

Genderqueer Perspectives on Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis*

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Abstract

This essay analyses the plays *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane in the context of genderqueer identity. Genderqueer is used as an umbrella term for identities that fall outside the binary of male and female, a concept imposed by a Western hetero- and homonormative society that this work seeks to subvert. Contemporary queer (performance) theory and lived experiences of trans* and queer people form an integral part in understanding the plays' characters, their struggles and their journey in these plays. This serves as an attempt to disrupt academic discourse around identity in Kane's works to-date and inform ways to understand genderqueer perspectives.

Introduction

1 Sarah Kane's plays have received wide scholarly attention since their initial performances and subsequent publishing. Although the topic of gender and queerness has gained attention in this context, it has been discussed predominantly within a heteronormative and homonormative frame that reinforces the gender binary. However, Sarah Kane's works offer the reader and audience the possibility to think beyond the normative binary of male and female gender; instead, leaving behind this perception of gender by exploring an array of different identities. This will be highlighted by offering a genderqueer reading of Kane's plays *Cleansed* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), contributing to the already existing discourse, giving new impulses to read her and other's work in a contemporary way.

2 My analysis of these plays draws on queer performance theories and queer theory, as well as on contemporary queer experiences, including reflections on the scholarly approach to trans* and queer-coded bodies. The setting of *Cleansed* can be aligned with Jill Dolan's notions of queer and utopian performatives with regard to plot and characters, while the play's distinct use of violence evokes Lee Edelman's notion of the death drive and its connection to the queer individual. Moreover, I will show that the dichotomy between what happens on stage and the audience dissipates during the course of the play and a more direct audience address is being made in relation to trans* identities and queer bodies. Sarah Kane's body of work does not solely include trans* identities but *queers* the gender of characters. This occurs not only through language but also violence which is enacted upon the characters in the plays.

3 Believing, that no two queer experiences are the same, the analysis of the two plays will focus on individual exclamations of characters, not trying to forcibly draw parallels between fundamentally different experiences. It goes without saying that, intersectionality and

similar intersections and similarities of experiences among individuals in the queer community are a core part of what constitutes queer identity and builds towards something that is close to community or *communitas*. Queerness or queer is being used not necessarily as an identity category but a framing of experiences that exist and thrive outside of heteronormative and homonormative structures, which gender-transcending individuals often find themselves to escape from. The aim of this essay is thus not only to examine how genderqueerness is depicted in the works of Sarah Kane but also to offer a refreshing perspective for further research into theatre making of the late 20th century in regard to gender and queer studies.

4 To understand how gender is generated in *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis* and with which understanding of gender to approach Kane's plays, it is important to know the history of genderqueer identities beyond the context of the most common Western perspective. 'Transgender' as an adjective denoting that a person has a different gender identity than the one assigned on a birth certificate. It has become an umbrella term for a variety of gender identities.

5 The binary idea of gender denoting men and women is a Western concept that was disseminated through the colonial endeavour and is still imposed on large parts of the world since colonisation. Two-spirit identities of First Nation tribes in North America, Indian *hijra* and Indonesian *waria* are just three of over a hundred recorded¹ gender identities all over the world (Manzano and Vincent 13). This post- and distinctly anti-colonial perspective is further explored by Jack Halberstam: "the colonial power to name has shifted away from the general management of gender-ambiguous bodies [...] toward a more global production of power" and that "colonial control over naming and explaining [...] falls less to medicine and more to political organisations committed to the project of identifying and remedying transphobia and homophobia globally." (Halberstam 28). Here, Halberstam emphasizes that the culture in which trans* bodies exist is hostile to the discourse among trans* people, trying to define their identity in order to be moulded into subjects which politics can weaponize for often conservative agendas. Halberstam also notes that even contemporary discourse about genderfluidity is heavily reliant on the twentieth-century formulations of the gendered body in terms of class and race.

6 According to Alex Iantaffi transgender people are often not able or not willing to conform to norms set out by the heteronormative society they have grown up in or the homonormative community they grew into (Iantaffi 286). By definition, trans* individuals

¹ Recorded by Western colonisers

cannot take part in the depoliticising of their identity since they are constantly forced to re-define it in order to be intelligible within the confines of a heteronormative society. As Ben Vincent and Ana Manzano point out: “When transgender people are discussed within mainstream media, medicine, or academia, this is most often in terms of the gender binary – that is, the cultural system which positions male and female as the only possible realities” (12). Lastly, it is essential to point out and keep in mind while reading the works of Kane that the experiences of trans* masculine individuals are often ignored and rarely represented in contemporary representations of trans* experiences.

Imagining queer futures in *Cleansed*

7 *Cleansed*, which premiered in April 1998 in the 380-seat auditorium Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, features seven characters: Graham, Tinker, Carl, Rod and Robin are all perceived as Androsome² people in the context of the play. Grace and the Woman are described as Gynesome people. However, Cristina Delgado-García observes that in *Cleansed*, Kane “produces bodies that appear as unintelligible from a gender-normative point of view” (233), since the gender markers on their bodies are rendered unintelligible by the violence inflicted on these bodies or since identities overlap or remain undefinable.

8 Graham Saunders notes that the “duality [...] between tenderness and affirmation in love placed against annihilation and loss of self-hood is found within the title [...] itself” (93). The play takes place in an institution described as a university, whereas it might become apparent throughout the play that the name refers more to what the building might look like than what is its actual purpose – a death camp. In this nondistinctive setting and the described tenderness of the play lies a complexity unlike any other, with the characters’ identities forming the core of this complexity. The characters Rod and Carl are in love with each other, but the cost of this love is dismemberment and death by the hands of Tinker in the course of the play. The character of Graham, the brother and subject of love of Grace, is murdered by Tinker within the first scene, but remains a ghostly presence in the play. Grace and Graham, alongside Tinker are the primary queer subjects of this play. Throughout the play, Grace wishes to become Graham; while Tinker first hesitates, they³ eventually agree and begin to see Grace as

² To avoid Western categorization or biological essentialism or determinism, the terms *Androsome* and *Gynesome* as proposed by Christina Richards, Walter Pierre Bouman and Meg-John Barker in the introduction of the 2020 multidisciplinary book *Genderqueer and Non-Binary Gender* will be used.

³ The singular pronoun *they* will be used to describe Tinker as well as Grace and Graham. It is intended as an act of queering the character’s identities when talking about them, to make their queer identities more accessible and apparent.

Graham, an Androsome person. The desire of Grace to become Graham and thus Androsome is an integral part of the play and the queering of Grace's body and identity is a part much overshadowed by the description of violence in the play. But before Grace arrives at that point, a history of violence ensues, initiated by Tinker.

9 The first variable in looking at genderqueer identities in *Cleansed* is the bodies' relationship to violence. The play contains a much-discussed "ritualised cruelty" as violence inflicted on characters' bodies and its representations on stage are the primary focus of the audience (Brusberg-Kiermeier 80). It can be argued that the violence inflicted on the characters which renders their bodies as "the site of violence", queers the identity of every character (Waddington 144). Trans* bodies are often objectified particularly by medical staff with the intention to 'cure'. Among healthcare 'professionals', there still is an inherent binary understanding of transgender people (Galupo et al. 205). The continued classification of gender dysphoria as a mental health disorder and shortcomings by medical staff in seeing the comorbidity of gender dysphoria and poor mental health, generates unpleasant, intruding and horrid experiences of trans* individuals with healthcare services. Tinker could be seen as the embodiment of medical professionals in contact with bodies which do not conform to their ideal of cis heteronormative standards and their attempt to 'cure' them of those incongruences.

10 Jill Dolan's notion of queer space is essential to understanding the importance of the setting of *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis*. For Dolan queerness is "a place to which people can travel, to find pleasure, and knowledge and maybe (or maybe not) power" (Dolan "Queer Theatre" 5), while José Esteban Muñoz describes queerness as something that "is not yet here" in the opening sentence of his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009) (1). Utopia, queerness and performance are deeply intertwined. The three of them function off of ephemerality, a phase of transition, as the utopia itself should be temporal and spatial at the same time (99). The characters in the play never leave the perimeters of the university, the rooms and the grass outside function as queer space. In this space, change is actively happening, envisioned and acted upon.

11 Once any subject and their queerness exit the temporal space of, for example, the theatre performance, they also exit utopia. For both, Dolan and Muñoz, utopia and performance hold queerness. The theatre Dolan imagines is utopian, a "no-place" (Dolan *Utopia in Performance*, 13), a place that is not there (yet), anteceding Muñoz. Without queerness, this place is not conceivable and will remain utopian. But by ascribing utopia to a stage, it gains a physical aspect, it becomes a place (Muñoz 99). Queerness itself, in turn, becomes a space where potential change is possible, even if not manifesting as a physical action. Dolan states that "to

be queer is not who you *are*, it's what you *do*, it's your relation to dominant power, and your relation to marginality, as a place of empowerment." (Dolan "Queer Theatre" 6). After the performance, or the specific moment in the performance, is over, the audience is left with the queerness that was part of it. Here, people arrive at something possibly utopian. At the same time, they exist in that very utopian sphere, the ephemeral. Stephen Farrier correctly states that "bringing the virtual-queer and the body-political into a space where they do not cancel each other out, but work to produce something else, is a utopian queer move" (Farrier 50). Dolan's notion of the utopian performative is closely tied to Elizabeth Freeman's queer temporality. Queer temporality after Freeman "rejects notions of 'natural progression' [...] again, queer temporality is not compelled to follow a specific path, nor does it seek to normalized outcomes" (Freeman in Duda 5). Freeman situates the queer temporality as a "nonsequential time", as to say that it does not conform to the understanding of time most people have (qtd. in Halberstam 86). Jill Dolan's understanding of performance and theatre as something queer and therefore, now, outside of a normative conception of time, serves as an example of how the audience of the plays might feel watching Kane's plays on stage. They are presented with something they perhaps have not yet experienced and, simultaneously if they were to be queer themselves, might find affirmation in. Moreover, scholars such as Kara Keeling, working on the intersection of race and queerness, have pointed out that queer temporality is experienced in distinctive ways by those individuals who are black *and* queer.

12 As Brusberg-Kiermeier notes, "the body's desire to inscribe itself into the world is answered by the inscription of violence on to the body" (86). It quickly becomes apparent that the characters must endure violence if they want to reach their respective aims of self-agency. In the institutional setting of the play, queerness is achieved through violence and a radical re-imagining of one's identity, a no-place as Jill Dolan describes it. Through the repetitive mutilation and rituals of violence enacted by Tinker, this place also sustains itself through the queering of the characters' identities, albeit violently. Lee Edelman's notion of the death drive with regard to queer individuals offers further insight into the characters' relationship to violence. Drawing on Jacques Lacan, Edelman constructs the death drive as being imposed on queer individuals by heteronormative society, but as something that should be embraced at the same time: "Queers should affirm their identification with the drive, in order to proclaim the rift within society's (and subjects') fantasy of self-preservation" (Edelman in Jarcho 2). Thus, although the death drive is not inherent in the subject, it has learned to live with it to be able to imagine themselves a future. By imagining the death drive on stage and affecting the audience

and readership of the plays, it also furthers a future reality in which perceptions of queer realities and futures could be understood differently by the heterosexual cis-gendered majority.

13 Through each act of violence, the characters outer as well as inner appearance changes and the *cleansing* of their character ensues. Delgado-García argues that the play “presents the body not as the stable and unique material fact of an equally fixed and exclusive selfhood, but rather as the contingent effect of dynamic processes that repeatedly inform and subject physical matter” (Delgado-García 233) which coincides with Jay Stewart’s notion of the genderqueer body as a site that is constantly re-negotiated and re-evaluated (Stewart 61).

14 Brusberg-Kiermeier argues that “the title *Cleansed* implies not only a cleansing from drugs or ethnic cleansing, but also a purification of love [...] a triumph of mind and soul over the body” (87). While the assumed homosexual characters Rob and Carl are seeking this love through their mutual attraction, declarations of love and sexual acts, Tinker and Grace seek this fulfilment through a change of gender, in Grace’s case at the cost of violence. The loss of Grace’s lover/brother Graham occurs in the first scene of the play, before the character of Grace is introduced. Graham is killed by Tinker, who administers a drug overdose to Graham’s eye. Kane chooses to let Tinker inject the deathly dose into Graham’s ‘eye’ which is implying the end of Graham’s and Grace’s literal perception of themselves. There is almost always a great discrepancy between how genderqueer and trans* individuals *see* themselves in opposition to how they are perceived by their heteronormative environment. The administering of the doses by Tinker in Graham’s eye could be read as the first step in the incongruent relationship between Grace/Graham’s body and mind. In Scene Five, Grace voices their wish to become Graham for the first time and manages to take on some attributes of Graham by mirroring his behaviour:

GRACE. Teach me.

[...]

GRACE. *Gradually, takes on the masculinity of his movement [...] she mirrors him perfectly as they dance exactly in time.*

When she speaks, her voice is more like his. (Cleansed 119)

Later in the same scene, they both make love to each other, perhaps the most tender description of that act in Kane’s plays. The sexual act in itself is described as unison, free from any hierarchy of gender. In the act, their identities are queered, as they reach a moment of queer temporality; while a sunflower that grows out of the floor constitutes an impossible act that is

possible while queer temporality exists for them. Throughout the play Grace's dialogue hints at their dissatisfaction with the gender they are perceived as, particular in Scene Seven:

ROBIN. If you could change one thing in your life what would you change?

GRACE. My life.

[...]

GRACE. My body. So it looked like it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside.

[...]

GRACE. I'm not like that, a girl, no. (*Cleansed* 123-28)

Following the remarks and questions of Robin/Graham, Grace expresses discomfort with her body and grows seemingly uncomfortable as shown in short answers and cut off lines. In Scene Three, Grace puts on Graham's clothes and tells Tinker:

GRACE. I look like him. Say you thought I was a man. (*Cleansed* 114)

According to Delgado-Garcia "[Grace's] self-assignment of identity requires external reassurance" (144). Grace's desire to be read as something other than a woman is apparent throughout the play and confirms that Grace does not only wish to be reunited with Graham out of love, but also wishes to become another gender in order to be themselves. The categories of body, sex, sexuality and gender are disrupted in the discourse about Grace's or Graham's identity. Notions to adapt Graham as a character that does not really exist or is just a projection of Grace do not grasp the subversive potential of the play. In Scene Fourteen, the woman Tinker goes to see in the Black Room, becomes a projection of Grace for Tinker and serves as a catalyst of Tinker's future acceptance of Grace's gender identity.

WOMAN. Don't want to be this.

TINKER. You're a woman, Grace.

WOMAN. I want –

TINKER. Don't say that.

WOMAN. You said –

TINKER. I lied. You are what you are. No regrets.

[...]

TINKER. You're a woman.

WOMAN. You're a doctor. Help me. (*Cleansed* 143-44)

The denial of Grace's gender identity by Tinker is common among people close to trans* individuals due to the fear of losing something when the individual in question chooses to start their social or medical transition. These microaggression, namely misgendering through pronouns or using deadnames, should be regarded as violence as well, as "for all the violence inflicted on bodies in *Cleansed*, language is possibly the most violent agent" (Chute 186). Scene Eighteen is set after Tinker performed surgery on Grace, detailing how bloodied bandages are strapped around Grace's chest and hips, substantiating a gender-conformation surgery (*Cleansed* 147). Thus, Grace turns into Grace/Graham in Sarah Kane's playtext, an identity foregrounding that all parts of Grace are not lost. Grace might be the most obvious example of a genderqueer individual in Sarah Kane's oeuvre, since they not only voice their discomfort but also undergo surgery to confirm their gender identity. In the last scene of the play, Grace/Graham expresses comfort with their body and subsequent identity:

GRACE/GRAHAM. Body perfect.

[...]

Thank you, Doctor. (*Cleansed* 149-50)

15 The dialogue between Tinker and the woman does not only change the fate of Grace, but also of Tinker who are themselves grappling with their fluid identity as described by Saunders (96). They are set up as the antagonist of the play but redeem themselves through their actions – as clear in the penultimate words of Grace/Graham – functioning as a catalyst for the progress of the queer space that is the setting of the play. As Saunders observes, "once Grace's identity has been obliterated both Tinker and the Woman seem free to become lovers" (99).

16 Concluding, the categories of body, sex, gender and sexuality are subverted in the realm of the play. Following Judith Butler's terminology, Delgado-García identifies a "performative subversion as parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts" to explain the disruption of common cis heteronormative conceptions of these categories (232). Grace represents the quintessence of a genderqueer body existing in a non-normative queer space and their own queer temporality. They also, as do the other characters, embody and appropriate the death drive as queer individuals. Samuel Grassi suggests that "the play makes the point that love is a matter of pain and loss of integrity for the self" (163). It can be argued, this loss of

integrity, however, only correlates to the homo- and heteronormative understanding of self. It is essential to note that none of the characters in the play actually try to fight back against Tinker's violent practices, but rather endure them. Grace endures rape by multiple unknown people, Carl loses his arms, his lover Rod is killed and burnt, and Robin who is also in love with Grace/Graham is eventually hanged by Tinker. They all adopt their fate as individuals who are furthering the inquiry into a new queer futurity through their acceptance of violence and even death. The violence these characters experience can be read as a radical expression of what it means to live one's life as a queer and trans* individual. *Cleansed* offers a unique perspective of the physical and psychological violence trans* individuals have to endure both before and during their transition. Through the self-proclaimed and self-inhabited queer space and queer temporality due to the outside violence, the play and its characters can explore (gender)queerness in their identities. More importantly, through utopian performativity, it presents the audience with a 'could-be' but not a 'should-be' and encourages them to help the comfort of trans* individuals in their own worlds.

Re-defining the Trans* Existence in 4.48 *Psychosis*

17 4.48 *Psychosis*, the last play written by Sarah Kane, offers little to no indication of gender, nor of individual character. The text exists in the form of a voice, arranged like a dialogue and yet completely rid of any. While Jo McInnes, was cast in the first production of the play, and stated that the "woman in the play is definitely a real person" (qtd. in Machon 155), giving some indication of the gender of the queer subject and Kansiz notes, "the use of pronouns as well as the autobiographical context corroborates the idea that the patient possesses a female body" (281), the play clearly subverts these categories. Numerous attempts at defining the voice as a character or patient fail to acknowledge the fluidity of the text. At the same time, the decision to divide the voice into characters made by productions can confirm the paradoxical nature of this fluidity. When there is no attribution to characters in the play, there can be endless and no possibilities for dividing up the text to be read by one actor or multiple actors on stage. Kathleen Morgeneyer, who was cast in the 2020 production of the play at Deutsches Theater in Berlin, calls for the text not to be divided up into male or female voices, but for merging them to become one voice (Morgeneyer). "No specific setting and textual fragments instead of a consistent plotline" are observed by Annette Pankratz as well (158). Albeit the plays self-identification as an autobiographical expression of Kane's own depressive episodes, or perhaps because of it, the play – the text – is queer and offers queerness to the

reader and audience. The body, sex, gender, sexuality paradigm which was already subverted in *Cleansed* does not exist in *4.48 Psychosis*.⁴ Cristina Delgado-García states,

the body morphology suggested in *4.48 Psychosis* resists the normative presumption of a correlation between gender identity and gendered corporeality, as well as the existence of a binary gender [...] Instead, *4.48 Psychosis* offers anatomically ambiguous genitalia, with references to ‘the broken hermaphrodite who trusted herself alone’, and transgender identity. (242)

This identity, however, must use coded messages unique to the experience of a trans* individual to convey their struggles to the audience despite there not being any indication of character in the playtext.

18 The text of this play, like *Cleansed*, voices the frustration of the queer subject with their own body. According to a recent study by M. Paz Galupo, Lex Pulice-Farrow and Louis Lindley (2020), gender dysphoria can be triggered by a variety of factors, most prominently social interactions. They state that “historically, gender dysphoria has been framed from a clinical lens which emphasizes body incongruence and dissatisfaction” and perpetuates the “woman trapped in a man’s body” narrative due to the focus on trans women and the neglect of consideration of trans men or individuals with other gender identities (Galupo et al. 200). The distinction between socially transitioning, e.g., conforming to a heteronormative and homonormative understanding of one’s gender, and medically transitioning, e.g., HRT, mastectomy is vital in this context as well. The authors of this study emphasize that the “distress requirement for the diagnosis can be - or rather has to be - understood in a social context” (200). The study includes several accounts of individuals describing their personal experience with dysphoria., which make up only a fraction of how gender dysphoria can manifest itself. One person states that they feel a “Constant wondering if what I’m wearing will draw attention to the fact that I am not cisgender, fear of being invalidated by my peers and family, and fear of being physically harmed by individuals due to my gender orientation. (Biracial/multiracial male, 18)” (Galupo et al., 203) These reports also show that outside triggers, such as conversations and microaggressions, and “the binary organization of social and institutional spaces” can elevate dysphoria (felt by those persons) (Galupo et al. 205). The study offers insight into ways of reducing gender dysphoria, transitioning being the most important one. The selected reports show how gender dysphoria can have severe effects on mental health.

⁴ I will sometimes use the term ‘queer subject’ to describe the text and voice in places where it is imputable who speaks, to challenge the common conception of gender in the play which is often used in scholarly work on it. The singular ‘they’ will also be used. The word “patient” will not be used in order to not further the pathologisation of trans* people in the medical context.

Isolation and depressive episodes are comorbid conditions – suicide can also be directly linked to gender dysphoria. The subject in *4.48 Psychosis* experiences a similar mental state as people with gender dysphoria, resulting in their intrusive thoughts and actions.

19 The play starts in a no-place and therefore as queer place. No indication of time and place, only silence at the beginning of the play, queers the space for the audience and readership and it can be located in queer time, as Lee Edelman states that “queer time is not lived in a series of milestones and imperatives, but rather as a stolen moment in spite of looming death” (Edelman 84). Through a voice in the text, space and time are created but remain undefinable. The voice speaks to someone stating that someone has friends.

--- But you have friends.

(A long silence.)

You have a lot of friends.

What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive? (*4.48 Psychosis* 205)

The text reassures through someone’s inner dialogue or another person that they have friends. At the same time, it doubts them by asking if their friends are really supportive if they might have nothing to offer their friends in return. Duda perceives this voice as the therapist questioning the patient, noting, “we see that the heteronormative figure of the therapist cannot conceive of a community in which one does not need to offer anything in order to be accepted into it” (49). However, this voice could also be read as the subject themselves, already doubting themselves, falling into a state of queer mourning. The concept of genderqueer identity is epitomised in yet another phrase in the opening lines of the play.

the broken hermaphrodite who trusted herself alone finds the room in reality teeming and begs never to wake from the nightmare (*4.48 Psychosis* 205)

The “nightmare” that is described here is the dreamscape, to borrow terminology from Graham Saunders’ analysis of *Cleansed*, in which the voices exist. What the heteronormative observer might describe as a nightmare, the hermaphrodite merely experiences as a dream in which they can ask themselves questions about their existence and their gender. This line also assists the situatedness of the “victim, perpetrator, bystander” trichotomy that is mapped onto the text of the play (*4.48 Psychosis* 231). Although Alicia Tycer identifies this trichotomy in the audience – as they themselves serve as these categories - it can also be applied to the text itself, as the

queer subject describes themselves as all of these later on. If the line is spoken by a bystander about someone – in this case the hermaphrodite - the language used is failing to understand their identity. Whether the individual is genderfluid, non-binary, agender or trans* is not relevant to this analysis, nor is their genital configuration. The observer attempts to describe what escapes the binary logic of language patterns. The utopian performative of Dolan applies once again, as the audience is confronted with the problem of heteronormative discourse in their own world. When “Kane’s characters identify themselves and the audience as potential victims, perpetrators, and bystanders engaged in traumatic re-enactments”, it constitutes intersubjectivity among the audience members lifting them up into their own reality (Tyser 32).

20 What follows in the text is a vocal manifestation of the state of mind of the queer subject. It almost exclusively consists of negatives, describing what the person in question cannot do and what they are unprepared for doing. This is even addressed explicitly at one point in the play acknowledging that they are a “child of negation” (4.48 *Psychosis* 239), demanding empathy. Duda speaks of “a state of queer mourning”, as the queer subject is forced to conform to norms laid out by a heteronormative society of which the therapist is the figurative personification (52). The segment offers ways to situate in text in the discourse around trans* bodies and the problems which they face in their daily lives.

I cannot overcome my loneliness, my fear, my disgust

[...]

I am charging towards my death

I am terrified of medication

[...]

My hips are too big

I dislike my genitals (4.48 *Psychosis* 207)

The first phrase expresses discomfort rooted in loneliness and depression. It is similar to the discomfort Grace feels in *Cleansed*. Following, the voice expresses what could be read as the most literal indication of the queer death drive as outlined by Edelman. The word “charging” expresses the urgency of the action they are about to take. Having identified the heteronormative structures decisive for the state of queer mourning, the queer subject is not only figuratively seeking to end an unbearable state of consciousness imposed by the straitjacket of social institutions. In 4:48 *Psychosis* the institution in question is the psychiatric hospital, but - as suggested in *Cleansed* - this equally applies to seemingly diverse places

ranging from the prison to the university. In *4:48 Psychosis* the voice acts as the embodiment of Edelman's understanding of the death drive, consciously choosing to embrace it, planning suicide as a final escape:

At 4.48

When desperation visits

I shall hang myself

to the sound of my lover's breathing (*4.48 Psychosis* 207)

As love is mentioned by the voice as something that they are unable to feel and to reciprocate, Lacan's approach that the death drive is part of every drive – such as love - is affirmed.

21 The queer subject's statement about not being able to take medication not only gives context about their past – being subjected to medical professionals and medical institutions all their life has resulted in trauma – but also their future, that taking medication for them to feel better is an option that is not explored further by them because of said trauma, instead imagining other ways to feel more at home in their body (*4.48 Psychosis* 207). The comments on the body and the dislike of their genitals can be read in terms of gender dysphoria. Similar to Grace, they voice this discomfort, verbalising it and through this the queer space becomes a reality. Jack Halberstam argues, one has to think about new ways “to claim a body” instead of reiterating the same modes of asserting the trans* identity, as important as it is (Halberstam 50). But the queer subject is still stuck in defining itself over what they are not able to do, instead of what they can become. This is the fundamental tragedy of *4:48 Psychosis*.

22 The voice tells the audience about experiences with numerous doctors, “Dr This and Dr That and Dr Whatsit,” which is the experience most trans* individuals have when seeking medical transitioning (*4.48 Psychosis* 209). This way, the play shifts to a “medical narrative”, as Merve Kansiz argues, and the clinical gaze on the queer subject becomes more palpable (Kansiz 277). This is further elaborated on when the text lists eight different medications with which the subject has been in contact. The official diagnosis seems to be “pathological grief” but it is never further specified (*4.48 Psychosis* 223). The queer subject in the play voices anger at the medical institutions much like a trans* person would in the world beyond the stage. The disregard of the self-proclaimed gender identity by medical professionals especially, furthers the feeling of internalised transphobia and shame, which the queer mourning is a symptom of. In opposition to being accepted unconditionally by a wider social community the queer subject

is “placed in a cycle where the same created by the gaze of the clinic bring about symptoms which again expose [their] body to the same gaze” (Kansiz 84). This passage takes the audience out of the achieved queer temporality and queer space of the play. The chance of this transpiring is even greater if the audience member or reader is a trans* person since these experiences might sound all too familiar to them. While Kane does not explicitly state here why the queer subject is in treatment⁵, the scenes do resonate with trans* and genderqueer people. Tycer states that “when readers and audience members experience silences within such a detailed passage, they become inclined to include their own personal details” (Tycer 26). The reading of the queer subject as having a genderqueer identity is attested by the utopian performative by Dolan. The most apparent example of gender dysphoria appears in the text anew and clamantly:

I will drown in dysphoria
In the cold black pond of my self
The pit of my immaterial mind (*4.48 Psychosis* 213)

Do you think it's possible for a person to be born in the wrong body? (*4.48 Psychosis* 215)

These passages allow for a genderqueer reading as they explicitly address dysphoria and an incongruity between inside and outside. The queer subject expresses doubt about the attainability of a state of congruence between body and mind. The experience that “every compliment takes a piece of my soul” can be read in relation to the continuous misgendering of the subject by other people in everyday life (*4.48 Psychosis* 213). The queer subject's despair over the confines of the heteronormative “moral majority” (*4.48 Psychosis* 214) is evident in acts of self-harm (“cutting”) which are alluded to numerous times as attempts of the queer subject to feel their body as their own and to counter the clinical gaze to which they ironically subsequently are being subjected (*4.48 Psychosis* 217). The queer subject is eventually able to dismantle any conceptions of their body with the exclamation of horrid crimes and their refusal to be perceived:

I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the Arabs, I fucked small children while they begged for mercy, the killing fields are mine, everyone left the party because of me, I'll suck your fucking eyes out send them to your mother in a box and when I die

⁵ An indication for this is only given much later in the play.

I'm going to be reincarnated as your child only fifty times worse and as mad as all fuck
I'm going to make your life a living fucking hell I REFUSE I REFUSE I REFUSE
LOOK AWAY FROM ME (4.48 *Psychosis* 227)

This violent outburst is the direct result of the trauma they have been subjected to during their treatment. They want the audience, whether it be the actual theatre audience or the audience of voices to “regard [them] with multiple and shifting identities with different sexes” (Kansiz 286). With this tantrum, they claim a queer time and space by claiming to be “Victim. Perpetrator. Bystander.” of all these events, thus disrupting normative timelines (4.48 *Psychosis* 231). The queer subject claims agency of these atrocities, still not taking agency over their own life. This is the first time they can do so because it has been made impossible to do the latter by medical staff for the whole of the play.

23 Here am I
 and there is my body (4.48 *Psychosis* 230)

This line sums up the feelings of dissociation of the queer subject from their surroundings, something most genderqueer and trans* individuals who experience gender dysphoria have around their body and mind. The line break in between the two phrases not only mirrors the disconnect but also grants space in the reader's mind. Space to envision a utopia not only for the queer subject but the text as a whole. Through a radical re-imagining of their queer identity, a turn towards a more hopeful future emerges. A place that is “not yet here” but can be imagined if given space and time to be imagined (Muñoz 1). From then onwards, even the supposed therapist offers reassuring words but simultaneously disrupts the queer temporality of the space. When the therapist mentions their own lover and friends, and a home, the heteronormative world is flooding the text and thereby again shaming the queer subject who says, “I am sorry” (4.48 *Psychosis* 237) who is overcome with despair again. Before the play ends, the physical space between the lines spoken expands noticeably, encouraging the audience to fill that space with their own experiences. The closing words of the play

It is myself I have never met, whose face is pasted on the underside of my mind
please open the curtains (4.48 *Psychosis* 245)

Through bringing forth the curtain, the queer time is disrupted, and the queer subject's identity is too. The finality of the words 'never met', symbolise that through the opening of the curtains the re-imagining of their identity has come to an end. The curtain is not closed but rather opened, opening up new possibilities of imaging. Not a successful end, but a journey identified by the death drive seeking to re-define their queer existence for them and others.

Thinking Beyond Normative Discourse

24 This analysis of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* and *Cleansed* shows a way in which to place them in the context of genderqueer identities and contemporary queer theory discourse. Kane disrupts the notions of time and space and gives space to queerness and an envisioning of a utopia made possible entirely by the characters. The characters themselves and the settings in which they are located are not only queered due to how they are presented to the audience through text and performance, but also do not fall victim to a non-nuanced depiction of transgender identities. Although not necessarily intended by Kane, her characters offer a multitude of ways to be analysed, sympathised and empathised with.

25 The little attention such readings have received in academic discourse so far also allows for new ways of scrutinising plays by other contemporaries of Kane. There is also need for more dialogue about the importance of the gender and its implications when presented in a hetero- and homonormative way beyond politics of mere representation, discussing the institution of theatre as well. With urgency, the space for this has to be created by all types of theatre-makers, patrons and playwrights alike and has to include a diverse range of activist and scholarly voices.

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