

**DBS SCHOOL OF ARTS**

**TURNERIAN REBEL**

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**UNCOVERING THE ANTHROPOLOGIST VICTOR TURNER'S LIMINALITY IN  
MODERN PERFORMANCE**

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**MAY 2014**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
THE BA (HONS) FILM, LITERATURE AND DRAMA**

## Abstract

This thesis shall utilize the anthropological studies of Victor Turner to focus on the capacity for an individual, or Turnerian Rebel, to induce ambiguous, and thus possibly revolutionary, symbolic exchange on the musical and theatrical stage. Many Western twentieth century cultural theorists, including Jean Baudrillard, view that traditional forms of social communication have become increasingly attenuated in the light of technology, industry and capitalism. As a consequence the possibility for rebellious social drama is dampened. Through the prism of such critique the discussion will focus on the potential that remains in artistic performance. Firstly there will be an exploration of Turner's concepts of breach, liminality and communitas, originally observed in ritual and social drama of the Nbemdu African tribe in the nineteen fifties and sixties. This will identify the dynamic nature of social structures and, through symbolic performance, the possibility for the liminal individual to ignite a change or alteration. After which works by playwright Sarah Kane and musician David Byrne shall be analysed to conceive their own rebellious liminality. Ultimately by exposing their breach of social norms, identify the capacity of the modern Turnerian Rebel to create new possibilities for their community.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor Dr. Paul Hollywood for his support and guidance not only with my thesis but over the last four college years. You are an unparalleled inspiration to all of the students who pass through the DBS School of Arts doors. Also I am grateful to all of my other lecturers, for their help, patience and especially the class “field trips”.

To my family and friends, to whom I am in hugely indebted to, not only for their support, love and patience, but also comic relief. Finally I express my deepest gratitude to my partner and dreamboat Eóin - whose love, intellect and unwavering energy, challenged and inspired me throughout – and to the wonderful women I have had the pleasure of calling my classmates, who are now my friends.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Motivation for the study: Issues of community, media & performance in modern times

*“Fuck the bitching world and let’s be beautiful. Beautiful. And happy.”*

Robbie in *Shopping and Fucking* (Ravenhill, 1996)

Increasingly the role of mass media and capitalism are inherent in the communal cultural experience. Since the mid twentieth century performance studies, for instance, has emerged as a commoditised staple of the Western academic repertoire. Simultaneously theatre has progressively found itself the reserve of the middle to upper classes, confined to niche performance spaces. With inextricable links to capitalist industry, the truly socializing aspects of communal performance such as ritual and social drama are put into question. Post-industrialist cultural theories of the twentieth century, from those of Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse to Zygmunt Bauman and Jean Baudrillard, are concerned with the increasing complicity of mass media driven culture with areas of economics and politics. They generally view that this complicity allows increasingly little room for the social bonding and reflexive critique that was once an integral aspect of communal performance and arts, as relations have become attenuated and transfigured within the large scale industrialist and capitalist frameworks. As Marc Augé discusses in his work *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, there is now a “difficulty in defining notions like “tribe” or “ethnic group”” (Augé, 1995, p. 14). The collectiveness of the group comes into question as motives and contexts become confused – from the individualism of the artist to the individualism of the audience. Are they attuned? Are they there for the “wrong” reasons – sales, success, potential suitor? Or is it all just a matter of good taste? Influenced by Bauman’s concepts of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), Luis Manuel Garcia investigates

further this *slipperiness* of the group in *Crowd Solidarity in the Dance Floor*. He suggests there is now a formation of *taste communities* where a person attaches to the group identity through aesthetics and consumption (Holt & Wergin, 2013, p. 237). For him this optional, consumerist aspect of communal identity negates the traditional non-negotiable, obligatory nature of these relationships - that are now perhaps a thing of the past?

As with other modern sociologists, philosophers and cultural theorists Jean Baudrillard's concerns are with the effect of the instantaneous nature of media on modern Western culture and communities. The crisis of time and space, surface and textuality are primary concerns. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, written in 1981, he discusses how, when viewed through the lens of mass media, history and its associated symbolic carriers of meaning are deformed. Although one might assume the contrary, for Baudrillard the effect of an abundance of instantaneous information is to dissolve any capacity for real communication or social interchange. Through its speed and volume, mass media has brought with it an implosion of meaning, the dearth of which manages to break down history and tradition as concepts. For "there is no longer any time for history itself... in a sense it doesn't have time to take place" (Merrin, 2005, p. 72). This "demise of the sign" has meant that traditional symbolic carriers of culture have become part of repressive and reductive ideological power systems (Merrin, 2005, p. 163). The increased commodity of aesthetics has created pastiche representations, reflecting only the organising principles of a stratified hierarchal society. Bearing in mind that up until his death in 2007 Baudrillard saw the rise of increasingly sophisticated media tools such as the internet, his body of work shows how ontologically communication and derived meaning is progressively precarious. Increased media output in the "real" forms of twenty four hour news and reality television are now playing a part through their implicit mediating and editing of events and images. For Baudrillard nihilistic cultural developments occur as these mediated events are stripped of their context and

reduced to *exhibition value*, a side show. Thus the dynamics of group collectiveness and communicative processes have contributed to a communal and social displacement, reflected perhaps in Bauman's concerns that it "allows the system and the free agents to remain radically disengaged, to bypass each other instead of meeting" (Bauman, 2000, p. 5).

It is from this vantage that an assessment of the significance of artistic performance and the individual's role in it is to be made. The work of the anthropologist Victor Turner will be used to evaluate how in performance the capacity for open and meaningful social communication still exists. Turner's studies explore the ability of collective performative acts, such as ritual or social drama, to allow a community to continually propagate or reassess their existing social codes through symbolic exchange. In fact the inherent processual self-assessment he observes in such interaction is very much in line with Baudrillard's sensibility. While on the surface often construed as nihilistic, and damning, Baudrillard in fact calls for a reclaiming of the symbol through theoretical and practical revolution (Merrin, 2005). He writes in defence of the symbolic, and rather, is in critique of semiotic media and its resulting reductive objectification of nature and human interaction, where the now meaningless symbol is used to produce a "mechanical solidarity" rather than a truly, thought provoking communal one (Merrin, 2005, p. 75). As shall be seen Turner's concepts of the liminal individual, liminality and *communitas*, and the temporal nature of culture will show how communal revolution of the social representation is (and always has been) achievable in very real terms. Turner's work celebrates the powerful capacity of symbolic exchange, an exchange Baudrillard wishes to reinstate. Without the diluting effects of mediation on meaning and symbolic order, Turner identifies that the "raw" live event of performance has the potential to give the audience/participants the space and time to consider history and society, symbol and meaning by its ability to coherently create multi-levelled socially reflective messages acting

as a critique of a social norm. Thus it is in live, premeditated performance a liminal individual/artist, or as will be defined the Turnerian Rebel, can truly be effective.



## Chapter Two: Victor Turner

### Introduction to Turner and the concept of the Turnerian Rebel

“There is always the possibility of an avalanche of truth seekers”

Howard Barker, playwright (1997, P. 18)

Turner was, in fellow anthropologist Edward Bruner’s words, the “archetype creative spirit in anthropology” (St. John, 2008, p. 1). From the 1950s onwards his primary concerns of ritual and social drama in remote African villages and communities developed as a study of symbol and gesture, actor and audience. He expressed an intense inquisitiveness with the process of performance inherent in such activity. For him the preceding tendency for anthropological studies to look at society in closed empirical, logical systems rather than a processual dynamic entity resulted in the reduction of the individuals involved to mere cogs in a wheel. Such structures imposed a “systematic dehumanising of the human subjects” (Turner, 1988, p. 72). To a certain extent these dehumanising concerns mirror the *exhibition value* Baudrillard saw arising in the mediated sign or image. Like the effect of propagation through media, static academic structures can similarly lead to a limited, or at worst a one dimensional (as Herbert Marcuse might call it) perception of reality – with depth of time, history, tradition, and specific contextual aspects often left unrealised. While Turner formulated his anthropological ideas around observations on the ritual and social tribal activity in Northern Rhodesia, his emphasis on performance inevitably meant that performance of all kinds, including those of the Western arts, were to become fertile ground for his studies.

The dramatic and socialist influence informing Turner’s work becomes apparent when aware of his personal history. Born in Glasgow, Turner was the son of Captain Norman

Turner, an electronic engineer, and Violet Witter, founding member and actress of the Scottish National Theatre. Undoubtedly "*Drama was in his blood*" as his wife Edith Turner later opined (St. John, 2008, p. 5). After moving to Bournemouth, England with his divorced mother, he read poetry and classics at the University College London from 1938 to 1941. These studies were interrupted by the Second World War in which, as a pacifist and objector, he was drafted as a non-combatant bomb disposal soldier in Britain. During this time he met, married and had children with Edith Davis, a co-author of many of his later works. After the war he developed a zeal for anthropology and completed his studies in this academic strain. He went on to do post graduate work in collaboration with the Manchester School of Anthropology. Here Max Gluckman, the well-known South-African anthropologist, offered Turner a grant from the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute to carry out fieldwork on an African tribe. This is how he arrived in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, where his famed work with the Nbemdu tribe was carried out. His war experience coupled with his poetic and dramatic sensibility saw his focus turn to the ritual drama of social conflict and resolution within the tribe.

Initially Turner concentrated on ritual's intrinsic ability to communicate cultural themes. He identified the wide and varied nature of ritual genres: from cyclical and seasonal rituals, to those of affliction (hunting, curative and fertility cults) or divinity, to the contingent rituals of life crisis or initiatory rite of passage. A life crisis ritual was constituted by a physical or social development of an individual. Taking the form of christening or graduation ceremonies, they not only affected the individual but also the relationships with and between other people. For instance in the Nbemdu tribe, pre-pubescent initiation ceremonies involved circumcision and hunting for the boys, and preparation for marriage and motherhood for the girls. The individual generally underwent some kind of marginalization from the group to be re-aggregated after a change had taken place. Turner observed that while ritual was often an

interpretation of conventional, stereotypical performative activity composed of gestures, words and objects, it was also socially dramatic and dynamic. These dynamics sparked his preoccupation with the individual's potential to create new ideas and render new social norms, extending beyond ritual. Encapsulated in his conceptions of liminality and *communitas*, an individual could induce liminal or ambiguous meaning when attempting to thwart or re-conceive their place within an existing social ideology. When communicated within the collective group, tumult or conflict and potentially change could occur. He also observed how changes in communal factors, like mobility, shifts in power and increased modernity within the tribe, informed how new rituals were devised. Traditional forms were not deemed obsolete, as the newly conceived rituals were always reconfigurations or variants of old ones. So while always remaining subject to historical rules and themes, the possibilities for the individual and performance to access new ways in which to operate communally brings to mind sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's thoughts in which "the rebel refuses to accept what is, yet also abstains from rejecting it" (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008, p. 232). Such a definition of a rebel lends itself to Turner's concepts, as drama and participants are at once both product and co-creator of their political, economic and social community. Indeed as shall be seen when employing Turner's anthropological techniques, the liminal or ambiguous artist could very well be defined as a Turnerian Rebel.

### **When and how the Turnerian Rebel operates**

"What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms  
... illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are"

Nietzsche, philosopher

"There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in."

Leonard Cohen, singer, songwriter and poet [lyrics to *Anthem*]

As discussed, Turner focused on the adjusting and corrective nature of social interaction in all facets of the community life of the Nbemdu tribe. When aspects of a social structure for whatever reason become exhausted, or unfulfilling to the needs of the community or specific community members, they come into question in public performance. Here in communal drama the Turnerian Rebel has the chance to operate. Eventually the motivation for change becomes unimportant due to either a level of satisfaction or dampening of the demands, and the social structure ceases to change. The cyclical, processual nature of the structure emerges, as its function is re-established as a communal framework “to which action is subsequent and subordinate” (Turner, 1975, p. 37). Once again providing the governing social norms that future Turnerian Rebels will revolt against; as inevitably social dramas are ignited as corrupted or unsatisfying structures again form. And of course there are simultaneous layers of activity due to the capacity for many different social dramas or Turnerian Rebel exchanges to take place at any one time. For Turner social structure is therefore “always tentative” in its conception (Turner, 1975, p. 37). However, it must be noted he is not completely the naive optimist as he does negotiate further the terrain of social change, observing how questionable or misleading rhetoric can appeal to a community, who is unfulfilled, as much as genuine liminality.

### **Concepts of rites of passage, breach, liminality and communitas**

Expanding on French folklorist Van Gennep’s concepts on the three phases of the rites of passage, the social drama operates over four main phases for Turner (Turner, 1970). At a most simplistic level this consists of breach, crisis, redressive action and reintegration/recognition within the participatory group. A social breach as a “symbolic trigger of confrontation or encounter” is carried out by the Turnerian Rebel. Within the social rules this does not necessarily take the extreme form of breaking the law but can subvert a

variety of ideological or social norms. This then moves into a mounting crisis occurring repeatedly until it becomes as dominant as the conditioning of the existing social patterns. It is now communally visible, a threat to the governing customs, and this is where the potent concepts of liminality and *communitas* fully emerge. Ambiguous thinking that was only traceable in the individual has now grown to be a full state of communal liminality – a state of being in between as the group experiences an ambiguity and disorientation around currently held beliefs. *Communitas* refers to the structure formed in a society during a liminal period – a new structure based on common humanity and equality rather than recognized hierarchy, where the lines of social demarcation are dissipated. Now there is a sense of possibility, of change. Thus liminality creates not only a stage for reflection but creates a setting in which new symbols and norms may arise, for;

"liminality and the phenomena of liminality dissolve all factual and commonsense systems into their components and "play" with them in ways never found in nature or custom, at least not at the level of direct perception."

(Turner, 1988, p. 76)

Redressive mechanisms are then employed to reduce crisis contagion. In the context of a social drama this could range from judicial law to neighbourly advice. Here communal liminality is still present. When this redress fails however there is usually regression to the crisis phase, perhaps imbuing more definitive confrontations of rebellion or repression. Finally there is either reintegration of the social group or recognition and legitimization of the *schism* between the parties involved (Turner, 1975, p. 40). Either outcome will, to varying degrees, change the group structure.

By identifying and creating a social breach, Turner perceived that an individual could be a moral innovator with every aspect (duration, participants, the levels of liminality and *communitas* induced, outcome) a variable dependent on the drama occurring. When transposed to Western society the social drama can range from an intimate life crisis of the

individual and their community, to the larger context of social and civil political unrest, as in the cultural transitions of historical eras, such as Romanticism to Modernism. And of course, as every area of performance has the capacity for dramatic action the theatrical and musical stages are rife with possibility. With each rebellious performance, its temporal propagation (whether adapted instantaneously or most likely after a series of subsequent performances) can successfully change aspects of cultural life. Any adaptation of the prevailing norms depends on the group's acceptance of the concepts surrounding the breach, and Turner's writing celebrates not only the formation of cultural critique, direct or veiled, but the "lively possibilities of rejection" that comes with them (Turner, 1988, p. 22). To quantify the success of the Turnerian Rebels dealt with here, the context of their breach and their use of symbolic positioning will become crucial in evaluating the liminality in their work.

### **Concepts behind the dominant symbol and symbolic positioning**

Focusing on how social change is a direct result of effective performance activity, Turner explores its complex array of verbal and non-verbal symbols, signs and gestures. The anthropologist Milton Singer defines performance as *an orchestration of media* in which each media can have a subtle variation of message rather than the same unified meaning. Through the assemblage and manipulation of these components an ambiguous liminal message can be created. In *The Forest of Ritual symbol*, Turner echoes this sentiment viewing drama as the *score* that the symbols, or *notes*, create (Turner, 1970, p. 48). Inspired by the Polish philosopher and sociologist Florian Znaniecki, Turner sees symbols as being a "product of culture, not of nature" (Turner, 1970, p. 32). In Znaniecki's view natural systems are objectively given and exist independently of human activity and experience, whereas cultural systems rely on human participation and conscious for their meaning and existence. Baudrillard's abstract call to revolutionise the symbol is therefore apt as it is pivotal in

cultural communication. Turner recognizes that within each drama there is a nucleus of dominant symbols that hold extreme multivocality and encapsulate the major thematic properties of the drama. In the Nbemdu tribe he observed how dominant symbols were not singular to one ritual but can be present in a variety of such and only certain associations may be drawn to attention in each specific performance. When considering the performance of a modern Turnerian Rebel this could be viewed as a cross pollination of symbols from different cultural arenas, from politics to sport, to cultural institutions. There is also a much larger set of interrelated symbols or signs surrounding these, often univocal and gestural, which are like “prepositions in language” in that they are pivotal to keeping the action going (Turner V., 1970).

While exploring the interaction of the dominant symbols, Turner advises of the three main, closely related empirical attributes: condensation, unification and polarization. Condensation describes how multiple meanings are perceived by the senses to a given symbolic vehicle. Building on from this initial concept, there is the unification of seemingly disparate significata of symbols. Diverse significata can be thematically interconnected symbols that have the capacity to represent concepts drawn from different domains of social and ethical experience. At a simple level colour can be used to metaphorically connect. In the case of the Nbemdu tribe the dominant symbolic myudi/milk tree encompasses themes of nourishment and dependency. It unifies diverse social themes and phenomena that are associated with the various rituals it is used in – matrilineage, the novice, breast feeding, learning and unity. Polarisation of significata is attributed to a symbol’s dual poles of meaning. For Turner, the symbol is made up of a social or ideological pole and a sensory or *orectic* pole. The significata of the sensory pole arouse desires and feelings, and are often closely related to the visual form of the symbol, while the ideological significata are associated with the arrangement of social norms and values. In a single symbol these poles

can intermingle. Often unconsciously stimulated senses are connected to the ethical and judicial, and thus there is the possibility of contrary themes merging as the obligatory can become the desirable. Basic emotions can become “ennobled by coming into contact with social values”, so for instance a civic constraint can be transformed to a “virtue of love” (Turner, 1970, p. 30). In effect multiple ideas and themes can simultaneously be represented in a symbol, acting as an abridged version of what would otherwise be a lengthy argument – partially driven by this capacity of the symbol to diffuse “emotional quality to types of behaviour and situations apparently far removed from the original meaning” (Turner, 1970, p. 29). So within his complex structure of social drama and ritual, symbols operate at multiple levels and can have inherent paradoxes due to this intermingling.

Finally Turner goes on to identify three fields of symbolic expression. From his anthropologist viewpoint, each brings a different aspect to be observed. There is the indigenous or exegetical, the operational and the positional meaning of the symbol. The exegetical meaning concerns the indigenous participants and their interpretation of it. This can vary from the expert to the lay person, however for all participants it shows the associative links of the active unconscious and internal coherences. The operational meaning refers to what is done with the symbol and not just what is said about it. It is here that Turner sees the symbol as having the most bearing for an observer of social dynamics. The verbal and gestural way in which the group handle the symbol is essential in detecting the successful communication of dramatic action – whether liminal or not. Also for Turner it is necessary to observe those who are excluded from the performance, which is interesting when reverting back to Augé and Garcia’s questions surrounding group definition. Here exclusion or inclusion of certain group members demonstrates the community’s values and customs. Although perhaps, it could be contended that, disparities amongst members are more tautly felt in today’s increasingly aesthetic and globalised culture. And there is the positional



meaning, where each multireferential symbol holds relationships to other multireferential or univocal symbols and acquire their own significance to the whole. Turner observed that certain meanings or significata associated with the symbol are given prevalence within the positional context and that “the same symbol may be reckoned to have different phases in a ritual performance, or rather, different senses become paramount at different times” (Turner, 1970, p. 52). Their positioning is imperative, with their properties becoming dynamic in the hands of a Turnerian Rebel. Ritual, political, jural and “kinship” symbols essential to social processes are no longer abstract and atemporal, but dynamic and subject to “changing modes of signification in temporal socio cultural processes” (Turner, 1970, p. 149). Although perhaps apparent, it is worth emphasising that contradictions can lie between the exegetical and operational meanings. The effect of the symbol on the participants in any type of social drama or ritual (i.e. whether it is liminal or not) can be very different to how at a surface level they interpret it. The milk tree of the Nbemdu tree can celebrate matrilineage, the mother-daughter bond in a young girl’s puberty ritual, and yet it can serve to geographically separate the mother and daughter as the location of the village the daughter marries in to may be many miles away (exhibiting a form of symbolic polarisation). Also in the context of the Turnerian Rebels of this study, quantification of the operational meaning of the symbol is impossible, as the audience and those excluded remain unknown. However by looking at the Western symbols, exegetical significata and the subsequent positioning traces of liminality will be observed.

As can be seen Turner’s concerns extend not only to the static structures of anthropology and social ideological poles but also to the sensory poles at play as human actions must be conceptualized beyond the immediate surface (Turner, 1970, p. 36). By recognizing the contradictions between perception and behaviour of the participants, he gives the psychological, unconscious behaviour as much elevation as the social normative

behaviour exhibited. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to include all aspects of his theories. This would entail an anthropological study and would require an assessment of a vast and periodic set of communal rituals in order to offer a meaningful analysis. However it is important to bear in mind that for Turner ritual or drama is a mobilization of energies as well as messages. An effective liminal thinker puts into effect dominant symbols and if utilized effectively the participants are aware of an ambiguity, disintegration or disruption of norms and are mobilised psychologically, sensually and ideologically. Such a liminal individual is moving away from the binary, dualistic tendencies of Western thinking. Also they are not purely motivated by self-interest but are socially involved, seeing themselves as members of a community or as Turner puts it a “representative of other parties” (Turner, 1970, p. 38). When looking at the work of our Turnerian Rebel’s the playwright Sarah Kane and musician David Byrne, it shall be seen how they assemble, juxtapose, enhance and undermine dominant cultural symbols to induce communal liminality. It will challenge the idea that communal structures, shared experience and histories have fully broken down, rather demonstrating that they can take place in continually changing forms.

## Chapter Three: Turnerian Rebel Case Study 1 - David Byrne overthrows Pop Hierarchy!

“The artists desire to be free of the frame is a function of the frames need to expand”

Paul Mann, teacher, actor, director (Tomlin, 2013, p. 23)

In identifying David Byrne's Turnerian breach the cultural context from which he and his band Talking Heads developed must be assessed. Talking Heads emerged from the New York punk rock scene of the late nineteen seventies. At the time the US was going through a period of economic stagnation, a result of the cost of funding the Vietnam War and reduced manufacturing output. Falling tax receipts and increased lending costs led to the near bankruptcy of New York in 1975. Resulting budget cuts led to a period of economic decline for the city (Phillips-Fein, 2013). The subsequent low rents and vacant loft spaces however created a fertile ground for eclectic artistic activity.

This eclecticism is reflected in Talking Head's sound, encompassing pop, art rock, avante garde, funk, punk rock, world and country. Playing in the now legendary venue, CBGBs, their performance was in keeping with a scene in which reductionism had become a theme. In his book *How Music Works*, Byrne recalls it as a rethinking of the rock/pop genre – a “performance style defined by negatives” with no show-off-y solos, stage patter or stereotypical rock lyrics (Byrne, 2012, p. 39). Considered part of the New Wave movement Talking Heads had much in common with the emerging do-it-yourself punk attitudes. While bands like the Ramones performed along similar lines, not allowing fancy solos etc. for Byrne Talking Head's “most subversive thing was to look totally normal” (Byrne, 2012, p. 46). David Byrne lyrics coupled with an emphasis on showmanship, show a performer concerned with rethinking the elevated and professionalised conventions of the rock/pop star. With their growing popularity and increased touring, Talking Heads songs moved to a new

context and took on different meaning from the secular art rock movement they were formed in.

Byrne develops his own sonic anthropological musings in his *How Music Works*. As an artistic creator, he holds a deep knowledge of the traditions of his medium. Observing that with the historical changes of musical performative spaces, for music “the space the platform and the software makes the art” (Byrne, 2012, p. 14). Changing spaces called for acoustic changes, and with this the audience behaviour altered too. Gothic churches called for simple harmonics in order for the notes not to reverberate around the space interfering with each other. Later composers, like Mozart, played to the grand but smaller rooms of their patron’s abodes. Decor and dress would consume the notes and thus the music could become intricate in its details. Around the same time people would eat drink and talk at operas, so the music had bombast to facilitate this. David Byrne also sites Bach and Wagner’s acoustic arrangements as having been influenced by divergent spaces of play (2012). In the early twentieth century, jazz developed in small locations with little reverberations so “the groove could be strong and upfront” (Byrne, 2012, p. 21). Classical music underwent change in the sense of audience participation, chatting and eating were no longer permissible to allow for the appreciation of complex passages – a sensibility eventually echoed in the jazz venues. And perhaps here we can further identify Byrne’s breach, as for him the consequence was to “separate the body from the head” (Byrne, 2012, p. 22). This demarcation evolved as an intellectual, social construct.

The new technology of recorded music, the microphone, radio, personal sound systems, meant that successful recorded music needed to evolve to fit in with the venues the band were selling out, i.e. sporting arenas and stadiums – effectively bringing with it the emergence of arena rock. It increasingly focused on the euphoric social experience where the anthemic rock star became a godlike figure to adore. Armed with new technologies and

knowledge of the social traditions of performance, his breach therefore is to reduce Western worship of the individual and connect liminally the communal sensory experience with a social awareness and conscience. Analysis of Talking Heads' *Stop Making Sense* concert movie and a more recent live David Byrne performance with St Vincent should allow us to view this Turnerian Rebel in action.

### **The Pop Star as Dominant Symbol - Talking Heads' Stop Making Sense**

“...the ruling classes... divided the people, separating actors from spectators: people who act and the people who watch – the party is over!”

Augusto Boal, theatre director, writer, politician (Boal, 2000, p. 115)

David Byrne worked as set director on the Talking Heads' *Stop Making Sense* concert movie, alongside director Jonathan Demme. The documentary footage, for the most part, is free of cuts and edits that could otherwise obstruct or modify interpretation (Demme, 1984). As Byrne recalls he wished to explore “the wiggle room of the pop concert” (Byrne, 2012, p. 57). His breach unfolds as a re-envisaging of the rock star, uncovering the patriarchal and subservient qualities inherent in the rock/pop concert through gesture and imagery. The performance captures the audience through music and shared energy. But rather than falling into the penchant for “pseudo naturalism and the cult of spontaneity as a kind of authenticity” of performance, Byrne's choreography re-contextualises the role of arty pop music and also the stage setting itself (Byrne, 2012, p. 48). Although it must be observed this was a time before video screens projecting pop performers took off – an aspect that now problematizes the concert experience further – the liminal implications of this performance however still upturn conventions that even now permeate communal consciousness.

The show opens with Byrne, wearing a pale grey suit, entering the empty stage with a ghetto blaster and a guitar. The transparency of the medium and the undercutting of typical

features of the pop setting are brought to the fore. He starts to sing *Psycho Killer*. Behind him the backstage remains open and exposed, mirroring a pared down backing track that plays (see Figure 1). The showmanship is feint, appearing low key and, in light of the genre and the audience in attendance, anti-concert. By his positioning of the suit and the undressed stage he adopts these symbols to create new indigenous and operational meanings. The suit evokes meanings of sameness and officialdom. As the song comes to a close he jerks in puppet like movements around the stage as the backing track begins to skip and start. Connotations of sameness now appear both positively and negatively, communal and authoritarian. His puppet like movements question tropes surrounding concert and performer, authenticity and spontaneity. Significata of entertainment, politics and business intermingle, as the suit's implied conservatism goes against the image of the venerated arty pop star. Thus, while bundled up in a killer's lyric, it re-interprets both the establishment and anti-establishment. Simultaneously the crew begin to set up the stage, and continue to do so over a number of songs while other performers incrementally join him on stage. This acknowledgement of the creative process invites the audience to see all the players/actors, and when viewed through a postmodern lens, appearing as a deconstruction and decentering of the medium.



**Figure 1. David Byrne singing *Psycho Killer*, Figure 2. Platform and Drum kit assembled for drummer Chris Frantz (Demme, 1984)**

This transparency was innovative, and doesn't lessen the magic of the performance, for the incremental construction of the stage becomes part of the show, as gear is moved into place

and electrical cables are attached. A preparatory element normally obscured by the naturalistic swagger and stagemanship of the pop performer. A climax is reached in speed and tone once all band members are on stage with the songs *Burning Down the House* and *Life during Wartime*.

There is to be no hierarchy amongst the musicians, the addition of each band member's instrument is heard with their onstage arrival, particularly the rhythms of Chris Frantz's drums (see Figure 2) and Jerry Harrison's keyboard. By the fourth song, *Found a Job*, all members of Talking Heads are on the stage. When the backup singers, Edna Holt and Lynn Mabry, keyboardist Bernie Worrell of Parliament and Funkadelic, percussionist Steve Scales and guitarist Alex Weir appear the concert picks up tempo considerably. As David Byrne removes his suit jacket, everyone is neutralised and equalised by colour; in this case grey. Byrne is attempting to eliminate, as much as possible, the cultural baggage of clothes. No one stands out as each is ordinarily dressed. Thus they, with gesture, create a symbolic unification of the actors; who, while all actors on the stage, would normally be differentiated as white Talking Head members and a black backing band. As the audience and stage participants are repositioned positively in a communal celebration rather than adoration or mutual vanity, words are also key. The lyrics to songs, normally heard on a record, are recontextualised by the performance connecting with "body orientated grooves" (Byrne, 2012, p. 45). The ideological and intellectual trivialisation of sensory experience is removed with all senses liminally awakened - a feature seen further on in Sarah Kane's use of tragic form. When for instance Tina Weymouth joins him, the first to do so, the lyrics "*Heaven is a place / a place where nothing ever happens – party and everyone leaves at exactly the same time and it will start over again and be exactly the same*" explore existential concerns. And as the tempo is purposively increased the lyrics of alienation connect to the persuasive beats that

move and rouse the body. Performance, with a notable lack of overt sexuality, gives additional meaning to the preknown text of the pop song.

A juxtaposition of music, visual symbols and gestural movement continues throughout. *Burning Down The House* sees Byrne running on the spot and stepping side to side in tandem with the guitarist Alex Weir. *Life during wartime* is punctuated by similar moves. Byrne's idiosyncratic style of dancing to the lyrics "*this ain't no party*", which is an odd mish-mash of arms swishes, slithering knee movement and head bobbing, doesn't seem laughable but rather shows how it "possible to mix ironic humour with sincerity of performance" (Byrne, 2012, p. 33). Eventually this morphs into the front stage members running on the spot. Continuing they begin to lean forward as they do so (see Figures 3 & 4). The simplistic nature of the movement is shown to be a part of a choreographed set piece and again the audience are encouraged to view that everyone is both musically and visually part of the whole. As mentioned undoubtedly under Byrne's stage direction, there is no overt sexuality in the performance. Byrne, in particular, jerks in almost anti-sexual movements. This rethinks how sex might normally sell pop or rock-and-roll with the performers embodying a breach of this, as both a static pared down symbol and an action.

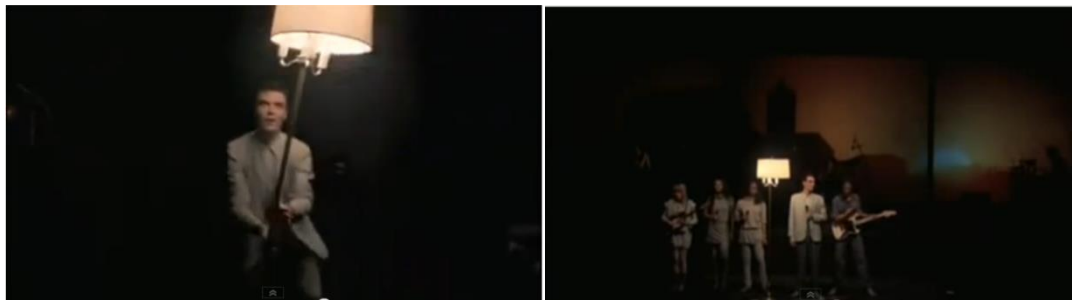


**Figures 3 & 4. Running on the spot while performing Lifetime During War (Demme, 1984)**

After the initial introduction of increasingly upbeat music and stage members, the loosely defined second section, begins with *Making Flippy Floppy* and ends with *Once in a*



*Lifetime*. During which Byrne continually moves around the stage - jogging on the spot, bobbing his head, seemingly losing control of his body and dancing with a floor lamp. The lamp as a Turnerian symbol takes various meanings both as stage lighting and as a prop for Byrne. Significata that come to the fore when coupled with the lyrics for *This Must Be the Place* are home, house, family – notably to another song these may not be emphasized and may just add an eerie/dreary lighting effect. A concept that home is anywhere is established by simple visual techniques - the background projections display different landscapes from shelves of books, to a cityscape and a countryside. Here explicitly the imagery and music, intellectually and sensuously, encourage a sense of communitas. Throughout the stark set design and simplistic lighting, allow for a greater focus on the performers, objects and their symbolical positioning.



**Figures 5 & 6. Lamp for lighting and symbolic stage prop during "This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody)" (Demme, 1984)**



**Figure 7. Huge suit, Figure 8. Large Clown-like pants (Demme, 1984)**

The final section starts with the The Tom Tom Club's *Genius of Love* followed by *Girlfriend Is Better* and the introduction the iconic big suit. Using a fitted armature

underneath, the oversized suit worn by Byrne gives the illusion of his head appearing smaller. His jerky movement underneath make for a discombobulate watch. The enlargement of the everyday costume of the suit acts in unexpected ways, as a symbol of business and uniformity more explicitly becomes a harbinger of fun. Once he takes off the jacket for the closing songs *Take Me to the River* and *Crosseyed and Painless* the significata associated with the oversized suit trousers is re-imagined to connect with those of a clown. During *Take Me to the River* Byrne introduces the members of the band in indiscriminate order again reducing normalized stage hierarchies. Without falling into stereotypical roles, Byrne and the band's simple physical presence succeed in expanding the audience's perception of what it means to be at an arena sized concert. While all the movements appear natural, they are clearly choreographed. Byrne undoubtedly is deeply preparatory in his efforts, as he creates new contexts for the familiar. Elements of dominant symbols are tweaked, as he takes his queues from simple "certain stage rules [that] appear universal" – perhaps due to his wide interest in performance arts from ritual to Asian Theatre (Byrne, 2012, p. 58). His comments on the theatricality of Balian ritual where "epic performances blended religious and theatrical elements", and in particularly the presentational form that "did not pretend to be natural" confirm his performative preoccupations (Byrne, 2012, p. 51). So while appearing at once happy to be alive and making music, by reducing the false spontaneity of the rock star persona this Turnerian Rebel's work also engages the intellect and moves the body to induce liminal communitas.

### **The Pop Star as Dominant Symbol Again - David Byrne and St Vincent's Love This Giant Tour**

David Byrne and St Vincent's recent 2013 tour in support of their collaborative album *Love this Giant* (2012) echoes the concerns exhibited in *Stop Making Sense*. Thirty years on inevitably cultural changes have taken place – New York, Byrne's music and live experience

are all culturally enveloped by monetary success and new technology. He is now an elder statesman of art-pop. Gone are the techniques of setting up the stage and use of everyday symbols, such as the lamp and suit, and at first glance this slick show is an ill conceived example of an active Turnerian Rebel. However the choreography, clothing, simple stage lighting and an emphasis on full participation shows how the pop concert and star remain fertile Turnerian symbols to be toyed with. The performance maintains a similar liminal focus as Byrne continues to experiment with both music and performance.

While *How Music Works* gives a reflective insight into the preparatory work undertaken by Byrne and his cohorts for *Stop Making Sense*, the NPR website contains a short video of the rehearsals for this tour (Boilen, 2012). The viewer can see how the synchronized dancing, choreographed by Annie-B Parson, is heavily rehearsed. In it Byrne comments that at a certain point “those things that were, actually, very planned out start to look very spontaneous” (Boilen, 2012), as they become second nature for the performers “the feeling comes back into it” - a previous feature of in his earlier work where an *immaculate reconstruction* is unwanted and unnecessary. It is shown that transitions and positions are preordained for the lighting and staging to be effective, however the tightness - defined as not “everyone plays exactly to the beat; it means that everyone plays together” - holds “agreed upon” imperfections that give character or uniqueness to the performance (Byrne, 2012, p. 44). The effectiveness of his symbolic positioning is more reliant on the lyricism and the employment of gestures and movement than the *Stop Making Sense Tour*. With no giant suit to re-imagine significata of officialdom, his personal pop icon significata is enough to create establishment/anti-establishment juxtapositions similar to before.

The NPR website provides footage of the concert to be assessed (Boilen, 2013), and it must be noted the editing and camerawork increases focus on the two main players, Byrne and St Vincent, a.k.a Annie Clark. There is still enough space to fully appreciate the role of

the eight piece brass band musicians playing trombones, trumpets, tubas, other horns and saxophonists. Accompanied by a keyboardist and drummer, their music is powerful but is only the start of what they do. They strut and make formations, like a street band, a marching band and at times even as line dancers circling and joining Byrne and Clark in a series of choreographed moves. Often Byrne, in particular, is an equal part of these formations. Colour palate is also neutralised, Byrne in black and white (including black and white oxford shoes), Clark in a black dress and heels, and the band similarly smartly dressed in monochrome outfits. This, as in the previous case study, on its own would not appear liminal, however when coupled with musical participation and exchange it calls for a reassessment. Byrne and Clark sing each other's songs beyond their collaborative work on the *Love This Giant* album, and the bands instrumentation makes no concessions to each pop song. They prove to be more than purely for accompaniment or background aesthetics. With the opening track *Who* all participants line up in a grid-like fashion across the stage, seen in Figure 9, but it is with the change in positioning in *Strange Overtones*, a tender and sophisticated song from Byrne's 2008 partnership with Brian Eno, that the performance begins to really show its liminal purpose. Some combine in a circle behind Byrne playing together and others play to the side accompanied by Clark. There is movement back and forth amongst the players and Clark does odd, muted faltering dance moves as they sing "you are strong and you are tough / but a heart is not enough". By the third song *Marrow*, one of Clark's solo compositions, the brass section is a key player and with David Byrne they flank the left and right of the stage (see Figure 10), eventually moving in towards her centre stage figure. They bounce to the ominous beat, as she sings "muscle connects to the bone / And bone to the ire and the marrow / I wish I had a gentle mind / And a spine made up of iron". Unexpected stage directions combine with unexpected lyrics, as a reflexive - yet ambiguous - critique of form.



**Figure 9. Opening song, Figure 10. Musicians flanking the side of stage (Boilen, 2013)**

The band forms a semi circle around Byrne and Clarke (see Figure 12) in *The One Who Broke Your Heart* as the lyrics make surprising cross references to the Garden of Eden and a street cafe. As they move up and down and employ simple hula-esque hand gestures (see Figure 11) their purpose is re-imagined by the lyrical content, “In the struggle for freedom / everyone looks the same” and “we all deserve to wear that crown”. The main stars Byrne and Clark never touch and rarely look at one another, effectively placing emphasis on the collaboration between them and equally with the brass band. There is a friendliness in the music and yet no intimacy in the gestures or lyrics. This intermingling and juxtaposition of movement, lyricism and musicianship happens continually. From *I Am An Ape*, where the red lights rise and fall with the beat as the brass section snakes across the stage to eventually overshadow the two main players (see Figure 13), to the *The Forest Awakes*, as Annie Clarke shuffles and makes boxes with her hands, the other musicians move around the stage in a similar box like formation. The robotic non sexual gestures echo in the lyrics “a time of confusion / the heart is a simple equation”, with each instrumental accentuated in their grid-like Pacman-esque moves. Eventually the song culminates in a wall of sound as they all move to their places in a line across the stage (see Figure 14). Rather than end here they spread back out to finish the song – proven part of a whole and yet pivotal as individual participants. The concert continues in a similar manner with *I Should Watch TV*, *Lightning* and closing with *Burning Down The House*.



**Figure 11. Simple moves reminiscent of hula dancing, Figure 12. Musicians in a circle move up and down in time (Boilen, 2013)**



**Figure 13. Musicians snake around stage stopping and obstructing view of Byrne and Clark, Figure 14. Line up on equal footing (Boilen, 2013)**

For Byrne every step, every gesture, every note is choreographed. He becomes a purveyor of cultural iconography and gesture as he re-evaluates the possibilities for the popular musical performer – by identifying and breaking down hierarchies as the sensory experience of the music intermingles with the ideology of the pop star. As Imamu Amira Baraka viewed music in itself as an unconscious expression of cultural attitudes and individual longings exhibiting “*certain specific ways of thinking about the world*”. For Baraka “*Music, as paradoxical as it might seem, is the result of thought perfected at its most empirical, i.e. as attitude or stance*” (Jürgen, 2004, p. 316). At a sensory level musical sounds and rhythms entrall and entertain people, and when music and performance coincide it can give a different dimension to musical meaning. These attitudes can become increasingly liminal and rebellious. The multireferentiality of Talking Head’s and David Byrne’s later

collaborative music, from funk, pop, african, jazz, country, is now a normal musical mode with mobility and globalisation increasing cross cultural influence. Also the context of late seventies and early eighties New York, America is no longer relevant. Thus certain liminal aspects have lost their urgency, subsumed by social norms. And yet viewing this recent performance, there are still elements that are unexpected - elements that succeed in subverting mainstream rock/pop hierarchies.

## Chapter Four: Turnerian Rebel Case Study 2 - Sarah Kane's Violent Ideologies

“Tragedy resists the trivialization of experience, which is the project of the authoritarian regime”

Howard Barker, playwright (1997, P. 18)

As with David Byrne it is necessary to explore the British social context of Sarah Kane's work to establish her breach. Like contemporary classical and jazz venues, Western theatrical space morphed into bastions filled with reverential audiences. The theatrics of Marlowe and Shakespeare while undoubtedly subversive needed bombast and entertainment to appeal to the wide variety of audience members, many of whom spoke and socialized during the performance. As the stage receded and audiences quietened, themes could be defined by a subtler use of metaphor and language. As noted in Aleks Sierz's *In Rewriting the Nation*, in comparison to other Western theatrical scenes British drama is known for staging a high percentage of “new writing”, bringing with it a distinct voice (Sierz, 2011, p. 16). John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), first staged at the Royal Court, is often seen as a turning point in British drama. Performances of the works of British playwrights like Arnold Wesker, John Arden and Edward Bond, were staged alongside works by international writers such as Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. Sierz notes that a British theatre emerged with an international feel but “spoke of a very British aesthetic” of naturalist style and a realist agenda (Sierz, 2011, p. 17). The playwrights of this new wave of socially aware gritty *kitchen sink* drama have been criticized for imbuing anti-gay or anti-women prejudices, due to what Sierz views as an “absence of imaginative vitality” in narratives still, perhaps unknowingly, immersed in patriarchal binaries and thus discourse (Sierz, 2011, p. 18). From the increasingly aggressive politics of the late nineteen sixties and seventies, such as the explorations of Marxist politics in Trevor Griffith's *The*



*Party* (1973), the nineteen eighties saw a shift once more “as women, black and gay playwrights confronted questions of difference and sexual identity” (Sierz, 2011, p. 19). This is evident in Howard Brenton’s *The Roman’s in Britain* (1981) and Churchill’s *Topgirls* (1982) attempt to find an alternative voice in Thatcher’s England. In the wake of the heavily televised Gulf War, the Yugoslav civil war and the newly emerging bonding of art and politics seen in Blair’s Cool Britannia, “in yer face” theatre materialized as a sensibility in which playwrights employed shocking and confrontational material. Developing the innovative imaginative legacies of Carol Churchill and Samuel Beckett, Sarah Kane emerged at this time.

Kane in her own search for truth attempts to grasp modern ontological uncertainty. This Turnerian Rebel’s style is visceral in its violent extremities, and like Byrne her breach is an attempt to address the loss of connection between the intellect and the body and also the distancing effect the media now plays in this. Many of the aforementioned twentieth century British playwrights chartered provocative territory – the stoned baby in Bond’s *Saved* or the anal rape in Brenton’s *The Roman’s in Britain*. Citing Bond as an influence, Sarah Kane’s dramaturgy contains similar poetic symbolic affects although her fragmentation of the theatrical form further crosses pre-existing boundaries. In *Suspect Culture* Clare Wallace observes that the methods employed by Kane, were similar to the extremities of Sensation Drama of the eighteen nineties, in that they often lead “more to an excess of incident than an overall cohesion of the plot” (Wallace, 2006, p. 89). In effect she does away with the discursive patriarchal restrictions critiqued in the work of Osborne and his contemporaries. Her metaphorical landscapes align themselves closer to the non-realist traditions and are concerned with internal and psychological reality. Her imagery depicts extreme physical and psychological states it is made “compelling to audiences who are, culturally and linguistically diverse” (Wallace, 2006, p. 186). Elaine Aston similarly views Kane’s work as a “perceptual

critique” which offers “dramaturgical, political and aesthetic invitations for us to feel differently” (Wald, 2007, p. 207). What Aston, and to a lesser extent Wallace, detect could easily be interpreted as features of Victor Turner’s liminality as she sets about re-imagining theatrical traditions and cultural perceptions. For this case study the text rather than a specific performance will be the source, with a focus on two of her earlier plays *Blasted* and *Cleansed* as they contain stark stage direction indicating her symbolic intentions.

### **Violence as Dominant Symbol - Sarah Kane’s *Blasted***

“Performance is visceral. It puts you in direct physical contact with thought and feeling”

Sarah Kane, playwright (Saunders, 2002, p. 15)

Like her peers Kane constantly challenged the constraints of theatrical form, however her artistry and humanity is influenced as much by the classics as by contemporary culture. As Edward Bond observes, *Blasted* is full of "ancient" imagery and goes on to say that all artists “bring the ancient imagery, changed and unchanged into the focus of their age” (Saunders, 2002, p. 25). Perhaps Victor Turner would have detected that this ancient imagery Bond refers to was at one point the output of a liminal thinker. Kane’s work displays the influence of Beckett, Artaud, Sartre, Barker, Genet, Greek tragedy and even Shakespeare, with very little “sense of external reality” (Saunders, 2002, p. 10). Christopher Innes notes that Kane’s “action and figures only have validity as symbolic expression” (Innes, p. 530), the expressions of which are reflected further in her use of form. As she moves from a parlour like realism to experimental figurative violence, she tests not only the audience's sensibilities, but also the boundaries of theatrical performance. In her radical experimentation and manipulation, content and form constantly jar and reiterate each other. By symbolically and emotively connecting themes Kane manages to invoke a moral questioning in the audience -

as to be expected of a Turnerian Rebel. Here she questions how far removed intimate domestic violence is from the atrocities of war.

The audience are introduced to the expensive Leeds hotel room, equipped with telephone, large double bed, mini bar and champagne, large bouquet of flowers. A setting which starts out as a private refuge but increasingly is encroached by a sense of menace. Ian who is forty five is accompanied by the much younger Cate, twenty one. Their pairing is particularly odd and uncomfortable when a previous sexual relationship is hinted to have taken place many years before. Immediately he is set up as crass, uncouth and a bully, with the opening line "*I've shat in better places than this*" (Kane, 2001, p. 3). It is his return from the bathroom with a loaded gun, which he places under his pillow, that establishes the power relations at play. As a symbol the gun has significata of power, violence and masculinity and coupled with the racist commentary of Ian has serious undertones. The childlike presence of Cate acts as a foil to this and in particular her thumb sucking has significata of innocence, naivety and childishness. Her perceived vulnerability is heightened when her learning difficulties are mentioned and later with her stress induced fainting. The interactions between Cate and Ian display intimations of their identity interdependency, his dominance versus her subservience. At first she comes across as no match for the chain smoking heavy drinking Ian, with his concerns for the personal and the gratuitous. Although remaining innocent of any crime Ian's language defines him, and as Patricia Holland observes he "operates with a set of values borrowed from the tabloid paper on which he works" (Saunders, 2002, p. 54). Such terminology constantly peppers his language, and is sometimes explicitly racist, "*the wogs and the fucking football fans*", (Kane, 2001, p. 19) or sexist.

In the second scene it becomes apparent that overnight Ian has raped Cate, flowers are strewn around the room. With the symbol physically altered it becomes something new, acting as evidence of a physical touse and the breakdown of multiple significata such as

innocence and growth, wealth and the veneer of civilised behaviour. The scene opens with Ian drinking gin and undergoing an attack on his “*heart, lung, liver and kidneys*” (Kane, 2001, p. 24). Watched by Cate, he recovers and whilst preparing for a shower he continues to drink, smoke and reacquaint himself with the gun. He goads Cate to “*have a pop*” throwing the gun on the bed beside her (Kane, 2001, p. 25), she appears to toy with the idea but instead destroys his leather jacket. As he discovers and stares at the damage of his jacket she starts to slap him over the head. After a tussle on the bed Cate finally gains the upper hand by taking the gun from its holster and pointing it to Ian’s groin. She however faints and Ian simulates sex on her passive body. Throughout this scene Ian makes seemingly odd comments, “*We’re one*” (Kane, 2001, p. 26), perhaps connecting her act of revenge on his jacket to his own actions. Then after she comes around for the second time and wants to leave he wishes her to stay as he is scared and she makes him “*feel safe*” (Kane, 2001, p. 28). He mistakes the sound of a backfiring car with that of a gun. While undoubtedly an abhorrent character, Kane begins to plant the seeds of an ambiguous moral standpoint to Ian, especially when in later scenes he too becomes a victim of violence. Here however he goes on to reveal the possibility of a much more ominous career than cynical hack. With Ian lulled into a moment of weakness, Cate enacts her revenge - with a *fellatio* attack. Ian connects his need for violent behaviour, both towards Cate and others, with saving the country. Cate doesn’t buy it and whilst still in obvious turmoil looks out the window declaring “*Looks like there is a war on*” (Kane, 2001, p. 33). There are two separate knocks on the door. First breakfast is delivered, on the plate there is meat which Cate won’t eat, a stance that becomes significant later. Then after persistent knocking there is the unexpected intrusion of *the war*, in the form of a soldier. Up until this point the door has been an uneasy disquieting object invoking anxiety and lack of human agency. There is a blinding light, the sound of an explosion and a blackout accompanied by the sound of summer rain.

Kane employs an innovative change in theatrical style, as the hotel room has been blasted by a mortar bomb. An unexpected occurrence on what until now had been mostly a standard, although unnerving, parlour drama. All the previous signposts and multi-vocal symbols are now covered in dust, as the intimate domestic scene has been encroached on by the war. The abrupt change in form echoes, as Kane puts it, the “confused and illogical” aspects of war (Saunders, 2002, p. 48). New adverse conditions see the dynamics between Cate and Ian change and at times take an about turn, as Ian's physical ability is continually reduced. Although stylistically experimental, Kane attempts techniques of mirroring characters similar to Ibsen or Bond. This is seen between Ian and the soldier, particularly in their language and then in their action of rape. The soldier recounts his participation in a violent war crime in staccato matter of fact graphic sentences, *"Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. They held the men while I fucked the women."* (Kane, 2001, p. 43), it is reminiscent of the rhythms of the news story Ian dictates down the phone in the first scene. This parallel with Ian's value systems creates a connection to the actions of the soldier - showing how little the violence of war is removed from the domestic. The rules have changed, as by the end of the third scene the soldier has raped Ian and sucked out his eyes, but this time the violence is on stage not behind closed doors. While the audience are not to be saved from the brutality of the act, the stage is limited to stylized representation. The soldier is both a “personification of Ian's psyche” and his worst fears realised (Saunders, 2002, p. 45). Here a paradoxical polarization of the violence of war is both uncovered and re-imagined by Kane, as the reasoned and rationalized subject of war, violent and often indiscriminate, becomes viscerally equated with the unreasonable and irrational action of the rape.



**Stark stage imagery of *Blasted*: Figure 16. After gauging out Ian's eyes the soldier kills himself, Norwegian Production. Figure 17. Ian lives on, original Royal Court production [REF: <http://www.iainfisher.com/kane.html>]**

By scene four, the soldier has killed himself. His escape from the nightmare of war can be equated to what has become Ian's slow - deliberate - physical deterioration. This clash with war is reflective of Ian's personal path. His body is emasculated exposing the tension of body and mind, expression and action. The reduction of the body mirrors the surrounding chaos and the deconstruction of the hotel room containing the social motifs of Ian's life. Cate returns with a baby, another symbol of innocence (see Figure 16). As she doesn't believe in suicide she scuppers the now blind Ian's chance of suicide by removing the bullets before handing him the revolver. The baby on the other hand, who Ian calls a "*Lucky bastard*", dies (Kane, 2001, p. 57). The final scene opens with the makeshift burial of the child under floorboards. Liminality, as conceived in Turner's work, is perhaps more starkly interpreted not in the initial clashes or mirroring of the characters but in the final gestures. Ian, alone on the stage is seen strangling himself, crying, shitting, laughing hysterically, hugging the dead soldier's body, lying in weakness, and finally tearing up the floorboards he eats the baby and climbs into its burial site, to eventually die with relief. The series of stark vivid imagery reverberate as each is divided by the lights dropping to darkness, and his eventual death sees him being better off. Cate returns with food and blood seeping between her legs, indicating she could have been raped again or that the wounds of violence don't heal, as Ian dismissively suggested earlier – they live on. Drinking gin and eating the sausages that she

earlier refused indicate that she may be more like Ian now, a toughened victim. However the symbolic thumb sucking after feeding the incapacitated (dead but appearing alive - with his head popping up out of the floorboard where the baby was buried - see Figure 16) Ian suggests not only a living hell but a preserved humanity. In the symbolic character of Cate lies a liminality that is much truer to human experience, as a hopeful, perhaps coarsened, form of humanity. This positioning of humanity and inhumanity show how they always co-exist and intermingle, as Caryl Churchill summates it is “rather a tender play... able to move between into the surreal to show connections between the local, domestic violence and the atrocities of war” (Saunders, 2002, p. 25).

### **Institution as Dominant Symbol – Sarah Kane’s Cleansed**

*“You are my doctor, my saviour, my omnipotent judge, my priest, my god the surgeon of my soul”*

Psychosis 4.48 (Kane, 2001, p. 233)

Kane again recreates extreme forms of stage imagery and gestures to attain symbolic importance and express intangible emotions and ugly truths in *Cleansed*. In *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia*, Christine Wald observes that she “portrays the social and institutional processes of exclusion and punishment” (Wald, 2007, p. 199). The excessiveness of non realistic violence again sensationally grabs attention; however her themes are less focused on violence than on the ideologies that create their social viability. Violent action removed or disassociated from the context and intent uncovers the covert brutality of cultural logic and ideology. Whilst the characters and gestures are still ultimately symbolic expression, the inherent violence of the psychoanalytical and educational ideologies explored are less obvious than the domestic violence/international atrocity juxtapositions of *Blasted*. Arguably,

when coupled with the increased ambiguity of the character's roles and culpability, *Cleansed* is a work that is riper in the inducement of liminal thinking.

This episodic play, as Susannah Clap sees it, “does not so much unfold as accumulate”, commences within the perimeter fence of an old university (Kane, 2001, p. 87). The two main narratives that emerge of Grace, Graham and Robin and of Carl and Rod are coupled with the tortuous interventions of Tinker. The gruesome violence imposed on the characters is impossible to stage naturalistically and becomes aesthetically symbolic rather than nihilistic or gratuitous. Kane is inviting the audience to feel differently about the social and psychological role of love, its constructs and the oppressive nature of gender politics. Whilst snowing, Tinker is “*heating smack on a silver spoon*” for Graham (Kane, 2001, p. 107). Graham makes it clear he wants to overdose to which Tinker replies “*I’m a dealer not a doctor*” (Kane, 2001, p. 107) however he continues to load the spoon to assist Graham in his wish. The second scene, also within the perimeter fence, is set in mid-summer. The disruptive nature of the flow of time reinforces Kane’s concerns with metaphor over literalism and imagination over realism, as seen in *Blasted*. Here, Carl expresses his undying love for Rod who is more reserved about expressing such love in return as he is unwillingly to make promises he can’t keep. Tinker watches them and a recurring theme of surveillance emerges as he is continually positioned as sadistic voyeur. Carl offers Rod a ring as a sign of his commitment, a romantic offering symbolizing love and fidelity that is progressively drawn to and tested. The significata of the ring undergoes a polarization, as at once a symbol of the virtuous all conquering love of Rod and Carl, and later as a token of disdain and repression, in the hands of Tinker. With the arrival of Grace, sister to Graham, the play moves into the interior White Room. The significata of both an old university ground and an asylum intermingle, education, hope, desire are underscored by the brutal extremity of psychiatric ideology. Their original use of space in the University could be considered the imaginative



ground that the asylum's reasoned ideology grew from; outside but within the perimeters, the Round Room (the old University library), the White Room (formerly the sanatorium), the Black Room (the showers of the sports hall converted into peep show booths) and the Red Room (the university sports hall now a torture chamber of sorts). Colours are employed to encourage similar connections – the white room is clinical and professional, the black room is hidden and voyeuristic and the red room illicit, suggesting violence and anger. Yet as the play progresses these associations intermix as each space is visually and viscerally touched by both tender and brutal behaviour.

The episodic nature of the play and the minimalist set design removes the ethical context of the indoctrinating ideologies of prisons and mental health practices and thus removes any moral interpretation for the audience. Overturning such spatial and temporal realism also allows the characters and action to sustain their legitimacy through liminal symbolic expression. Their actions become questionable in ways that may have not arisen in a straightforward narrative. This is particularly the case in the roles of Tinker which are at once polarizing and unified, as he is set up in the seemingly contradictory tasks of voyeur, drug dealer and doctor. He lies and his motives are continually blurred or at odds, for when Grace questions Graham's whereabouts he claims "*I wasn't here at the time*" (Kane, 2001, p. 112) and, when she goes on to voluntarily admit herself to the clinic, exclaims "*I am not responsible*" (Kane, 2001, p. 114). In fact with the space appearing as some kind of locked down asylum, it is shown as an environment in which Tinker appears as an omnipresence that is involved in the re-education and either purification of a conceived social taboo or ailment, or if all else fails death of the other main characters involved. Notably the combination of his omnipotence and propensity to retribution calls to mind the significata associated with religious indoctrination, bolstered by the stigmata like torture of Carl and Grace. However Kane does not allow the initial conceptions of Tinker's role to turn into some sort of binary

opposition of good versus evil, heterosexuality versus homosexuality or love versus reason - oppositions that are at odds with liminal thinking - with the peep show booth being problematic for his bad guy function in the play. He too is looking for love, albeit in questionable circumstances. For the most part, solely the domain of Tinker and the woman, the Black Room in its covertness shows a character with desires and tendencies not so far off those he condemns. Just as the others project, what Tinker sees as some personal insufficiency, onto their loved ones he in fact does the same. At one point he even goes as far as to sound like the progressively disfigured Carl, as he claims to the Woman dancing that *"I'll be anything you need"* (Kane, 2001, p. 122).



**Royal Court 1998 world premiere of *Cleansed*: Figure 17. A minimalist set with few signposts Grace makes love to Graham. Figure 18. Tinker injects Grace as Robin watches**  
[REF:<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/in-yer-face-theatre/>]

Through ambiguities of Tinker's role significant of seemingly disparate symbols such as medical practices, drug dealing, voyeurism and religion are allowed intermingle and connect. As with Blasted's Ian, he is seen to be controlled and dominated by all of the ideologies that morally operate within him. As the only other person to enter the Black Room, Robin's reaction of crying reeks of despair, innocence and perhaps an understanding of the oppressive games at play for all of them, including Tinker. Writing about Sarah Kane in *Modern British Playwriting*, Catherine Rees believes that as torturer he is attempting "to

take ownership of the words and narratives produced” (Rebellato, 2013, p. 124). His treatment of the other characters seems an internalization of misplaced social ideologies, full of their own polarized contradictions. Nowhere is this so obviously manifested than in his treatment of Carl, firstly by the removal of his tongue, then by the removal of his hand, his feet and finally his penis. Before the first mutilation Carl is threatened with a pole being pushed up his anus. This threat leads him to forgo his previous declarations of loyalty to Rod as he exclaims “*Rod not me don’t kill me ROD NOT ME ROD NOT ME*” (Kane, 2001, p. 117). Tinker continually imposes violent retribution for any expression of homosexual or atypical forms of love, as well as for over the top declarations of love. His violence is a manifestation of reason and psychoanalytical interpretations of what constitutes romance and gender roles, and yet of course by its very nature is wholly unreasonable. As these dismemberments cannot be portrayed naturalistically on stage, the audience is symbolically aware of the reduction of all linguistic and gestural methods left to Carl to express his love to Rod. Tenderness and love are placed against “annihilation and loss of self hood” imposed by Tinker and his institution (Saunders, 2002, p. 92). As Carl’s expression of love become increasingly difficult, if words fail, if hands fail, if feet fail what does that mean for him? In these violent visualisations Kane explores how “If people can still love after that, than love is the most powerful thing”, as each of her characters are, as Kane admits, “in some way completely Romantic” (Saunders, 2002, p. 92 & 31). In the patch of mud within the perimeter fence, where Carl and Rod spend most of their time, there is a background noise of real world sounds. A football match and later a child singing, perhaps indicating not only their remove from physical safety but also experiences they may not enjoy as a result of being socially unaccepted. However Carl and Rod continue to try and express their love. Kane visually juxtaposes not only the mutilation but also the degrading impositions of the space, with their expressions of tenderness. She uses sounds and action, or lack of action for Carl, to produce

significance and invoke liminal ambiguity in both Tinker's actions and Carl and Rod's experiences. The torture chamber of the Red Room and the Round Room or old library are similarly treated.

The Round Room is the domain of the patience and love between Grace and Graham, and Robin and Grace. Graham continues to haunt the gentler scenes in which Grace teaches Robin to read and write, and by overlaying the same dialogue in the characters Kane allows their words to develop multiple meanings. Eventually Tinker tortures Robin by destroying his drawing of a flower for Grace, echoing the significata of the sprouting flower employed by Kane. Tinker also makes Robin eat the chocolates he got for Grace in one sitting, urinate on the library books and burn them. Here Kane employs a sense of despair, as Grace enters the stage after undergoing shock treatment she heats her hands by the fire of the burning books. With the help of the ghost of Graham, Robin conceivably the most innocent character in the play kills himself in the Round Room after realising Grace is now impervious to his love. In the Red Room, under the instruction of Tinker, there is the stylised violence of unseen men beating Carl for being homosexual and later Grace for her incestuous relationship and desire for her brother. (Although this crime of sexuality is never fully satisfied by the action as Graham is dead by the time this action takes place.) The men remain unseen. And at one point Grace is raped by a voice alone. Removed presences and ghosts become part of the action, as in a similarly odd fashion the ghost of Graham protects her from the men's gunfire, after which a daffodil sprouts from the ground. This echoes the sprouting of a flower in a previous scene in the White Room after the sex scene between Graham and Grace watched by Tinker. The significata of the flower, delicacy, birth, beauty and growth, come into play in both scenes and thus are interlinked not only with protection but also to the taboo subject of incest. Everything is open for interpretation. Later as Grace undergoes electric shock treatment in the Red Room she still attempts to find solace by trying to bath in a shaft of

light. The final scene sees both Carl and Grace awaken to their crude sex change. Horrified, Carl lets out a silent scream. Like with the failure of theatre to realistically embody these physical changes, the sex change applied by ideological Tinker ultimately fails in its completeness and connects to the failure of the violent ideologies or principles that allowed its enforcement.

Cleansed gives an aerial perspective, albeit abstract, of myths and ideological cultural landscapes. The characters crave authenticity from others and conform to myths, but when removed from meaning and historical interpretation the preserve of these legends become worthless. Tinker particularly lapses into caricature to preserve the ideologies he embodies. Their behaviour, coded and stylized, places stress in areas normally unnoticed or unaccented. Fierce encounters serve to upend ideologies and refuse to explain human action as good versus evil – as when the play closes in a patch of mud by the perimeter fence. It is raining and Grace is now Graham accompanied by Carl who is wearing Grace's clothes. The sun come outs and the squeaking of rats gets louder and louder, while the light becomes blinding. Mark Ravenhill sees Kane as a “contemporary writer with a classical sensibility” which is “often abrasive for a modern audience....used to the reassurances of sociology and psychology” (Saunders, 2002, p. 19).

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

By largely focusing on dynamic temporal nature of social structures and the significance of symbols within this, Turner is shown to be an anthropologist preoccupied with similar themes and concerns to that of twentieth century cultural theorists and performance art practitioners. These concerns in the hands of the Turnerian Rebels, while Western, are to varying degrees community specific. For instance, although German critics and audiences were responsive to Kane when compared to their English counterparts, she noted “the standard of productions generally is much poorer and you have to allow a certain amount of cultural difference” (Saunders, 2002, p. 12). Her observations perhaps reiterating the unavoidable, underlying difference in the theatrical aesthetic between two societies steeped in their own histories (or at least a subset of theatre practitioners and theatre goers) – differences that are always to the fore in anthropology.

Turner’s work went on to influence the growth of performance academia through a close collaborative relationship with off Broadway director and performance studies pioneer Richard Schechner. Critically there is the growing argument that performance studies, with proclivity towards avante garde, have increasingly focused on purely the aesthetic value of countercultural elements rather than investigate the formation performance bears on power and knowledge. This invariably affects output and skews ideas surrounding liminality, as Jon McKenzie wryly observes in theatre “radical liminality has become a liminal norm” (Tomlin, 2013, p. 38). The playwright Mark Ravenhill, a contemporary of Kane’s, develops the point, viewing that the growing interest in the abstraction of performance had led to the lost “pragmatics of working in practice” (Harding & Rosenthal, 2011, p. 34). Indeed Turner’s original texts reveals a viewpoint that encourages pragmatism and has little in common with art that abstract and destabilize symbolic meaning to the detriment of (conscious or

unconscious) coherency. For him all genres of collective performance require effective symbolic arrangement and communication for successful liminality. In their reflections Ravenhill and McKenzie appear as quasi Turnerian Rebels, identifying criticism that could be applied to subsequent appropriations of aspects in Byrne's and Kane's liminal work. As to be expected with the passage of time, newer audiences will find innovative symbolic staging increasingly part of standard onstage vocabulary. Recalling the fast paced modern experience Baudrillard critiques, a pick and mix approach can apply. Indeed the memorable symbolism and episodic nature of both of their work is conducive to an instantaneous recycling of aesthetics, such as a single song performed by Byrne or a fragmented scene in Kane's *Cleansed*. Indeed Baudrillard, Ravenhill and McKenzie all seem to identify the decline or misuse of the original liminal message. After a time it either loses its function, or when the symbols or gestures are appropriated by the non-liminal individual they may reserve some ambiguous qualities but ultimately their liminal multi-vocality is not effectively employed. However as this study analyses the symbolic layering of full original liminal compositions, liminal intent can still be identified.

Sarah Kane's attempt to cut through the bull and assuage Western *ontological uncertainty* is intensely apparent (Wallace, 2006, p. 317). Where Kane's boundary pushing theatre undoubtedly presents cultural symbols in new liminal ways, David Byrne's liminality however appears more subtle. Less shocking, his work is as experimental and visceral, and has a similar focus to Kane: that of the body and its fate. He not only overturns pop hierarchies but his performance encourages a reinstatement of communal connection to body and intellect. Showing how music and dance styles are metaphors and indicators for the social and sexual customs and conventions of a society from which they emerge. And how in a subtle subversion or alteration of these the audience can be liminally communicated to. Both are seemingly aware that the audience response is of the utmost importance. Rather than

through the movement and gesture of dance, the onstage violence or sex provokes Kane's audience. She articulates this when speaking of the difference between her experiences in film and theatre - "with the film I wrote, *Skin*, people can walk out or change channels or whatever, it doesn't make any difference to the performance. But with *Blasted*, when people got up and walked out it was actually part of the whole experience of it" (Saunders, 2002, p. 13). And as was seen each utilise the capacity of the raw activity of performance to actively engage the audience, elevating them to more than mere spectators by making them players in the exchange.

Even today the work of Kane and Byrne, whether through violent ideologies or a reduction of hierarchies, offers friction and deep rooted symbolic connection with the audience, continuing to act as a mirror and a breach of mainstream social norms. They show how their mediums are apt for a budding Turnerian Rebel to identify and dismantle social and aesthetic boundaries. Conceivably this displays how the re-aggregation of their breach is not quite finished, as the retained liminal aspects have yet to be culturally rejected or assimilated. Rather their work oscillates somewhere between the stages of crisis and redressive action, suggesting a cultural need for a movement or an amendment of power that has not yet been satisfied. And certainly the ambiguous nature of the subversive and pragmatic liminality of Sarah Kane and David Byrne is not intended to create confusion rather they both ultimately intend to ignite communal imagination.



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