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How to Mourn: Kane, Pinter and Theatre as Monument to Loss in the 1990s

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The 1990s and an aestheticization of authenticity

To that generation of people entering early adulthood at the turn of decade from the 1980s to the 1990s, there was a palpable sense of change in the world, a sense that decades of atrophying cold war was thawing around them, and that the political paradigms of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s – and by consequence the cultural paradigms that had been sustained by or in opposition to these – might give way to exciting new opportunities. If we were to identify a key event that participated in generating this sense of renewal, then we might first consider the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, an act that resonated on the plane of symbolic value across Europe. The face of this change was often brutal, with, for example, images of the executed bodies of Romanian tyrant Nicolae Ceauşescu and his wife Elena presented in news bulletins on Christmas Day 1989. Nelson Mandela's release in February 1990 continued the momentum of this sense of a new era, partially later manifested in British politics by the resignation of Margaret Thatcher in November 1990.

In October 1990, a few weeks before Thatcher's reluctant withdrawal from politics, something of a television phenomenon began in the UK, with the broadcast on BBC2 of David Lynch and Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks*. The airing of the first programme on 23 October attracted 8.15 million viewers, a historical high for a BBC2 Tuesday evening 9pm slot. The drama series, infused with surreal narrative strategies and imagery, applied and redesigned tropes of horror and detective genres within a predominantly aesthetically-motivated frame. If there was something of a cultural threshold forming in the UK, then the impact of this US show participated in that renewal from the platform of its own medium. One of the primary images from *Twin Peaks* was of the corpse of Laura Palmer, wrapped in plastic, recovered from a river. This, along with grim forensic scenes such as the removal of evidence from beneath fingernails, was a first manifestation of a concern in popular television to represent death with regard to its social impact and the representation of the corpse: prolonged attention to the affects of mourning within a family and community of friends had never before received such screen time in popular entertainment. Certainly, the show stands to be accused of aestheticising these issues as its ethical motor was much more monochrome than its aesthetic ambitions. Nonetheless, a corpse became a central character of sorts in the manner in which, by deliberate juxtaposition, the family portrait of Laura Palmer would form the sole imagery of (most of) the programme's end credit sequences. UK television series such as *Prime Suspect* (1991-2006) and *Cracker* (1993-1995) made this attitude to death, and the bodily

'testimony' of the corpse, a fundamental aspect of their syntax of expression, and as such issues of authentic representation of death and its impact upon the living became part of the fabric of popular programming in the 1990s. A relationship was thereby established between the ambition of entertainment (and attracting audiences), and the ethical resonances of death and mourning. Against such contexts, this article sets out to examine how Sarah Kane sought to wield the potential of live performance to address tensions in representations of trauma and death, and to reflect on how she might have exerted an influence on Harold Pinter's concern for cognate issues. In doing so, it considers the axis between impact and affect on the one hand, and entertainment on the other, and the place of ethical judgement in relation to such issues .

On 15 May 1991, Steve Lamacq, a journalist for the *New Musical Express*, went to Norwich to interview a relatively new band with as yet no album contract, The Manic Street Preachers. Part of the soundscape of Kane's early twenties, she later added the job of 'a roadie' for this band to the fictional biography of her pseudonym Marie Kelvedon, to whom she attributed her play *Crave* in 1997 (Kane, 1998, v). Once the interview was over, guitarist Richey Edwards invited Lamacq backstage and sought to demonstrate that he and his band had integrity by carving the characters '4REAL' into his forearm with a razor blade. As an abridged statement of authenticity, this piece of writing was subsequently lauded by admirers of the band's work as a prime example of just what it purported to be: an ultimate statement of integrity mapped onto the band's claimed aesthetic objectives. Notably, it is the first public instance of an act of self harm being equated, in contemporary popular culture, with integrity and authentic expression. This event participated in something of a codification of self harm and the troubled mind in 1990s British culture as a stamp of individuality, of an anti-establishment stance, and as an index of genuine experience that would find articulation in the plays of Sarah Kane and qualify the celebrity of artists such as Sinéad O'Connor and Tracey Emin, and later Pete Doherty and Amy Winehouse. Recognition of the personal tragic flaw as an emblem of authenticity and integrity became part of the understanding that bound admirers to some cultural figures, and this was sealed significantly by, for example, the suicide of Kurt Cobain in April 1994 and the disappearance of Richey Edwards in February 1995.[1] This discourse, though, further troubles the boundaries (established by new paradigms of representations of death and mourning) between authentic experience, its representation and its (adopted or encoded) value as cultural currency for the attraction of a public.

Cutting skin and perforating the body was not new in art, of course, though they were to become a common element of the syntax of body art and extreme performance art in the 1990s, with artists such as Franko B, Ron Athey and Orlan applying it specifically to offer audiences challenging experiences that might speak to issues of gender construction, sexuality and identity

formation more generally. International artists such as these were championed by a growing industry of performance art in the UK in that decade, which found itself embraced and adopted by the academy, as universities and new 'post-92' universities, especially, founded and developed arts centres in tandem with employing performers in roles as tutors and facilitators for students. While the growing prominence of body and performance art that involved forms of blood-letting contribute to a general shift in the aesthetic vocabulary of the decade to incorporate the corporeal and its experience in suffering, they (mostly) stand apart from acts of deliberate self harm as a frustrated form of self-expression which might subsequently inform or be incorporated into aesthetic objects such as Emin's *My Bed* (1999) or Kane's *4:48 Psychosis* (2000). A concern to explore human experience through a focus on the vulnerabilities of the body was to become a central motif in much 1990s theatre and performance. Mark Ravenhill declared that 'the highest form of reality is found in physical pain' (qtd. in Tabert and Carr, 1998, 71; my translation) and one might consider new theatrical work such as his and Kane's as representing a challenge to the poststructuralist de-materialisation of bodily experience into textual fragments, taking place within a British cultural shift towards a new concern for the 'authentic' as located and manifested precisely within bodily experience.[2]

Retentissment and divertissement: war, the media and *Blasted*

Before considering how Kane addressed representations of atrocity and the boundaries between the experience and the appeal(s) of the authentic, one further context that informed the cultural environment of her years as a maturing artist might be considered. The growing political crisis in the Persian Gulf in 1990 developed into a significant socio-political event in early 1991, which would put something of a halt to any optimistic perspective arising from an awareness of an environment of political renewal. On 4 January 1991, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, Jean Baudrillard published an article, 'La Guerre du Golfe n'aura pas eu lieu' ('The Gulf War will not take place'),[3] in the French national newspaper *Libération*. Paul Patton's 1995 translation of the article's title simplifies the future perfect tense (will not have taken place) to a straightforward future tense (will not take place), perhaps in recognition of the retrospective position of the translated text to the 'future' war, or simply to apply a less complicated construction. This now commonly accepted English title to Baudrillard's first Gulf War essay unfortunately misrepresents the intended irony of projecting forward to the media and political representations of an event yet to occur. Baudrillard's choice of title for his article, though, might not just have been a cynical statement of challenge against the seemingly inevitable, but must also have been a deliberate

reference to Jean Giraudoux's 1935 play *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*. This reference would have been made in part so that Baudrillard might ally himself with Giraudoux's pacifist objectives in locating an argument against war within an iconic piece of European narrative that concludes – as is well known – in a decade of war. In part, also, he must have wished to mobilise the theatricalisation of message. In Giraudoux's play, a peace treaty brokered by Hector with Ulysse is rendered unworkable by the misrepresentation of the poet Demokos who, slain by Hector, claims he dies at Greek hands. The wielding of dissimulation as a diplomatic stratagem, and the elevation of symbolic value over lived experience as a crucial aspect of diplomatic discourse, must have had obvious attraction to Baudrillard:

> We are all hostages of media intoxication, induced to believe in the war [...] and confined to the simulacrum of war as though confined to quarters. We are already all strategic hostages in situ; our site is the screen on which we are virtually bombarded day by day, even while serving as exchange value. (Baudrillard, 25)

Baudrillard might be accused of rendering the 'Western' viewer as victim here, ironically bypassing the prioritised access to human suffering he wishes to indicate is deliberately circumvented in the construction of ideological artefacts for us to consume. Nonetheless, his argument that our cultural discourses had been invaded by managed representation that controlled and designed our sense of access to real events was to inform a growing reliance on irony and cynicism in the kinds of cultural activities I address in this chapter.

The US-led aerial bombardment of Iraq began a fortnight after *Libération* published Baudrillard's first Gulf War article, and the ground campaign lasted from 23 to 28 February 1991. While our popular cultural vocabulary was demonstrably shifting to find space for the contemplation of death, murder, incest and discourses of authenticity in relation to the representation of such realities via bodily reality and pain, the reporting that surrounded the Gulf War, by contrast, managed to displace any access to the authentic articulation of the experience of the victims of war. Oxymorons such as 'clean war' or 'friendly fire' became ready components of the reporting of the events in the Gulf, embellished by video-game-like footage of cross-hair accurate destruction of non-civilian military targets, employing the visual vocabulary of entertainment forms to inform news viewers of military successes. The 'cosmetically treated spectre of death, and its even more deceptive televisual subterfuge' (Baudrillard, 28) in our daily consumption of the Gulf War acted as a cynical oppositional correlative to a growing cultural vocabulary of frankness, authenticity and an embrace of the interface between suffering and identity, whilst also fuelling that vocabulary. This accelerated and exacerbated an antagonistic relationship between media and aesthetic/artistic representation of material with ethical

implications, an oppositional condition that could only be augmented and further nuanced by the onset of the Bosnian War in April 1992.

Sarah Kane was studying drama at the University of Bristol during the decade shift. She had begun as a fresher there a couple of months before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the release of Mandela. During her second year, Margaret Thatcher resigned and the Gulf War exploded at the time of her twentieth birthday. She graduated with a first class honours in the summer of 1992, before immediately going on to an MA course in playwriting at the University of Birmingham over the 1992/93 academic year. Kane wrote what was to become the first two scenes of *Blasted* as part of her final presentation towards her MA in 1993, and these were first performed on 3 June that year as part of a weekend series of workshopped rehearsed readings of her cohort's output. These scenes were being drafted and compiled, then, during a period when the daily newspapers and television news bulletins were populated with an unending series of images and information about the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, especially the sieges of Srebrenica (1992-93) and Sarajevo (1992-95). Kane herself testified to how her consciousness of the events of the war in Bosnia informed the early drafts of *Blasted*:

> At some point during the first couple of weeks of writing I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. An old woman was looking into the camera, crying. She said, 'Please, please, somebody help us. Somebody do something.' I knew nobody was going to do a thing. (Sierz, 100-1)

Her first impulse, she recalled, was to jettison the scene in a hotel room she had written between Cate and Ian, a scene in which a terminally ill middle-aged man abuses and rapes a naive, much younger, former girlfriend – 'do I abandon my play [...] in order to move on to a subject I thought was more pressing?' (Sierz, 101), she asked herself. A moral concern arising from an emotional connection with a woman's plight 900 miles away temporarily interrupted her artistic impulses. Instead of rejecting what she had written to focus on what she felt was more compelling material, she came to the position that the two issues were conjoined morally, and so connected two pieces of writing with an explosion in that hotel room, bringing war and metaphor brutally, suddenly and confusingly into a previously naturalistic theatrical discourse.

Aleks Sierz argues that Kane made an association between Ian's racist attitudes and sexual violence and the war in Bosnia, which she articulated as 'one is the seed and one is the tree' (Sierz, 101), and that this represents a straightforward rationalisation of her position as a writer. The logic here is important in considering the dramatic representation of atrocity and the experience it offers an audience, but while the seed/tree analogy offers insight into Kane's desire to structure an ethical response, it does not clarify how that might operate theatrically. Whilst issues of authenticity and realism have of course always contributed to concerns about making art, the 1990s generation of

writers of British theatre, including Kane, arguably addressed the issue from an experience inflected by an extended period of awareness of media representations of atrocity.

Kane addresses the media directly in *Blasted* by having her seemingly irredeemable character Ian work as a freelance tabloid hack, with two sequences in the first and second half of the play acting as something of a bridge between the play's two halves. Within fifteen minutes of the play's start, Ian answers the hotel room phone to dictate his copy for a story about the murder of a local teenage girl, one of a number of victims of a serial killer in New Zealand. His necessary utterance of the punctuation and paragraph sections causes an estrangement of the text as heard, emphasising its content and foregrounding its intended status as a textual item divorced from the actuality it represents. Ian embellishes the basic story with an unnecessary description of the victim as 'a beautiful redhead with dreams of becoming a model' (12) which exemplifies the discourses of tabloid newspapers that regularly promote and trade off a sexualised representation of young women, whilst simultaneously (and seemingly unproblematically) adopting a stern moralistic angle on crime informed by that same take on gender. Such tabloid outrage was also directed at those (including, of course, Kane herself) who would address such attitudes by representing the violent or socially irresponsible outcomes of discourses of sexualised youth.[4] In the second half of the play, upon learning that Ian is a journalist, the soldier appeals to him to testify to his existence, and thereby his experience as both a victim and a perpetrator of atrocity – 'Tell them you saw me' (48), he instructs Ian (paraphrasing Vladimir to the boy in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*), maintaining that a journalist's job is 'Proving it happened' (47). Ian, though, offers a different definition of a journalist's duty, one that first suggests the distancing from reality of fictionalised accounts – 'I write...stories' – and then clarifies that a story has to be 'personal', indicating that there needs to be a distinct form of appeal (for readers) to a story for it to be newsworthy. And yet the list of examples he offers matches precisely the list of crimes the soldier has confessed to – 'Shootings and rapes and kids getting fiddled' (48).

The play would remain recognisable if Ian's background as a journalist was removed. There is even something mildly contrived about this aspect of his character; his answering the phone in the first scene is at odds with his objective to isolate and protect himself from perceived threat, and the role of a journalist as a passive commentator contrasts with the active interventionist role as 'soldier' he purports to maintain for some unnamed, nationalistic organisation. But Kane's decision to mark him thus is central to a theme she wants to address at the core of her contemplation of atrocity. She is concerned not just that atrocity happens and – as with her response to the woman in Srebrenica –that it happens with a lack of appropriate response to hinder its promulgation, but that the manner in which it is mediated for us fails fully to either address or communicate the horror of

such experience. Moreover, war and atrocity are often mediated in such a way that leaves little room for moral ambivalence, through representations that might effectively be driven by ideological discourses that are rendered invisible, subsumed into the means of representation. There is a concern, then, in *Blasted* to provide a theatrical experience that might elicit an ethical empathic response in its audience, without directing or governing that ethical response. Kane's ambition in rendering her response to the Bosnian War into artistic material, then, meets the demand Baudrillard set himself in defence of his Gulf War writings: 'it is not a question of being for or against the war. It is a question of being for or against *the reality of war*' (Baudrillard, 9; emphasis original).

In contemplating the realities of war in her play, Kane constructs a theatrical aesthetic similar to that of Edward Bond, who sought to rend sunder a spectator's ideological positions through initiating a process of self-interrogation and promoting creative, imaginative thought processes. She extends this aesthetic, going beyond the use of Bondian 'aggro-affects' which might seek 'to make the audience question what they normally accept' (Bond, 32) by implicating spectators into making an emotional, judgemental response on violence as symptomatic of societal failure, instead piling on 'aggro-affects' in such number and speed that an audience must defer judgement and experience their immediate, visceral responses to the images and testimonies of atrocity. Graham Saunders suggests that Kane sought to craft the sort of immediate experience a spectator at a football match or a Jesus and Mary Chain concert might enjoy (Saunders, 15 and 17) and quotes the *Guardian* interview where she argued that 'performance is visceral. It puts you in direct physical contact with thought and feeling' (15).

This ambition of theatre's 'direct physical contact' with its audience is clearly reminiscent of the Artaudian objective of activating a 'retentissement' (resonance, reverberation) in an audience. Now, the coupling of Kane's achievements with Antonin Artaud's aspirations is all too often predicated upon the usual misunderstandings of his concept of a 'theatre of cruelty' being fundamentally about bombarding an audience with horrific images, sounds and scenarios. Artaud was nonetheless clear that his 'cruelty' was a demand placed on both artist and audience as a means of transforming both, through their co-corporeal experience of theatre. He argued that art commonly 'deprived a gesture of its resonance inside the organism' but that through concentrated theatrical strategies (including horror) the resonance of the gesture could oblige the organism – the body of the spectator – 'to adopt attitudes in harmony with that gesture' (Artaud, 125; my translation).[5]

In direct opposition to Artaud's 'retentissement' we might place 'divertissement' – which translates as 'entertainment', but also as 'distraction', diversion away from something – as a common ambition of commercial theatre. Of course, maintaining an opposition between an

ambition to entertain or have some other impact is common in drawing distinctions between or within forms of art, but Artaud's argument for art that imposes or offers a 'retentissement', a physically transformative power, is distinct from, for example, the argument that art might be socially relevant. Notably, a concept of communication that might transform its recipient is also precisely that which Kane activates in the conversation between the soldier and Ian in their discussion on the function of journalism. Here, she employs an argument of accessing authentic experience ('Proving it happened') as correlated to achieving a 'retentissement' in the recipient of a news item, rendering consumers of news as witness to that experience rather than simply consumers of it. This is in contrast with the 'divertissement' of Ian's approach, which equates journalism with entertainment, diverting those who consume it from actual experience by subsuming that experience within attractive, digestible narrative.

By way of partial example, consider the reporting of the deaths of Admira Ismić and Boško Brkić, a young couple who were both shot dead upon crossing a bridge in a 'no man's land' area between military factions in Sarajevo on 19 May 1993. The two, both twenty-five years of age, were of different ethnic origins, as was not untypical of young Sarajevan couples – one a Bosnian Serb and the other a Bosniak.[6] Brkić received a mortal shot to the head, while his girlfriend Ismić did not die immediately but remained alive for a quarter of an hour after being shot, embracing Brkić's dead body as life left her own. The image of their intertwined corpses spread across the international news media and was cast as something of a symbol for the fracturing of Yugoslavian society. In 1994, their plight became the subject of a documentary entitled *Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo*, written and directed by John Zaritsky, in which the image of their bodies and the course of events that led to their deaths was described as 'one picture and one story that seemed for a moment to break through the fatigue of horror' (Zaritsky). That statement acknowledges a condition of assumed weariness in news recipients with the persistent stream of disturbing information from the former Yugoslavia, and with the manner in which this one story and its associated key image could serve as a syphon for understanding the conflict. Here we have an example of how 'the personal' is used as a catalyst for conveying news, folded into a ready-made tragic narrative available to all. While well-meaningly conveying a detail of the everyday brutality of the siege of Sarajevo, the reductive formula it articulates and encourages fails to activate a full communication of the horror of such deaths; rather, it diverts the pathos from that event towards a broader notion of loss, and though this does not amount to the 'divertissement' (entertainment) of the titillation Ian promotes in his journalism, it does manifest the 'divertissement' (distraction) of news media strategies that seek to reduce real experience in ways that make it communicable through recognisable tropes.

Blasted, then, might be seen not just to be condemning the failures and weaknesses of news reporting of human tragedies such as the Bosnian War, but seeking to fulfil the role of communicating a horror that the media does not or cannot convey, or simply elides through finding narrative conduits for the material that, in effect, direct and replace our responses. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra considers how art can offer 'a discursive analogue of mourning':

> empathy should rather be understood in terms of an affective relation, rapport or bond with the other recognized and respected as other. It may be further related to the affirmation of otherness within the self – otherness that is not purely and discretely other. This affirmation applies to the imbrication of the past in the present as well as to one's interaction with particular others, including the dead, who may exert possessive force in the present and require modes of understanding which combine cognition and critical analysis with more complex responses, including, when appropriate, a discursive analogue of mourning as a mode of working through a relation to historical losses. (212-13)

Kane's achievement with *Blasted* can be considered as something of a cultural monument which might activate such a mode of mourning in its audience, one divorced from any immediate object of mourning and thereby avoiding the sentimental. Her drama seeks to erase the alterity of the real and the simulated, through the visceral experience of being immersed in the play; her 'aggro-affects' do not jolt us into immediate introspection, but their accumulation cause us to lose any anchor in social referentiality whilst subject to them. As such, the play inspires our sorrow, without facilitating the attachment of that sorrow to any object outside ourselves. Even our pity for the characters is steadily troubled, and the play deliberately frustrates any sense that the war referred to belongs in the real world that we know and shall return to. Similarly, the play incites moral outrage, but activates ethical double binds in which empathy and revulsion are entangled – both Ian and the soldier merit our disgust, but also incite our sympathy. Certainly, after the performance we can begin to examine the emotional rubble and construct ideological responses to what we have experienced that do very much belong in the real world, in terms of gender or global issues of social fragility in the face of conflict, but the in-theatre experience itself is an aesthetic, experiential monument to mourning, an implacable stripping of any culturally sustained denial that such suffering and trauma happens, is wrought by humans upon humans, and is ironically held at arms' length from ethical consciousness by the very means of reporting it.

The word 'monument' is applied to the play here with reference to Andreas Huyssen's writing on cultural memory and amnesia, and the tension between a monument as a trigger to cultural memory or as a physical testimony to forgetting. In a culture in which access to objective truth about atrocities that we ourselves do not experience is impossible, and where we risk being trapped and defined by the implications of hyperreal events and reductively narrativised media

representations, a natural gravitation towards irony and cynicism as the syntax of aesthetic commentary or representation is irrepressible. Kane avoids this by not attempting to address any objective truth of a real-world event. She instead presents the material quality of an object, a monument, through visceral experience – we become the testimony itself, 'a substitute site of mourning and remembrance' (Huyssen 258) through the potent resonance of the imagery she employs. Huyssen's writing about the failure and potential value of monuments as a medium of remembrance and proliferation of knowledge centred predominantly on the Holocaust. He articulated his concern over the growth and proliferation of a Holocaust trope in the 1980s and early 1990s as a cultural tendency which contaminated and extended reference to the Holocaust beyond its original reference point, so that 'the original trauma is often reenacted and exploited in literary and cinematic representations in ways that can also be deeply offensive' (256).

Ashes to Ashes and theatre as monument to loss

Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*, written and first performed in 1996, can be considered in many ways as a direct response to Kane's play, and concerns itself with the cultural saturation of Holocaust tropes in the mid-1990s and the managed distance between a comfortable middle-class British existence and the reality of atrocity. The character of Rebecca repeatedly recounts memories of children being taken out of the arms of mothers on railway stations, of factories of obedient but poorly treated workers and of refugees being herded into the sea to drown. In my article 'What Remains? *Ashes to Ashes*, Popular Culture, Memory and Atrocity' (2009), I discuss how Pinter here mobilises examples of arguably contentious representations of the Holocaust, such as *Sophie's Choice* (Alan Pakula, 1982) or *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), in order to suggest that cultural memory is absorbed, internalised and personalised by various routes, including populist art. In this way, Pinter makes Rebecca something of a monument to the Holocaust in the manner in which I above argue that an audience is transformed through their experience of *Blasted*'s deployment of 'retentissement' to collapse 'divertissement'. However, in representing aspects of the Holocaust in his play, Pinter activates a moral enquiry into whether one has the right to discuss or represent atrocities. In this way, *Ashes to Ashes* might be viewed as positioned in direct dialogue with Kane's play and extending its vocabulary to embrace and address the quandary of artistic representations of the Holocaust. Pinter was certainly aware of and engaged with *Blasted* in 1995, and he championed and corresponded with Kane from then until the end of her life. In a public statement in support of the play, he defended it as a play that confronted 'something actual and true and ugly and painful' and contrasted its horror with that of Quentin Tarantino's 'truly demeaning'

and ‘just for fun’ cinematic brutality which he argued ‘undermines the spirit and the intelligence’ (Sexton), thereby activating the kind of ‘retentissement’/’divertissement’ opposition argued for here above. Elsewhere in this volume, Hanna Scolnicov clarifies how Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes* ‘deals with the ethical burden of memory, of bearing witness, of living with the haunting memory’ of the Holocaust which ‘continues to be with us, infecting our ethical thinking, intervening in our most intimate relationships, in our everyday thoughts and actions’ (p. ?) I seek here to extend her attention to the cultural ubiquity of the Holocaust, and consider how Pinter teases out the seemingly inherent conflict between representation and commentary within aesthetic treatment of acts of atrocity.

Ashes to Ashes is a play with just two characters, husband and wife, engaged in a lengthy and difficult discussion that incorporates remembrances of instances of atrocity. During his interrogation of his wife, Devlin, a university professor who insists rigidly on the attainability of and respect for objective truth,[7] demands that Rebecca disassociate herself from the horrors she claims to recall:

> **Devlin** A little while ago you made…shall we say…you made a somewhat oblique reference to your bloke…your lover?...and babies and mothers, etc. And platforms. I inferred from this that you were talking about some kind of atrocity. Now let me ask you this. What authority do you think you yourself possess which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?
> **Rebecca** I have no such authority. Nothing has ever happened to me. Nothing ever happened to any of my friends. I have never suffered. Nor have my friends. (Pinter, 1998, 413)

Pinter is addressing both the ethics of representation, as foregrounded by Kane, and also the cultural processes by which memories of human abomination are necessarily kept alive – if Rebecca has not experienced the things she recounts, where do her recollections originate? Devlin’s question is pointed and deliberate, and one cannot avoid noting that the author must essentially be asking himself the same question, and by extension asking the question of his art. Pinter tackles this via some unambiguous positions. He has Rebecca utterly deny the possibility of her association with the experiences she nevertheless recounts and, as if to nail that point, he offers an extra-dramatic textual note to indicate that his play is taking place in contemporary Britain (or, rather, 1996 at the earliest) by noting ‘Time: Now’ at the head of the published script, immediately after giving the ages of Devlin and Rebecca as ‘in their forties’. The implication is clear; the play’s characters have not experienced the events of the Holocaust that the play nonetheless establishes as being key to Rebecca’s psychological crisis. At the centre of his enquiry about fictionalisation of atrocity, then, Pinter gives his suffering lead character a series of false memories, fictions of atrocity seemingly formed from other cultural narratives of the Holocaust, including popular film.

It is not the fact that the images Rebecca recounts might reflect her memories of certain films that is crucial here; these are not explicit enough to elicit the suspicion of direct referencing from the audience. As she narrates these recollections, though, we may process them through recognition of the tropes activated, and even our own associations with the kinds of films that make use of such tropes. In this way, as Varun Begley states, *Ashes to Ashes* was able to 'critique [its] own conditions of possibility' (17) and address the key concern long articulated by people such as Elie Wiesel, namely, that to represent the Holocaust in art is to risk falsifying the memories of the lost victims of that catastrophic event. Rebecca may serve primarily to acknowledge a broad palette of access to Holocaust discourse via its mediation in film and other cultural forms, and secondarily as a means by which (following Kane) to demonstrate how human-engineered atrocity 'must, impossibly, be "thought" as an event that challenges and denies the assumptions that we can comprehend and interpret experience through language or in any other way' (Grimes, 212). Pinter offers art as a solution to the kind of 'personal' representations of horror that journalistic necessity might often resort to in totemistic place of the kind of direct testimony that the soldier in Kane's *Blasted* craves. He also obliquely extends Kane's critique of the 'personal' in journalism to artistic representations of atrocity – any activation of our recognition of the train platform scene from *Sophie's Choice* or the factory or *Kristallnacht* sections of *Schindler's List* causes a discomfort in us, as we are bound to empathise with Rebecca, whose suffering is manifest before us, whilst that empathy is compromised by our awareness that these cannot be (and are confessed as not being) her memories. The lacuna between our awareness of atrocity and our own (lack of) experience of it is made manifest in our response to that paradoxical lacuna in Rebecca, and this associates itself with the shortcomings of major cultural artefacts that seek to address the Holocaust through a 'personal' aesthetic that necessarily reduces and funnels our empathic attachment to atrocity through emotional association with individual characters' experiences, whether fictional or fictionalised versions of real people (Sophie Zawistowski, Oskar Schindler, Itzhak Stern).

Rebecca is a character that has been rendered a monument to twentieth-century genocide through a process of absorption of cultural memory, and contains and suffers the impossibility of maintaining and sustaining memories that are not hers, or ours, but which must be remembered. She is afflicted by the permanent 'retentissements' of her awareness. Her reference to her own disquiet at police sirens fading into the distance is perhaps indicative of the permanent agitation of her suffering, and her expressed desire to want to possess that sound, and not let it reach others (408), suggests a consolation in suffering in the place of, as monument to, the suffering of others. At the end of the play Pinter employs a shift in stage discourse that characterises a number of his late plays, where a single voice addresses the audience as though from within a hermetically sealed

dramatic locus beyond the locale of the rest of the play – *Party Time* (1991), *Moonlight* (1993) and *Celebration* (2000) all share this feature, often associated with death. The technique draws an audience's attention in on Rebecca, aided by a reduced lighting plot that focuses on her and marginalises Devlin (who no longer speaks). This heightened attention is further augmented by the introduction of an echo to Rebecca's words, as she recounts one last time an event where a woman had a child taken from her arms at a railway station. To add further to our concentration on this narrative, Rebecca switches her recollection from the third to the first person, and 'becomes' the person who first had her baby taken away, only then to deny ever having had a baby in the play's final words. The poignancy is at its most extreme here, when this denial chimes in to counter the earlier one of ever having been victim of atrocity. Rebecca's suffering is authentic within the context of our dramatic encounter of her, our investment in her as tragic figure is uncompromised, and her denial at the end becomes the denial of a survivor, the narrative of erasure of the trauma victim.

Yet Rebecca remains the impossible victim of the Holocaust. This is Pinter's gesture of 'retentissement'; a difficult, irresolvable pathos, stamping Rebecca's dilemma into an audience, to be subject to attempted resolution only once the play closes. A character who is and is not a victim, and who, in being a victim, necessarily denies the source of her victimhood, is an exemplary facet of Pinter's stated approach to truth in art when, in his Nobel acceptance speech, he described how 'truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other' (Pinter 2005). Pinter's dialogue with *Blasted*, if such a process might be envisaged, involves a movement away from his usual approach to political playwriting, which involved structuring the consequences of reactionary politics through images of threatened and fractured families set in unnamed countries that manifest British features (*One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), *Party Time* (1991)). Instead, like *Blasted*, *Ashes to Ashes* locates its impossible events – Rebecca's memories – within a more openly British context where they cannot belong. The mismatch between activity and perceived location no longer serves to indicate a commentary of British implication in atrocity, but to embed an uncertainty that is key to the articulation of an ethical concern. As with the soldier occupying a Leeds luxury hotel, Rebecca's false (and yet authentic) memories permit the creation of a pathetic space in the spectator that bridges empathy and objectivity. In this way, Pinter approaches Huyssen's prescription for a compelling Holocaust monument:

> Post-Holocaust generations can only approach that core by mimetic approximations, a mnemonic strategy which recognizes the event in its otherness and beyond identification or therapeutic empathy, but which physically innervates some of the horror and the pain in a slow and persistent labor of remembrance. [...] The ultimate success of a Holocaust monument would be to trigger such a mimetic approximation (Huyssen, 259)

Artaud's ambition of inserting affective 'retentissements', via horror and association, into the body of the spectator and thus transforming him or her, matches well a process that Huyssen describes as one that 'physically innervates some of the horror and the pain in a slow and persistent labor'. Applying this concept of monument to the construction of dramatic events and the manipulation of theatrical discourse to bring about a transformative experience for audiences, it is possible to consider an ideological application of 'retentissement' that engages spectators in contemplating ethical issues relating to real-world conflicts by activating sites of mourning, acts of remembrance. Kane and Pinter, with *Blasted* and *Ashes to Ashes*, achieve ethical engagement deliberately without overtly relating the action of their plays to contemporary political events. Separating the aesthetic experience of sorrow and horror from an object of sorrow or horror outside the theatre facilitates a free association and application of the achieved mourning to contemporary events, without channelling such a response through the kinds of narrative of 'personal' associations commonly employed in journalistic prose or the conventional story-telling through identifying with blighted characters of popular entertainment.

Notes

[1] Edwards's car was found abandoned at the Severn View service station, near the notorious suicide spot of the Severn bridge. He was not pronounced 'presumed dead' until 2008.

[2] In the original German, Ravenhill's words read: 'Im körperlichen Schmerz manifestiert sich ein Höchstmaßan Realität.'

[3] Following the publication in *Libération* on 4 January 1991 of 'La Guerre du Golfe n'aura pas eu lieu', Baudrillard went on to publish two other pieces in that newspaper as the conflict in the Persian Gulf unfolded. Published on 6 February and 29 March 1991, these were respectively entitled 'La Guerre du Golfe a-t-elle vraiment lieu?' and 'La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu' (translated by Paul Patton as 'The Gulf War: is it really taking place?' and 'The Gulf War did not take place'. All three articles were published collectively in English in 1995 under that last title).

[4] The reaction of some of the tabloid press to the 'Paedogeddon!' episode of the Channel 4 comedy series *Brass Eye* broadcast on 26 July 2001 was typical of this contradictory behaviour. The *Daily Mail* (27 July 2001) ran an image of princesses Eugenie and Beatrice (11 and 13 years old) wearing bikinis in the same edition that decried using paedophilia as a subject for comedy as 'unspeakably sick', and *The Daily Star* (28 July 2001) printed an image of the 15-year-old singer Charlotte Church to emphasise her breast size (describing her as 'chest swell') directly juxtaposed against an article describing the *Brass Eye* episode as a 'sick show'. All quotations from Ferguson.

[5] Original text: 'à prendre des attitudes conformes au geste qui est fait'.

[6] Bosniaks were commonly, and inadequately, referred to as 'Bosnian Muslims' in media reporting of the Bosnian War. The term differentiates from 'Bosnian' (inhabitant of Bosnia) and indicates an ethnic Slavic group determined by a historic connection to the territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina alongside a traditional adherence to Islam. Such religious adherence may or may not be active in current members of that group.

[7] In the text, Devlin refers to having lived 'a life of scholarship' (Pinter, 1998, p. 415). In a fax dated 16 July 1997 to Gianni Quaranta (stage designer of the Italian premiere of the play), Pinter explained: 'I believe that Devlin is a professor at a university' (Pinter 1997)

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