theatre practitioner does, we've had to imagine and approximate, as best we can, what rape is like, and imagination can be scary at times. It is a phenomenon of human behavior that is equally baffling and haunting, and as a group we've been trying to explore that mysterious territory.

To be blunt, another layer of difficulty comes from the fine line between serving the play and just creating a grotesque, hypersexual spectacle. The first crack at staging the scene was very intense (maybe too much so), and this came not from the reactions of my actress playing Grace (the victim) but rather from the vicious, over-the-top zeal with which my actors playing the Voices brought to the table. They really went for it, portraying maniacal rapists enjoying with laughter every single thrust. After some thought and some discussions with my faculty advisor, I began to reimagine the scene with the Voices bringing a more mechanical, more detached intention to the moment, but even that brings up questions of what the scene is meant to do in the play.

On the one hand, the scene is meant to serve as one moment in which Grace's body is drained of its meaning, its importance, and her agency over it. This process happens through the education in scene 5 of how Graham's body works, through the rape, through the electroshock, and through the sexual reassignment surgery. This process

allows her to ultimately sacrifice her body to Graham in the final few scenes of the play. This makes me think that the rape should be mechanical, getting at the slow drain of meaning from her body.

On the other hand, Kane follows the rape in the scene with a moment of daffodils sprouting all over the stage, an image of unbelievable beauty and joy, and this makes me feel that the first half of the scene (including the rape) has to have an equal and opposite amount of power. There should be balance in the scene, which would lead me to keep the vicious, maniacal and visceral presentation of the scene. Also, I feel on some level that we have a responsibility to present rape in a raw form because, as Kane says in so many words, to not represent something is to neglect that it exists. I want to be fair to my audience, the script and what it asks for, and my actors who have to perform the deed, so I need to make a decision that compromises equally all of these concerns. Ultimately, I'm not sure where I'll go with this moment, and I'll be trying out both options in the next couple of days through rehearsal. Hopefully through this work I will find an answer to this nagging question.

7.3 SECOND HALF DISCLAIMER

Around this point in the rehearsal process, the University of Pittsburgh began to come under the scare of bomb threats, which continue to escalate in number as I write this. I've attempted to write my journal for Weeks 3 & 4 from my perspective during those weeks, but, in reality, they are being written after the upsetting news was spread that the show would be pulled altogether for safety reasons. Originally, I would've written about how the individual occurrences of the bomb threats affected each rehearsal

week, but now that seems inappropriate. Instead, after these sections, I've added another titled (simply) "Bomb Threats" in which I've attempted to catalogue the implications of these threats through my work and the effect they had through the untimely end of the process.[6]

7.4 WEEK THREE: CONTEXTUALIZATION AND COSTUMES

In Week 3, the hurdles I faced were mostly with contextualization (and a few other smaller concerns). What I mean by this is that I finally watched the show I've been paired with for the double bill I'm involved in, Steve Martin's *WASP*, and this viewing has affected the way that I'm thinking about my show (for better or for worse). Ben Kaye, my colleague and the director of *WASP*, has put together a fine production of Steve Martin's play, which will be performed in the first act of our double bill, but, as I have encountered in the past, I am distinctly aware of the dissonance created by pairing two disparate pieces together.

My first show for the University of Pittsburgh was *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett, which was paired with Christopher Durang's *Wanda's Visit*; a curious pairing I know. In that scenario my show came first in the production, and problems certainly arose. What seemed to happen from my point of view was a loss of Beckett's (and my) intent. His one-man play has a kind of creeping impression on the viewer, something that needs time to incubate after a viewing of the play; it's meant to worm its way into your subconscious and settle there to be removed and examined later (like a lot of Beckett's

[6] As you will see in the coming pages, there was yet another twist in this process. As a production team, we decided to put the show up for an invite-only, one-time presentation of the piece on April 17th, 2012.

work). What happened in my production was the utter obliteration of that by the broad comedy of the subsequent Durang piece; the raucous laughter smothering any intended introspection on my part or Beckett's.

While I don't fear another disastrous pairing this time around, I do have (inverted) concerns. I wonder how my audience will be affected by the contextualization of my production of *Cleansed*. It reminds me of the critiques of *Les Cenci*, of its situation directly after the presentation of a light operetta. I imagine I feel quite similar to Artaud at this point. As I've said *WASP* is well-crafted and a delightful show to watch, but it sets the audience up with laughter and then lulls them into depression; that is the arc of that particular show. It chronicles the unhappy lives of a 1950s WASP family unit, all of whom are crushed by that familial structure. The script (in my opinion) asks a director to suffocate the audience with depression and lost dreams and hopeless yearning, and all of this (with no disrespect to the work of all those involved with *WASP*) effectively puts the audience to sleep, it pacifies them in some ways. My show hopes to do the opposite. Kane's play hopes to tear the audience from sleep and dormancy, to force a visceral reaction from them, ultimately, to enliven them and to "resensitize" them to life.

This dissonance is striking to me, and, quite honestly, I have no idea what to do about it other than to ponder. I think that my attempts to "resensitize" are apparent, and I feel no urgent need to augment them because of outside forces. I hesitate to make any changes to my own work and the work of my colleagues to combat this expected reaction to a decision that was ultimately out of my hands (and I'm not sure that I need to), but what I can learn from this is a lesson about season planning and contextualization that I can apply if I ever have the power to make those larger decisions.

On another note, costumes have become an issue for me this week. I've realized how little I think about costumes as a director and how little I tend to care about them on stage, which has negatively affected my costume designer's work and our collaboration. I've been too vague with her, too general, and I fear that I've stunted the growth of her design with my neglect. To be fair, I felt that I was giving her artistic space to do the best work she could, but I realize that this was erroneous. I can think about it the same way that I think about working with actors; they need direction and concept first and then they can begin their work. I've attempted to amend this mistake, and, from the work that we've done together this week, I feel that we're back on the right track. Ultimately, this is a lesson that I will take with me in every future endeavor as a director and that I will extrapolate to every other design aspect of each show. This is something that I spoke about in the body of this thesis paper, but that I admittedly did not take fully to heart. I can be more specific with my designers while still allowing them artistic freedom and that will be a goal of mine in the future. To be blunt though, I'm not sure how this idea will manifest itself through the rest of this process.

7.5 WEEK FOUR: SPECIFICITY WITH DESIGNERS AND PACE

Week 4, which ended in tech rehearsals, was a week spent trying to push the pace and the rhythm in preparation for the addition of lights and sound. I've already written about this in the journal so far, but it is a persisting problem. Pace has become a major issue in this production to this point for a number of obvious reasons: the concision of the script (which speaks back to my discussion of violence as quick and torture as slow), the acting values which are only highlighted and augmented by the rhythm and pace of the script, and my ability to be able to tell the story properly. This story telling aspect came

into clear focus this week when I began to run the show on a regular basis; I became much more in tune with the rhythm of the entire script as opposed to the compartmentalized rhythm of each scene. The pace should be carried from scene to scene, but it isn't at the moment. That is something that I will be focusing on a lot.

For instance, by watching these runs, I've found the need for pace in scenes eight to fourteen to be of paramount importance, considering that scene fifteen is the longest scene in the play and is primarily dominated by a repetitive and disgusting stage direction. To balance this demand of the script, those previous scenes need to clip. Similarly, the first three scenes, expository in nature, have had a tendency to drag because the wants and objectives of the characters aren't quite so vividly clear as they become later. Also considering my previous concerns about waking the audience up after the tranquilization of *WASP*, I feel an urgent need for pace in these scenes, and not simply pace but also all the things that pace brings with it: rhythm, stronger acting, less time for the audience to "fall asleep" again.

Ultimately, I don't really see any need for this production to be any longer than 65 minutes, and we're running at about 80 right now. It might be utopian to expect to cut 20% of my run time, but that is the goal. In the end, I know the experience will be better for actors and audience alike to see this show at that kind of pace, an unrelenting drive to the conclusion, which does not allow for escape or distraction and forces everyone in the space to confront each moment, each image, and each word with little time to escape.

The other lesson that I learned this week was how much I am currently lacking in my skills and planning with designers, as I've already spoken to. I recognized by the end

of our tech rehearsals that I had not been as helpful or as clear with the designers as I could have been. I don't feel like I failed at this by any means, but I know that I could've been more helpful. To some extent, I can chalk this up to a lack of knowledge about lights, sound, set, costumes, and props. I am trained first and foremost as an actor, and I have much less experience, training and knowledge in these other areas.

What this says to me is that I can learn more about the technical aspects so that I can talk more eloquently to these people, but the other side of the coin is that I realize my concept for design elements needs to be more cogent from the beginning of the process. Involved in this document is the handout that I gave to my designers outlining my concept, and, as you will see, it is ultimately too textual, too intellectual, and not nearly visual or aural enough. While words are necessary, I could've been more immediately explicit about my visual concept for show, and, in the end, I think that I didn't give my designers enough to start with. Another lesson that I can take with me as I go on to more productions.

7.6 BOMB THREATS AND THE LEADER

Before the strange turn of events that were the 57 (at the time of this writing) bomb threats to the University of Pittsburgh campus, this section was meant to be conjecture about expected audience response, what I was hoping to see and what I expected to see when this show made the final leap into reality by performing for a willing audience. Now, in light of the realization that these threats ultimately kept this production from ever seeing an audience, I feel the need to talk briefly about how they

affected my thinking and my work and how they taught me a powerful lesson about directing and being a leader.

Through the second half of the rehearsal process my cast and crew were interrupted, postponed, or displaced from the Studio Theatre in the basement of the Cathedral of Learning (a major target of the threats) approximately seven times. Beyond the obvious safety concerns for the well being of all those working with me, my major difficulty in dealing with this was in keeping everyone's focus intact. Obviously, things became different when we were forced to have notes sessions outside in the park, in other buildings, when we were forced to rehearse scenes in a number of places across the University of Pittsburgh campus to find refuge from the sirens and the fear that came with them. Time was lost, which translated into compromises I was forced to make in staging, in design and so forth, but the loss of trajectory, of focus, of the ultimate goal of production was much harder to deal with. Understandably my actors began to lose much of the work we had done, their blocking became fuzzy, their intentions unclear and their artificial fear, pain, and terror demanded by the script rang false in juxtaposition to the real terror we all had to deal with. Then came the final blow, that the show, as we knew it, would never see an audience, that the threats had scared my actors and designers so much that they no longer felt safe working on the project in the volatility of the environment of looming bombs and terrorism.

What all of this taught me was the importance of the director as a leader. I've had to bear the brunt of a lot of negativity, a lot of broken dreams. I've had to sit at the helm of the grieving process for these actors and designers (many of whom have been robbed of their last contribution to the University of Pittsburgh as seniors) and lead them through

their unhappiness. This has been an incredibly hard thing to do, and this experience will certainly make me a better leader and a better director.

One of the many critiques of Antonin Artaud's work on *Les Cenci* was his dictatorial style of leadership, his lack of compassion and caring for those working under him, and this is something that I've never wanted to be. But I understand it. Through this process my internal struggle has been between the director-self that says, "The show must go on," and the ethical, compassionate-self which values the individuals involved much more highly than the product. What wins of course (what should always win, perhaps) is the compassionate self, a lesson that the play *Cleansed* teaches us, a lesson that is not easy to accept. It's hard not to get overly sentimental or melodramatic about this, especially considering my proximity to the cancellation of this show, but I really do feel a strong harmony between how this process panned out and the play itself. Sarah Kane's play *Cleansed* shows us the fragility of love and passion in the face of terror, loss and (at times extreme) pain. This process has taught me to cherish the work, to cherish the moments of being in the room with my actors, the moments when I can shout for joy for the beauty of the work; all so that I can weather the storms of loss when they come.

As a final thought, this process has had me thinking about the rhetoric we all use about the theatre being a "safe place," a place where we explore and share some of the most painful and beautiful things about ourselves, the place where Artaud and Grotowoski have heralded the sacrifice of the martyr-actor. These threats have made it clear to me that this "safety" is not a given. We must earn it; we must incubate it. It takes effort and trust and sweat to construct that security that I've talked so much about in this thesis in regards to the "safety" of mimesis. When there are (real?) bombs outside,

the mimesis of the stage has more importance I think, it has more reality to speak to, and as artists we must be prepared to speak louder when the bombs are looming. The only way we can do that is by ensuring that we construct that protection for ourselves. Ultimately, we build this safety together, by offering ourselves to the process the way Grotowski asks us to, the way Kane did to her scripts, the way Artaud demanded in his own way, and also by caring and protecting the others that we work with.

8.0 CONCLUSION

I am writing this conclusion of my study on "Stage Violence, Power, & The Director" in the wake of my defense and after the one-night-only presentation of my resurrected production of *Cleansed* for an audience made up of my colleagues and friends. In the following, I will be discussing and reflecting on my thoughts and experiences throughout the entire process, especially my response to the ideas and critiques from my defense and the presentation of the show for an audience. Taking all of this fully into account will certainly take time, my eight months of writing, the 5-week rehearsal process, the production, the defense, and my thoughts about how all of these things speak to one another will take years perhaps to fully work through, but I will try to express in the following as best I can the discoveries I've made in this process.

8.1 OUR ONE-NIGHT PERFORMANCE AND THE LEADER

As of one week ago, the entire production team of *Cleansed* and I were convinced that an audience would never see our show due to the danger and fear of the prolific bomb threats made to the University of Pittsburgh this Spring. The process of the show's cancellation was as follows. After the escalation of bomb threats, we began to have polls at the beginning of rehearsals judging people's comfort with rehearsing on campus. In the event of any actors feeling uncomfortable or unsafe, we would call off rehearsal. This process led to the cancellation of two rehearsals. During the day of what would've

been our first dress rehearsal[7], we sent out an anonymous email survey asking whether people would be comfortable performing in the event of a) a bomb threat anywhere on campus or b) a bomb threat to the Cathedral of Learning (the closest Pitt building to our new theatre space). The amount of negative response to this poll was pretty overwhelming to me and because of this the show was cancelled.

In the week following this news, I heard a wide range of thoughts and opinions about the cancellation of the show, and what I could do about it. People were upset. Actors still wanted to perform, but, as I've written about, I felt it was my duty to help them through the grieving process and to bite the bullet as it were. Also in this time, I held my thesis defense, in which the hardest question to answer was: "Why isn't the show going on?" All of this kept adding pressure to my situation, to my decision to allow the show to "die." Through that week, my thought had been that it was out of my hands. I felt that the survey of actors, designers, and crew had been definitive, that as a leader my first duty was to keep everyone safe. Also, I felt that holding the show (with the knowledge that some actors and crew may not show up) would obliterate the necessary anonymity of that survey. And lastly (and most painfully for me), I sensed a distinct feeling amongst many of the people involved in the production that the end of the stress and exhaustion that came with this chaotic production was a welcomed sense of relief. Many people gave me the impression that as much as the cancellation had deeply saddened them it had been a kind of blessing in disguise. To be honest, this was a lot for me to handle and to work through.

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[7] At this point, the Theatre Arts Department had suggested that we move to another theatre out of the danger of threats, and we were going ahead with that plan.

The tipping point for me came from my defense committee and a question that each member asked me in their own way: "What do you want?" I have written about the need to "speak louder when the bombs are looming," which is something I believe. In that week, as I thought about everything, I realized that I would be willing to put on this show in the rubble of the theatre for only one audience member if that's what it came to. I wanted it terribly. The last question became: is it fair to ask others to do the same? After deliberation, I came to believe that it was. I've thought a lot about the director as the leader, and for a while I was thinking that my role in this process was as the leader who calls the retreat. But what I realized the more that I thought about this process was that I could be the leader who rallied his troops to blaze forth, to be Henry V. I realized that, while I couldn't demand the production to happen, I could do my best to encourage them to come along with me, to embolden all those who looked to me for strength and direction (in every sens of that word). Like Henry, I could ask the soldiers to go ahead into the unknown, with full awareness that some may not come along and that that was okay.

In the end, I asked the director of the first one-act of the night if he would be willing to come along with me, to put the shows up for one night only to help us feel a sense of completion and fulfillment. He agreed, and we sent out an email to our casts and crew. Long story short we performed the shows on Tuesday April 17th for a full house and we received the only encore that I've ever seen in my four years here at the University of Pittsburgh. The audience and the artists were for that one night willfully together in that space, in rebellion against the danger and fear of the bombs. It was everything that I believe the theatre is meant to do.

Admittedly, sitting there watching the show was difficult for me because it wasn't the show I'd dreamed of. Because of all the lost rehearsal time and because of the week of purgatorial stagnation and because of the sense that everyone had that it *still* might not happen[8] the show wasn't what it was meant to be, not what it could've been, not what I had imagined. In scene 15, there was a fire on stage and the audience was forced to evacuate the space for ten minutes. In scene 10, the sound cut out, and we went without for the next two scenes. There were dropped lines and unfinished blocking, and the show clearly needed more time to be polished. It was flawed to say the least.

But, most importantly, it was performed. We gave it to an audience filled only with people who truly wanted to experience these shows with us. The show wasn't perfect, but it was shared! We put it on in the face of confusion and bomb threats and stress and anger and fear. Of that, I am profoundly proud. Like Carl, our tongue and our hands were cut off, and (after a week of fear, depression, and aimlessness) we decided to dance our love because it was what we had to do, and, without having learned the lessons I have about being a director-leader, that would never have happened.

8.2 DESIGNERS AND THE WORD 'MY'

Another big topic of discussion from the defense was my work with designers. I have already written in this text about the missteps I made throughout the process of working with the designers on my production. I've learned that I need to be more specific with the team at the beginning, especially by incorporating more images and sounds and by using less intellectually heavy and heady text. I've also learned that it was

[8] There had been two bomb threats called in on that Tuesday, though neither to the Cathedral.

a mistake to present to the designers in my initial concept that I was willing to cut stage directions that we couldn't find the perfect answer to; the beginning of a process is for possibilities not impossibilities. Ultimately, the simplest way I can think about all of this is to say that I need to more specific, more positive, and more clear-minded with the designers earlier on in the process.

Of course, this process was different with each designer, and I worked more effectively with some than others. With the sound designer (with whom I was most effective I think), I was able to excite him with my discussion about Artaudian immersion and the importance of the visceral impact of sound. From there, his creativity with my direction led to a relatively easy collaboration. With the lighting designer, I again attempted to use the theories of Artaud to excite his imagination, and this certainly worked for some aspects of the design (color and aggressive light in the audience's eyes for example), but I could've been more specific with exactly how I imagined the differences between each "room" outlined in the script. I was never specific or detailed with him about the variance in light quality that I desired in the location changes, and, while he did an exceptional job in the end, I could've been more helpful in the beginning of the process to help expedite his design. With the set designer, I used words instead of images, and this is something I will not do again. Specifically, I used the word monolithic to describe what I wanted from her. In the future, I will pair the two together (words and images), with "monolithic" I could have paired an image that speaks to my personal, visual definition of the word (which probably would've been a kind of Robert Wilson inspired abstract aesthetic). I've spoken a bit about the costume designer, but the last thing I'd like to say about my work with her is that I was never positive enough. I

spent much more time telling her what I didn't want than what I did, and I think I stunted our collaboration by doing so. In the future, I will certainly attempt to be more positive and specific with designers. I will also allow for the same kind of flexibility I allow with my actors (to each challenge its own solution), considering the fact that each designer, each artist works in his or her own way.

But the most interesting lesson I learned through thinking about the questions and critiques that came from the defense had not to do specifically with designers but with the use of the word "my." It was mentioned in the defense that sometimes directors use that word inappropriately, as in "my designers" or "my actors," which is something that I use in my rehearsal journal and have used elsewhere. The argument is that this language used prematurely and without the consent or acceptance of the person you're talking about has the potential to undermine the agency and importance of that person, which is something I argue directly against in this thesis. So by calling a designer I've worked with once "my designer," I could be offending a person who I haven't quite earned that title with yet. There needs to be a process of growth together, of consent and true collaboration before that kind of language can be used properly, but, while I don't feel I earned that word with all of my designers, I will say that I do feel I did earn this language with my cast of actors in this production.

I truly feel that I did earn the trust and respect of almost if not all of my actors on this show. I believe that I did earn the "my." We earned this together, in fact, through a process of collaboration and dedication to the project. I think that by allowing my actors a sense of agency over their blocking and their part in the show, by always taking their thoughts and feelings into consideration, by stressing the safety of the rehearsal room and

the importance of community I gained an atmosphere in which we were each our own. I think the fact that each of my actors showed up to perform the show after its cancellation and under the danger continuing bomb threats speaks to this, and I think that each of them would've been proud to be called my actor as I would be proud to be called their director. This was never meant to mean that these actors were doing their work solely for me but rather that our work together was always based on a true foundation of trust, respect, and collaboration, which we forged together and leaned on throughout a tumultuous process. This process and the hard decisions I made throughout it would never have happened without a cast of actors that I was eventually able to call mine and to whom I was willing to give my full self.

8.3 REVISITING MY HYPOTHESIS

I started this exploration nearly twelve months ago, and eight months ago I settled on my hypothesis: that acts of violence on stage can act as one possible catalyst that brings actors and audiences together. I truly believe that my production of *Cleansed* and its situation within the University of Pittsburgh bomb threats are a testament to this utopian belief. When I defended the thesis (a few days before we performed and a day before I knew we would perform), I concluded that the community my actors were forced to create to defend themselves from the demands of the terrifying script that is Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* was the proof of my hypothesis. That the violence of the script forced my actors to commune or drown was a testament to the power of violence to unite. But after we performed the show I have an even clearer view of how my hypothesis was correct. On Tuesday, we put on *Cleansed* with our partner production *WASP* for a full house. As I've said, we received a standing ovation and an encore, which admittedly was

more for our courage as artists than for the artistry itself. The audience was aware of what we had gone through due to the bomb threats because many of them had dealt with similar situations, and they showed up to support us through that difficulty. From what I could tell in talking to a few audience members afterwards, they too understood the resonance between what the play tries to communicate and what we were all dealing with in our real lives, and in the moment of the encore, when the audience demanded that my cast come out to spend just a few more moments with them in that space to applaud their courage to share in this time of fear, I think that my hypothesis was proven true, if only for a moment.

APPENDIX A

CONCEPT OUTLINE GIVEN TO DESIGNERS[9]

Cleansed by Sarah Kane – Concept Outline

Director: Jordan Matthew Walsh

Asst. Director: Dylan Meyers

Stage Manager: Zoe Benditt

"Furthermore, when we speak the word 'life', it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from the surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating center which forms never reach. And if there is one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, when instead we should become as victims burning at the stake, signaling each other through the flames."

- **Antonin Artaud**

Monoliths

When I read this script, the most memorable and striking facet of it is the inclusion of impossibly difficult stage images of violence, sex, and fantasy, and I imagine that all of you have experienced the same thing reading Kane's work. Dismemberment, explicit sexuality, and flowers bursting through the stage are just a few examples of the confounding images demanded by this script. As we all embark on this journey, which is sure to be a difficult and challenging one, I have a few words to say about the nature of these images.

In my opinion, all of these things from violence to sex to sunflowers are placed in this script to evoke huge, monolithic forces in human life. The rats represent disease, death, decay, and fear. The sunflowers stand for growth, life, beauty, and love. And so

[9] This was given to designers at our first design meeting in early January.

on through the script. I think that the forces that each of these images represent are fairly obvious and surface level, but I mention them for an important reason. I am of the opinion that if in *our* representations of these things in this production for Pitt cannot elicit the kind of response that these monoliths are meant to then we fail. If our interpretation of the rats does not evoke that squirming, disgusted horror in the audience, if they don't feel the powers of disease and decay in a powerful and visceral way, then our interpretation is ineffective and, therefore, I won't put it on stage.

This may seem like a simple thing to say, but I wanted to make it quite clear to all of you that a) I am willing to cut some of the more impenetrable stage directions if we can't find the right impact and b) I am more interested in implementing the visceral impact of these images than a mimetic or cogent representation. To be plain, I would rather use just the screeching sounds of the rats and forego their physical presence onstage if that is our best chance at forcing the audience to experience the true impact of those vile creatures (i.e. disease, decay, and so on).

Tone and the Audience

I am a burgeoning disciple of the work and writings of Antonin Artaud, and I want some of his philosophy to be at play in our production. To give you a brief overview, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is an attempt to give back to the theatre a dormant power, which Artaud felt had been lost somewhere along the way. A power found in ancient rituals, a power to propel an audience into the streets to tear down the structures our very civilization. He talks of theatre inciting riots and unlocking a primal and (for him) visceral humanity. He also talks of the audience/performer relationship as an

antagonistic one, a battle of sorts. His goal was to coax from the audience that latent power lost long ago.

This is all hyperbole to be sure, but I agree with him on a lot of points. From him, what I want you to take away is this idea of provoking the audience, pulling from their souls that dormant power. I want us all to think of ways to involve the audience in the show through design choices, staging choices, and so on. Don't take these as suggestions but rather examples; I imagine deafening sounds in the script coming from speakers under the audience seating banks, I see blinding lights harsh in the audience's eyes, and I see the Voice ensemble slithering and creeping through the spectators. Ultimately, without compromising our basic goal to tell the story that Kane wrote, I want to defy the idea that the performance is onstage and the audience gets to sit in the dark, blameless and without a stake in the action, and I believe that with this text that is very possible.

Kane's work does this; when you read the play, images of dismemberment are horrifying, rats eating body parts give that gut wrenching terror, and scenes of love and flowers are amazingly invigorating. I want us all to think of investing in these images this idea of provoking the audience. These images achieve this in the text; we need to achieve the same on stage. This does not mean that we need to augment their impact; we just need to achieve the holistic sensory experience demanded by the script.

I want audience to feel what the characters in the play feel, to be roused by our production, and I think that by overturning the preconceptions about what to expect when walking into a theatre space we can begin to get at this goal. In my work, I will be attempting to use the depictions of sex and violence to get at this goal, but I think that

your work can also move towards it as well. This philosophy is meant to break the pacifying theatre tradition of the audience sitting in the dark, distanced from the action, and therefore innocent. This play allows no character the privilege of innocence. I don't think the audience should be exempt either.

Opposites

"Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. Love burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame." –Song of Songs

"Love me or kill me, Graham." - Cleansed

The most powerful battle in this script, in my opinion, is the one between love and violence, and I think that we all need to keep this dichotomy in mind as we progress through this process. In *Cleansed*, we see the loving relationships of the "inmates" tested by Tinker's viciousness and the unforgiving power of his violence, and, for me, the winner in this epic battle is love. That is my most basic understanding of the script: that love, that simple and pure human bond, can survive anything. For me, this play is uplifting, hopeful, and optimistic in its own horrifying and jarring way, and that is what I want to express in our production.

So for us, what I want to get at is the difference between these two human experiences. For me, violence is garish, bright, loud, and overt. True love is simple, subtle, and small. I want the difference in experience to be felt very obviously in the audience. I want the audience to feel in their ears, eyes, and mind the differences between these forces. In violence, I hope that they feel tense and their palms begin to

sweat. In love, I want them to lean forward, to yearn for more. And so on. But, this is not to say that these two forces never bleed into one another. In fact, in this strange specific world, many of these characters are forced to endure and accept acts of violence in pursuit of that love. In the "university," unlike in life, one must pass through the most terrible violence to obtain that most powerful love. I believe the audience should experience a similar phenomenon.

APPENDIX B

CAST AND CREW OF PITTREP'S *CLEANSED*

PRODUCTION & MANAGEMENT

Production Manager Susie Brant
Stage Manager Zoe Benditt
Asst. Stage Manager Jenna Simmons
Tech Director Erin Collopy
Asst. Tech Director Nikki Fisher

DIRECTION & DESIGN

Director Jordan Matthew Walsh
Assistant Director Dylan Meyers
Costume Designer Alexa Smith
Lighting Designer Dave Bisaha
Props Designer Sarah Ivins
Set Designer Amanda Leslie
Sound Designer Andrew Sours

CAST

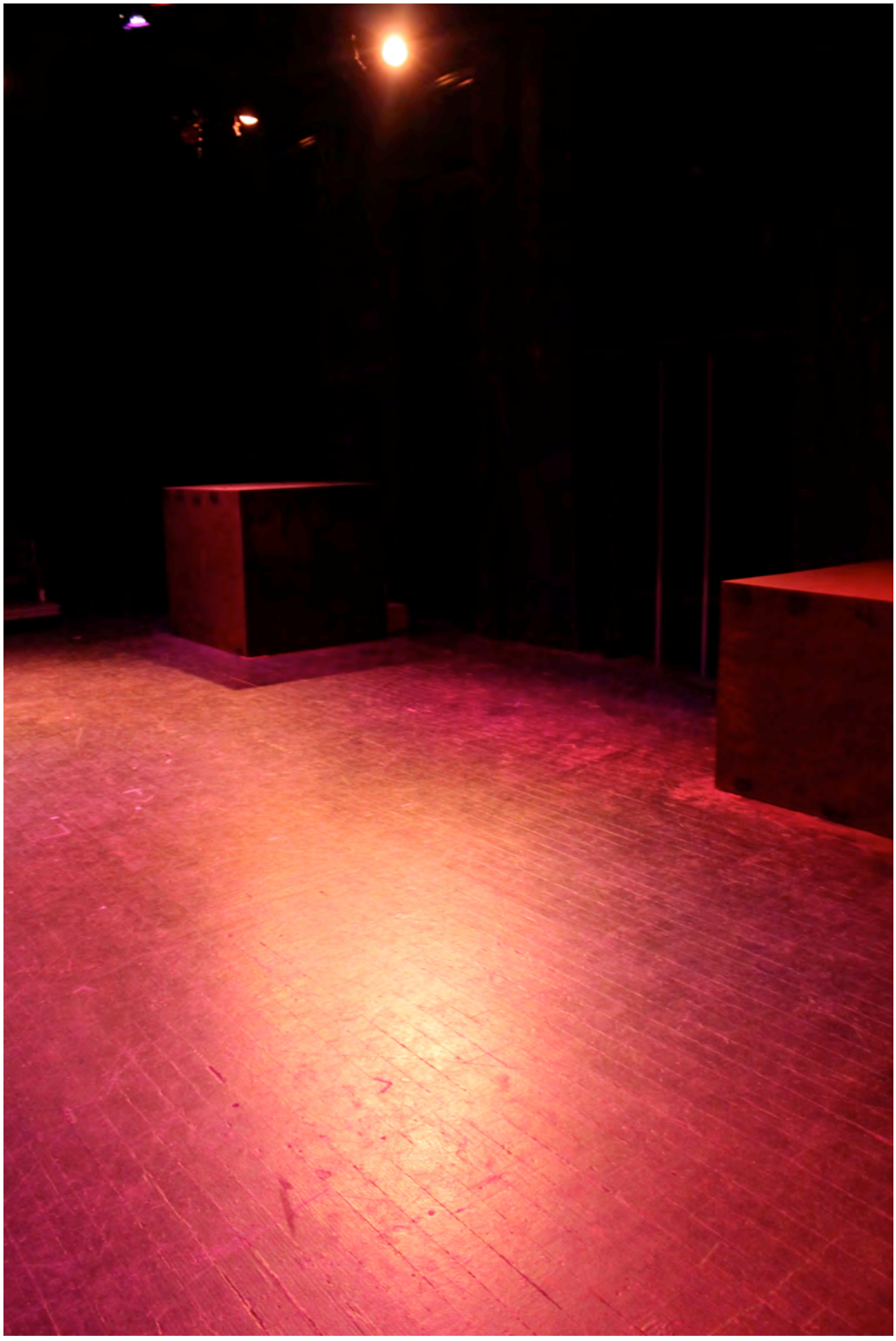
Graham Kyle Bogue
Tinker Kellen Hoxworth
Carl Matt Russak
Rod Connor Pickett
Grace Nina Starner
Robin Ben Coppola
Woman Moira Quigley
Voice Melissa Italiano
Voice Mike Magliocca
Voice Chelsea McCune
Voice Ayse Uneri
Voice Shane Jordan
Voice Jackie Saporito

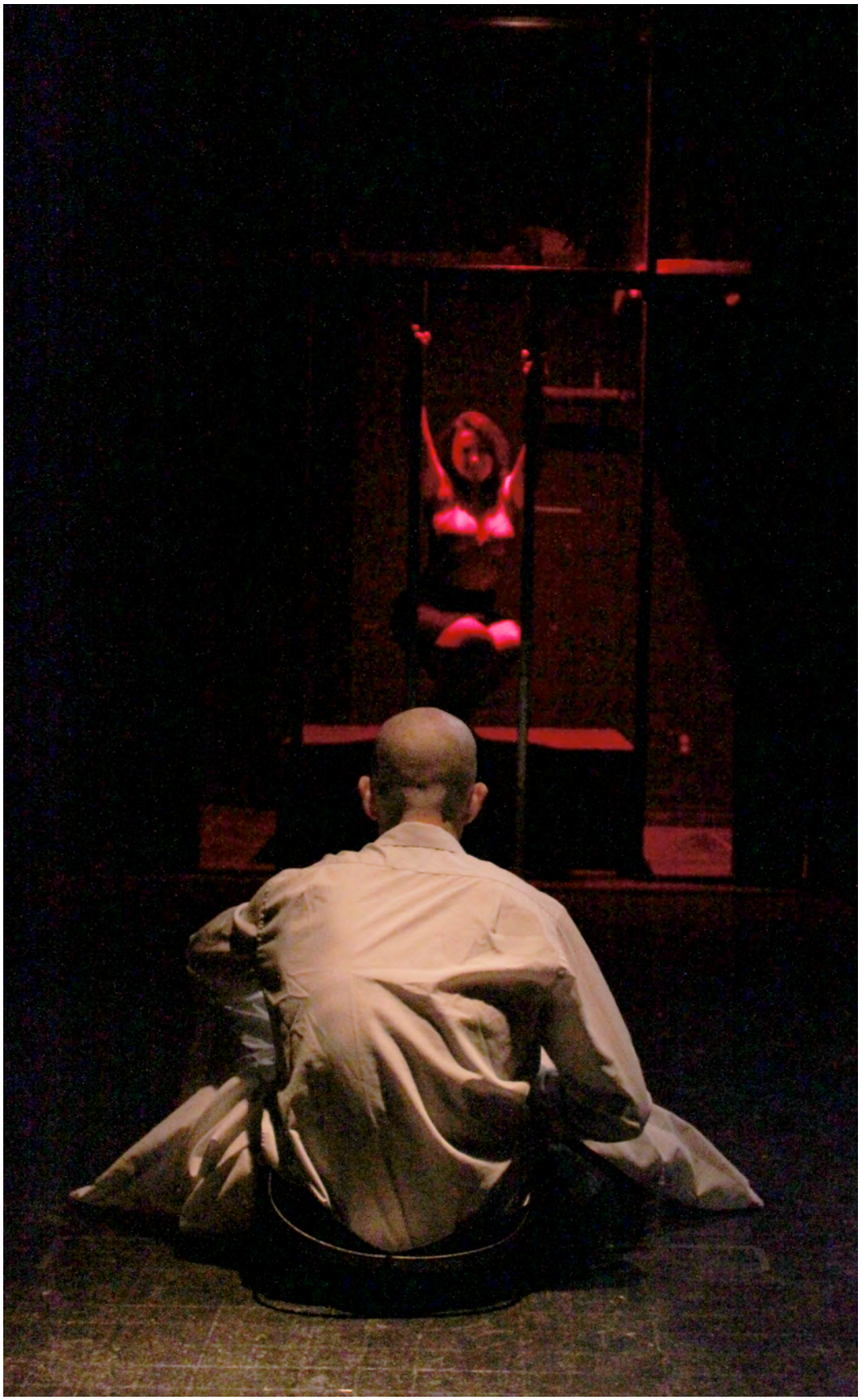
CREW

Run Crew Brittany Coyne
Light Board Operator JC Bardzil
Sound Board Operator Andrew Sours

APPENDIX C

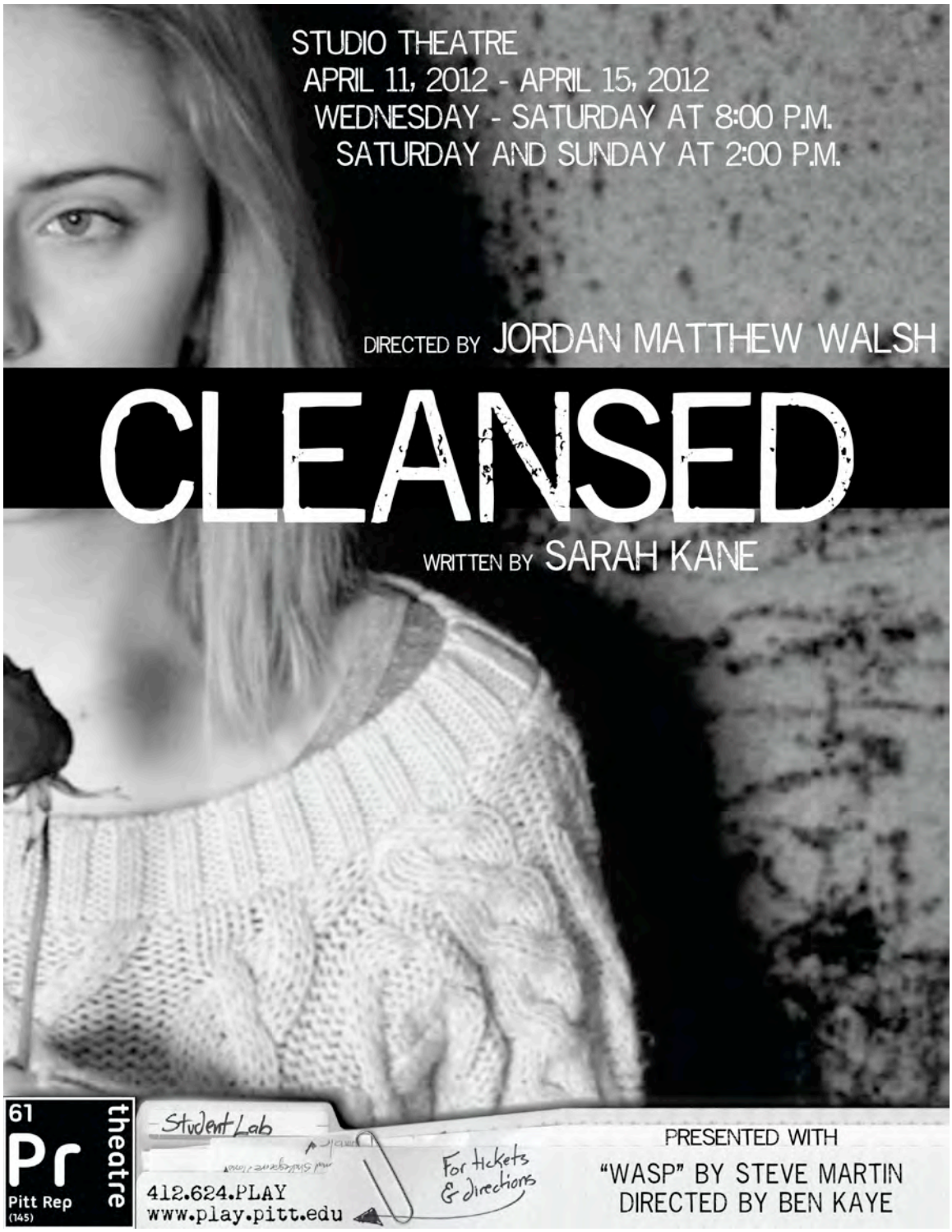
PRODUCTION PHOTOS





APPENDIX D

PRODUCTION POSTER



APPENDIX E

PRODUCTION BLOG

The production blog can be found at:

http://cleansedpittrep.wordpress.com/

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