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Diegesis and Mimesis

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Transmorphisms in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* and Laura Wade's *Breathing Corpses*

Abstract

This article shows how postdramatic works for the theatre invite us into conceptual regions wherein the distinction between the diegetic and the mimetic modes is effectively blurred. Not only does this interfusion of mimesis and diegesis make the boundaries between the 'fictitious' theatrical reality and the non-theatrical somewhat permeable, but it also invites us to re-conceptualize mimesis as an act of production within a work. This auto-generative mimesis accounts for a self-propelled, non-purposive, and fluxional becoming that allows a given arrangement within a play to ever constitute itself anew. In order to arrive at a definition of mimesis as a dynamic constitutive motion from within a work, I look at the generative ontology of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his concept of 'expression'. This type of mimesis becomes capable of showing how plays are involved in self-constitutive processes that recompose their fabric from within. In being such, mimesis assumes the role of a generative force in the composition of literary worlds in drama.

Introduction – Diegesis and Mimesis in Postdramatic Theatre

This article seeks to uncover a novel way of positioning the notion of dramatic mimesis – representation through enaction – within the ontological texture of postdramatic works for the theatre. Rather than emulating a literary reality from without, postdramatic theatre strives to generate its own idiosyncratic realities that are at times incongruent with our received notions of the real. Postdramatic theatre thus problematizes the very question of the genesis of representation since, as Lehmann notes, our expectations of what constitutes mimesis and diegesis, "the principles of narration and figuration, and the order of the fable (story)" (2006: 18), are put to the test. Specifically, postdramatic plays exhibit a certain redundancy of the divide between the diegetic and the mimetic mode: that of narrating on behalf of others and that of enacting in speech as if one were someone else. Speaking with Hans-Thies Lehmann, in postdramatic theatre we witness an interfusion of both modes and thereby a novel way of scaffolding a theatrical reality from within a work.

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Whereas the dramatic tradition relies on a definition of mimesis as action, and can be constituted as such because of an audience's capacity to recognize an action as fictitious yet coherently 'lifelike', postdramatic theatre constructs regions of flamboyant ontological uncertainty. Many of the constituents of the Aristotelian dramatic tradition are dispensed with and no mimetic recognisability is readily available. Spectators have been denied the familiar territories of plot and action, reliance on the dramatic script per se, and the careful scaffolding of a 'fictional' universe clearly recognisable as such. Whereas postdramatic theatre does not deny the existence of the classic elements of drama, it does not accept them as a given but enters in dialogue with them.

What is unsettled in postdramatic theatre is exactly the plane of ontological coherence that constitutes the drama as strictly dramatic: "The traditional idea of theatre assumes a closed fictive cosmos, a 'diegetic universe' that can be called thus even though it is produced by means of mimesis . . . the play on stage is understood as diegesis of a separated and 'framed' reality governed by its own laws and by an internal coherence of its elements . . ." (Lehmann 2006: 99-100). Dramatic mimesis in its traditional form ignores the sporadic inclusion of epic elements: "While arguably 'real', the occasional disruption of the theatrical frame has been treated as an artistically and conceptually negligible aspect of theatre" (ibid.). The postdramatic tradition, on the other hand, thrives on the interfusion of the mimetic and the diegetic as a means of entering in dialogue with the real: "in the postdramatic theatre of the real the main point is not the assertion of the real as such . . . but the unsettling that occurs through the *indecidability* whether one is dealing with reality or fiction" (101).

Accordingly, one feature of postdramatic theatre is the refiguration of the divide between the mimetic and the diegetic modes. Every so often we have a disruption of the mimesis of action on stage through narrative means. As if aiming to amplify the layers of ontological uncertainty in the postdrama, narrative is introduced within the mimetic rendering, at times entirely replacing the mimetic mode. In injecting the drama with diegetic narrativity, these disruptions make the drama increasingly nondramatic. Rather than being carried by plot or action, the drama is being advanced by the utterances of narrating speakers. The imitation of human action that lies at the heart of the *Poetics* is unsettled. Instead, we have figures on stage that give account of their own action or diegetically impart the action of others.

Yet these diegetic accounts cannot be aligned with simple cases of metalepsis, soliloquies, asides, songs performed by a chorus, metadramatic tendencies, and other such epic elements within the drama. Such infusions of narrative, rather, disrupt the very ontological unity of the drama. That is to say, what we have at hand is a type of diegetic narrativity that disrupts the

aesthetic 'illusion' of the drama as such. Every so often, we encounter infusions of diegetic narrativity that influence the layer of mimetic immediacy. At the same time, the diegetic narrativity cannot be separated from the enaction. Rather, these layers form a unity that is neither diegetic nor mimetic precisely because its genesis no longer relies on the immediacy/distance distinction that guarantees a clear boundary between the two ontologically discrete regions. By means of such vocal gestures, figures on stage become capable of co-constituting the very theatrical realities of the plays they inhabit. We develop a sense that each utterance is a gesture of creation and that the realities of the play are moulded through the very act of speaking as the characters continually negotiate the constituents of their theatrical reality.

In his theory of speech acts, John L. Austin speaks of an incorporeal transformation taking place in the ontological status of things because of the power of certain utterances to effect a change in the states of affairs they reference. He calls such utterances "performative" (1962: 10) because of their capacity to alter their surrounding reality. In such cases, "the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something" (5). Such utterances can be said to 'perform' an action and thus alter the status of persons and objects. In the case of postdramatic theatre, we have an even more radical type of reality creation as here the very practice of worldmaking is conditioned on the uttering of words. It is the very materiality of speaking and this auto-generative quality of language that, at times, carries the transition from words to worlds in a play. This change, however, has less to do with Austin's subtle and incorporeal change of state. Rather, it can be likened to a transubstantiation whereby the infusion of diegetic narrativity within a play already amounts to the 'materialisation' of a world.

This performative and auto-generative act of creating a world within a work is supplemented by an increased confusion about the ontological status of such emergent worlds. According to Lehmann, this "reality of the new theatre begins precisely with the fading away of this trinity of drama, imitation and action" (2006: 36). We no longer have a case of mimesis as an undisputed immediacy but a dispersal of the mimetic. Here mimesis dissolves into diegesis, and, alternatively, diegetic elements fuse within the mimesis. In introducing such disruptive techniques, "postdramatic theatre emphasizes what is incomplete and incompletable about it, so much so that it realizes its own 'phenomenology of perception' marked by an overcoming of the principles of mimesis and fiction. The play(ing) as a concrete event produced in the moment fundamentally changes the logic of perception and the status of the subject of perception, who can no longer find support in a representative order" (99). We no longer rely on the "shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells,

the world of which one tells" (Genette 1980: 236) but witness their co-min-gling. The division of a literary world into a mimetic and a diegetic plane relies on the principle of distance, narrative being taken to be "more dis-tant than imitation" and "more mediated" (160). In postdramatic theatre, we witness a collapsing of this very boundary or a productive alliance of the two planes based on the erasure of the principle of distance. In this way, the theatrical reality actively engages with some of the inherent paradoxes within the principles of mimesis and diegesis. At times, it reminds us that "showing can only be *a way of telling*" (163), that diegesis can be not only of words but of action and as such, can be achieved through mimesis ('diege-sis through mimesis'). In other cases, we encounter an extreme modal dis-tance between the level of the mimesis of action and the level generating a play's narrativity ('mimesis through diegesis').

At the same time, while striving to frustrate the 'fictional' dimension of the drama, such forms re-dramatize that which we habitually refer to as 'life'. As Angel-Pérez notes, such techniques nevertheless "inject some drama back into postdrama" so that "being post-mimetic somehow also means being pre-mimetic" (2013: § 3). The ontological uncertainty inher-ent in postdramatic theatre is thus intensified. The spoken narrative – an act of self-constitution in words – works not against but together with dra-matic mimesis to reinforce not the constitution of the real but that of fic-tion, as well as the ever-shifting (perhaps even nonexistent) divide between the two: "Post-dramatic practices are making a show of what constitutes the condition of the subject constructing itself through words: it makes us understand the intrinsic fictionality of the construction and therefore re-founds drama within post-dramaticity" (ibid.).

Rather than perceiving mimesis in terms of imitation, such theatrical re-alities invite us to re-conceptualize mimesis as an act of production within a work. This type of mimesis, as the following pages show, accounts for a production that is auto-generative. Further still, this is a type of production involved in non-purposive and fluxional becoming that allows matter to ev-er constitute itself anew. In order to arrive at a definition of mimesis as a dynamic constitutive motion from within a work, I first look at the genera-tive ontology of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and, specifically, at his concept of 'expression' introduced in *Expressionism in Philosophy* (1968). Here 'ex-pression' is a relational entity that carries forward the individuation of sub-stance from a maximally indefinite state towards finitude. As a relational and transmissive component, Deleuze's 'expression' captures the very mo-tion of constitution in the genesis of a form. This revised concept of mime-sis thus becomes capable of accounting for the type of reality creation en-demic to postdramatic theatre – a generative and self-constitutive gesture that moulds a work from within.

Unlike Aristotle, who viewed substance as a mere passive receptacle for forms, generative ontologies such as that of Deleuze have conceived of another possibility, "that the resources involved in the genesis of form are immanent to matter itself" (DeLanda 1997: 499). Rather than presupposing that the genesis of forms involves agencies and forces that are to be found outside of the matter to be formed, here we speak of a 'spontaneous morphogenesis'. That is to say, we have the possibility that matter generates novel shapes out of its own resources, without recourse to an entelechial pre-givenness. In isolating a specific 'space of possibility' within a play, we can witness how a play carries forward the emergence of an entirely novel shape within its fabric, and even advances by dint of such spontaneous acts of onto-constitution that are entirely self-propelled. If we are to assume this vantage point, mimesis too can be said to be 'expressionist' in that it becomes capable of showing how plays are involved in auto-generative processes and recompose their fabric from within. In being such, mimesis assumes the role of a generative force in the composition of literary worlds in drama. The present article looks at Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998) and Laura Wade's *Breathing Corpses* (2005) to show how these plays disclose one such ontology and subscribe to a different type of reality creation that is ubiquitous to postdramatic theatre.

Mimesis as Relation

The term mimesis is commonly associated with concepts such as mimicking and imitation. The dialogues of Plato contain the oldest documented account of a relatively consistent 'theory' of mimesis and an assessment of its relation to the arts. Book X of Plato's *Republic* (10.598a-599a) ranks mimesis – artistic imitation – as the lowest manifestation of the Good. A mimetically rendered world – in painting, poetry, and sculpture – is perceived as fictitious and therefore fraudulent. It is a product doubly removed from the Idea, the one 'truthful' entity informing a world of fleeting phenomena. Unlike verbal diegesis, where we have the Homeric bard speaking in one's own voice and recounting the actions of others in the third person, in theatrical mimesis we have a type of poetic imitation that involves speaking through the voices of others and hence an element of 'deception'. This treatment of mimesis as representation is commonly associated with correspondence theories of truth and has reinforced the view that dramatic mimesis, seen as a locus of immediacy, carries a 'danger' because of its capacity for affective contagion. The 'antitheatrical prejudice' inherent in the anxiety that the 'fictitious' may have its inimical impact on the 'real' rests precisely upon this imitation premise. Postdramatic theatre, in turn, intro-

duces a different type of antitheatricality that thrives on the interfusion of elements of verbal diegesis (telling) and theatrical mimesis (showing), supported by an increasing unsettling of the nominal divide between the 'fictitious' and the 'real'. As I argue in this article, this interfusion is the product of a different type of theatrical reality that can be called generative or 'expressionist', and implies a different perspective on the concept of mimesis.

Koller's book *Die Mimesis in der Antike* (1954) reminds us that mimesis is actional, dynamic, and productive in its essence. It relates to notions of impersonation and enaction; also, it is best understood in terms of Greek drama as a medium that combines dance, music, and speech. Having its origins in drama, mimesis is more of a performance or a transmission, a gesture of rendering. Koller's interpretation shifts the focus to the very act of the transmission and the establishing of a relation between two ontologically disparate regions. Rather than focusing on the end product, that is, the represented reality, or on the model structure, that is, that which is emulated, Koller looks at the ways in which the transfer between the two is enacted. Here we have a dimension of mimesis that is both processual and relational. This dimension is lacking in the concept of representation inasmuch as in dealing with representation, we already deal with a product. Koller's focus, on the contrary, shifts to the explication of the mediality as such. This is one early instance where we have a foregrounding of the relational, dynamic, and productive side of mimesis. In order to fully account for this generative dimension of mimesis, the present article assumes Koller's focus "on the medium of expression inherent in mimesis rather than on the object of expression" (Keuls 1978: 11).

Rather than an exercise in matching between two hierarchically divergent givens, mimesis here is the very act of forming a relation. Once we assume this vantage point, we notice that mimesis does not presuppose a hierarchical scenario whereby a lesser reality ('fiction') is matched and evaluated against a 'truthful' one ('life') but exhibits intermediary, processual, transmissive features that foreground a productive alliance between incongruent worlds. Within this shift, attention is paid to the in-between ground of the transmission. Mimesis becomes the expression of a relation between two ontologically disparate world regions.

This take on mimesis allows us to substantiate Lehmann's positing of postdramatic theatre as generative, as a "formation rather than a story" (2006: 68) wherein the focus shifts to "the processes of metamorphosis" (77). Further still, it allows us to see how these, in turn, "lead to another mode of theatrical perception in which seeing as recognition is continually outdone by a play of surprises that can never be arrested by an order of perception" (ibid.). As we confront a "theatre of states and of scenically dynamic formations" (68), we are led to dwell more closely on the onto-

logical status of its constituents. Here we look not so much at a 'story' or a 'message' but towards something that Lehmann calls a "landscape" (78). The latter leads us not so much in the direction of a telling or a showing of a story but to a particular style of being, a "gesture or arrangement" (82) whereby we cannot but confront an "irruption of the real" (99). Lehmann describes this as a formation of an "unstable sphere of a simultaneously possible and impossible choice, as well as the virtual transformability of the situation" (106).

Within this 'scenic dynamic' (as opposed to the 'dramatic dynamic'o), the very ontology that a postdramatic play creates is conditioned upon the dispersal of action and the downplaying of the possibility of developing a narrative. We encounter maximally open worlds composed of potentiality, an attunement more towards the virtual than to the scenic and the tangible. Accordingly, the "principles of narration and figuration and the order of the 'fable' (story) are disappearing" (18). As Poschmann notes, "against the 'depth' of speaking figures that would suggest a mimetic illusion" (ibid.), we have a simultaneity of mimetic and diegetic forms, a coming together of the layers of the 'real' onto a unified landscape whereby even language itself no longer pertains to the speech of characters but acquires a certain "autonomous theatricality" (ibid.). Because of this, apart from an aesthetic logic of the postdramatic, one could begin to speak of a distinctive ontology related to this particular type of theatre.[1]

Within the context of postdramatic theatre, the vantage point thus changes yet again. Postdramatic theatre goes one step further in blurring the divide between the ontologically disparate layers that the principle of mimesis unites. The act of narrating on stage coincides not only with the act of speaking but also with the very act of the constitution of a work. A play is constituted line by line, utterance by utterance, not by dint of a plot or an action, but through the very utterances of figures on stage. And these figures, rather than creating a separate cosmos and insulating the work they inhabit as a coherent and discrete dramatic universe, continually make us aware of the fiction. The plane of showing – the region of dramatic mimesis – is infused with narrative, and it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between showing and telling, enaction and diegetic rendering. That is to say, postdramatic works for the theatre invite us into conceptual regions wherein the distinction of the diegetic and the mimetic is effectively blurred as no clear separation exists between the act of telling (speaking on behalf of others) and the act of impersonating (speaking as if one were someone else). This interfusion of mimesis and diegesis makes the boundaries between the 'fictitious' theatrical reality and the non-theatrical somewhat permeable. This leads me to speak of a new orientation of mimesis in

[1] For a detailed account, see Dimitrova.

postdramatic theatre. Here we do not deal with the acts of emulating, but of an orientation towards the very act of generating a reality within the theatrical.

I call this orientation 'immanent' because it amounts to a gesture of creation from within a work. Speaking of this generative dimension of mimesis in the genesis of forms, here the divide between the two techniques of rendering, diegesis and mimesis, can be subsumed under another species of mimesis that can be called 'expressionist'. Mimesis in this case accounts for the very act of forming a literary world within a theatrical reality and attests to the ways a theatrical reality is 'expressed', that is, constituted, in vocal gestures. Dramatic theatre builds up its reality on the basis of an essentialist philosophy that carries the implication of a pre-established essence that undergoes series of transformations. Postdramatic theatre, when read through the lenses of Deleuze's concept of expression, shows how relations are primary to their relative terms. In this case, we encounter a realism of relations that puts on display the secondary nature of substances and the primacy of the underlying field of relational forces that participate in the ongoing genesis of substance.

This is also the case with mimesis in postdramatic theatre whereby the very notion of essence is undermined and made secondary to the act of relating. Accordingly, mimesis is something inextricable from a work and ubiquitous to its ontology. In view of this, the Latin imitatio can be replaced with 'evocation': mimesis here designates the procedure by virtue of which a literary world is generated and comes into existence by means of vocal gestures. A literary world, however, remains yet open and indefinite enough to allow for a complete refiguration of its reality.

Mimesis as Expression

In order to account for this special type of literary creation in postdramatic theatre, I turn to the concept of 'expression' introduced by philosopher Gilles Deleuze in *Expressionism in Philosophy* (1968). Deleuze's concept of expression alludes to a nondual ontology that conceives of being as self-organising and self-propelled. One such view is reinforced in *Expressionism in Philosophy*, a book on Spinoza's *Ethics* that deals with the individuating motion of an infinite substance to finite modes towards ever finer distinctions.

Deleuze envisions Spinoza's substance as infinitely unfolding, relational, and in perpetual motion. Substance unfolds with the help of an intermediary transmissive constituent called 'expression'. This transmissive constituent allows substance to become many – to enfold and manifest itself in a

variety of finitudinal entities – while remaining in itself. As such, substance pertains to a pre-representational region where it is present in its maximally infinite form. At the same time, substance is involved in a perpetual motion of individuation whereby the infinite becomes finite, that is, a concrete entity. Substance thus moves from one mode of existence to another, from the maximally indefinite (the infinite) to the maximally concrete (an individuated finite entity within a world). These two regions are ontologically distant and appear practically unbridgeable. In introducing the concept of expression, however, Deleuze offers a way to account for this transition from the infinite to a finite form. The transmissive work of what Deleuze calls 'expression' guarantees the continuity between the two regions, that of ontological constitution and that of individuated entities.

Substance becomes expressed as an *event of sense.* At the same time, the expressed event of sense remains entwined with the pre-representational region of ontological constitution and is ubiquitous to it. In this way, the event of sense is also the inherence within a literary world that is maximally open to the regions of pre-representation and constitution. Once an event of sense consolidates within the ontological texture of a literary world, it has the capacity to reshuffle it anew and to alter its ontology. In this way, we can have several ontological layers presented within a single play, a reshuffling of the mimetic and the diegetic mode, and, at times, a thorough refiguration of the literary world at hand up to the point that it becomes unrecognisable as such. From this vantage point, we become capable of accounting for the oftentimes incongruent and mutually exclusive realities that populate the literary worlds in postdramatic theatre, and put on display the generative dimension of mimesis that is oftentimes responsible for the interfusion of ontologically disparate diegetic and mimetic elements.

Within our specific context, the work of expression and the event of sense carry the unfolding of drama. The entwinement of expression and sense, of a constitutive motion and a supra-representational constituent, at once enables the genesis of representation (expression becomes expressed sense and thus a world is constituted) and opens up to the region of pre-representation (a constitutive motion). Assuming this vantage point, one begins to notice that postdramatic works for the theatre – albeit nonsensical to the habitual gaze – exhibit a quasi-causal logic. Rather than perceiving these plays in experiential terms, the present article assumes the stance that their 'nonsensical' constituents are maximally expressive (to the point of being non-signifying). In being such, they expose the work of an event of sense within a play's ontological texture and thus can show us the various ways in which an already constituted literary world (representation) remains inextricably related to a host of forces and relations

that belong to the supra-representational regions of ontological constitution. In being such, a literary world can recompose at every step (as in the case of Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*), or open up to the supra-representational region of the event of sense (as in the case of Laura Wade's *Breathing Corpses*).

The manifested event of sense is not congruent with the literary world that surrounds it. It rather carries the imprint of the pre-representational region – a field of constitutive forces and relations out of which the order of representation congeals. Confronted with the consolidation of an event of sense within their habitual texture, plays are at pains to re-adjust, re-compose, and thus incorporate the pre-representational within their fabric. The concept of 'expression' designates exactly the generative motion that carries the capacity to create and recompose literary worlds, whereas the event of sense coincides with the juncture whereby one such recomposition is triggered. Whereas expression carries the motion in the process of the constitution of a literary world, the event of sense carries the capacity to reshuffle an existing arrangement within a literary world and compose it anew. In this way, the expression (generative force) and the expressed sense (the force precipitating novelty and change) work together in the scaffolding of literary worlds in drama.

These points of departure feed into another purpose of the present article: to show postdramatic theatre as a case of a dynamic mimesis whereby the very motions of ontological constitution are being played out. Within this latter context, mimesis and diegesis are inextricable from one another. Here mimesis is a continuously generative flux only observable in the various diegetic modalities it creates. Mimesis is a gesture of transmission whereby literary worlds undergo a variety of transmorphoses and recompositions as they are infused with elements that generate their own narrativity. Let us see, then, how this interfusion of mimesis and diegesis supplies communication between different ontological layers in Kane's *Cleansed* and Wade's *Breathing Corpses*, carries the generative flux of expression, and exposes a quasi-causal logic at work within the plays' ontological texture.

The Case of Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*

Cleansed (1998) is the earliest example of a Sarah Kane play in which we witness a decomposition of the categories of plot, character, time, and action. *Cleansed* draws a picture of ontological uncertainty as it continually appeals to the themes of shifting subjectivities and the arbitrariness of agency. Stage directions are profuse, bringing an authoritative streak with-

in the otherwise frugal dialogic sequences. Yet both the mimetic and the diegetic planes rely on an informational and communicative minimum to shape a coherent narrative. At the same time, mimesis and diegesis continually fuse into one another as enaction becomes narrative in the course of the play. That is to say, the play generates its narrativity by confronting us with a series of scenic landscapes without story – but precisely because of doing so, it also vicariously constructs a diegetic plane. On this level, we can already discern a certain minimal narrative (Tinker mutilating two couples, couples persisting, scenes of torture issuing as a result of this resistance). This diegetic plane, however, has nothing of the dramatic as it is indeed populated by the variations of a single 'situation' or an 'event' that is continually reshuffled and recomposed in the course of the play. Equally so, the characters only subsist in a state of relative stability – they continually merge into their counterparts, appropriate each other's gender markers, speak through each other's lines, and even 'invade' each others' bodies. Personalities shift, spoken lines travel from one character to another as if having acquired an agency of their own, and even the figures themselves become increasingly unrecognisable as the play progresses. At the same time, the figures in *Cleansed* appear to have been generated spontaneously and arbitrarily. Even more so, they continue to be moulded into one another and take on a variety of shapes in the course of the play.

Essentially, the play introduces us to two couples: that of Grace and her brother Graham as well as that of the lovers Carl and Rod. Graham, then, is replicated onto another figure, Robin, who appears to have been spontaneously generated out of the play's fabric as Graham's imperfect substitute, wearing his clothes and speaking through his lines. A woman in a peep show booth also makes a sudden appearance and we are given to understand that her erotic dance – triggered after inserting tokens in the show booth – is an emulation of Grace's dance. Then we have a supernatural creature named Tinker, at once a doctor presiding over an unnamed facility and a shapeshifting entity of extraordinary malevolence. Tinker's presence is entirely unexplained; he appears to have emerged out of thin air to tamper with the lovers' lives. Lovers perceived as 'aberrant' are 'punished' in spectacles of lavish absurdity, within a landscape marked by the corrective presence of institutions. The last scene depicts Carl having acquired female genitalia and Grace having completed the transition towards literally becoming her brother. Tinker, who goes to great lengths to test the couples' love in ordeals of tremendous cruelty, admits: "I think I— / Misunderstood" (Kane 1998: 40).

Cleansed is thus a postdramatic play insofar as, in its scenes of ritualistic mutilation, we observe not only a "replacement of dramatic action with ceremony" (Lehmann 2006: 69) but also an increased awareness of

the de-dramatisation of the drama. A certain revelling in the spectacle of
the non-dramatic is at hand here as the very act of bodily mutilation is for-
malized, taken in isolation, and made an aesthetic unit. As Lehmann notes,
here the theatrical body becomes "a ceremonial body" (162). We witness
a focus on the very gesture of the performing of an action whereby "the
whole spectrum of movements and processes have no referent but are pre-
sented with heightened precision" (69). The theatrical body becomes a val-
ue for and in itself, and as Lehmann states, whereas "the dramatic process
occurred *between* the bodies, the postdramatic process occurs with/on/to
the body" (163). Images of bodies in pain and the aesthetic value of "ago-
ny" are primary here. What is of interest for this postdrama is the very "de-
composition of the human being" on stage as this "self-dramatization of the
physis continually works to realize the intensified presence of the human"
(ibid.).

In a way, the play can also be said to be constructed around Plato's tech-
nique of 'diegesis through mimesis', the constitution of telling through
showing. The play's narrative is moulded entirely by means of sparse vo-
cal gestures and intense action on stage. Whereas the stage directions are
long and elaborate, the spoken lines remain pointedly minimal, just enough
to sketch out a situation. At the same time, the very frugality of the stage
space and the artificiality of the dialogue – directed not so much towards
the characters' counterparts but towards a void – undermine the theatrical
illusion and frustrate any wish for reference. The component of 'imitation'
is made apparent, yet at the same time no imitation can be performed at all
since the play appears to follow its own course and to evolve spontaneous-
ly without much recourse to an external reality. This already alludes to a
certain morphogenetic principle at work with the play.

Cleansed exposes one such auto-generative quality in that it appears
to recompose from within and alter its ontological texture as it progress-
es arbitrarily, without much appeal to an Aristotelian plot striving towards
a foreshadowed purpose and completion. The play thus alludes to an au-
to-generative ontological framework whereby we have a constitutive mo-
tion that incessantly generates novel shapes while, not unlike Spinoza's
substance, remaining in itself. In the context of *Cleansed*, three transmor-
phoses take place as the play appears to be continually at pains to generate
versions of the union of Grace and Graham by means of what can be called
a 'derivative isomorphism'. That is to say, one structure is mimetically
mapped upon another, generating matrixes of resemblance. *Cleansed*, thus,
can be said to be entirely composed of such isomorphic thresholds where-
by Tinker's attempt to emulate or neutralise the figures of Grace and Gra-
ham brings forth a host of tremendous transformations and supernatural
occurrences. In the course of the play, these figures are effectively erased,

however. Once agency, self, and articulation are lost, one arrives at a stage whereby the play generates an 'endomorphism', two bodies grotesquely carved into one another. While formally successful, however, this mapping results in an unsettling picture – the play merely ends in blinding light with its figures facing a bright void, exhausted and thoroughly misshapen.

Three successive transmorphoses recompose the play's ontology anew until it arrives at this last moment. First, in attempting to emulate the union of Grace and Graham, the play appears to generate a copy of the lovers Grace and Graham, producing the union of Tinker and the woman in the peep show booth. Inserting token after token and talking to the woman in the booth as if addressing Grace, Tinker pleads her to love him, show her face, and talk to him. The booth dance mimes Grace's dance, yet the scenario sketched out here only offers an imitative model. The desired relationship is grotesquely imitated; the union between the woman in the booth and Tinker remains only an imperfect double of Graham/Grace as it only mechanically copies the lovers' union without any involvement of its one indispensable constituent, love.

As *Cleansed* advances, a second scenario is generated. Here the union of Graham and Grace is mapped onto Grace and Robin. Throughout the play, 'Robin' barely has an independent existence – he rather functions as an emanation of 'Graham'. The scenario generated here can be described as automorphic: what we witness throughout the scenes involving 'Robin/Graham' is how an entity (Graham) is mapped onto itself. This is evident in the many episodes in which Graham stands next to Robin, miming his gestures and talking through his lines. Robin temporarily becomes a receptacle for Graham, containing him entirely. First, he is shown to wear Graham's clothes (Kane 1998: 7). Later, Graham, as a ghost, speaks through Robin's lines, the two voices overlapping: "Robin/Graham Do you still love him? . . . Robin/Graham Gracie . . . Robin/Graham But choose" (18-19). The scene continues to make use of the Robin/Graham overlap even after an overlap of the voices of Grace and Graham (Grace/Graham) presents itself: "Graham/Robin What would you change? . . . Robin/Graham I would. . . . Robin/Graham I am. Robin/Graham Never will" (21-2). Eventually 'Robin' dies (38) as 'Graham' reaches out to him, in the exact moment in which the two figures are physically united. The presence of the Robin/Graham isomorphic map shows that *Cleansed* has recomposed its ontology anew, generating a newer version of the union of Grace and Graham.

In the final scene, we arrive at a third version of Grace and Graham – already the unified figure 'Grace/Graham' – and therefore at a third morphism. This moment is already prefigured in the scenes in which Grace's and Graham's voices are indistinguishable from one another, "Graham/Grace (*laugh.*)" (19) and "Grace/Graham I do. . . . Grace/Graham No"

(21). At this juncture, a last step has been taken so that Grace can literally 'become' her brother. Her wish that her body "looked like it feels" (20), "Graham outside like Graham inside" (ibid.), is made literal. To Tinker's literal mind, this means attaching Carl's genitalia to Grace's body, completing the final stage of her transmutation into Graham. At the same time, Carl undergoes a surgical treatment to acquire the genitalia of a woman (Grace). The bodies of Grace and Carl are "hollowed out" (Horton 2012: 117), reshuffled, and made open for entirely different flows. 'Graham' is mapped onto 'Grace' while 'Grace' is mapped onto 'Carl', thus making each character subject to perfect erasure. Tinker believes to have done everything right, to have 'mended' the 'aberrant' bodies, but the result is a horrendous shape.

In this third scenario, we are presented with a spectacle of what Kaufman calls a "most vulgar and mythical violence" (2003: 21) that nevertheless contains within itself an event of sense, an impassive force that holds the promise that an entirely new redefinition of any fixed form is still possible. An event of sense enwraps the violence and all the while retains a tinge of hope. It constitutes an openness and contains the possibility for further alteration along the chain of transmorphoses that the play undergoes at every step. In line with Urban's interpretation, here Kane's work can be said to dramatize an arrival at an ethics emerging "from calamity with the possibility that an ethics can exist between wounded bodies, that after devastation, good becomes possible" (Urban 2001: 37).

Deleuze also addresses this ethical dimension: "We do not even know of what a body is capable . . . We do not even know of what affections we are capable, nor the extent of our power" (2005: 226). *Cleansed* shows how the relations into which bodies enter stretch infinitely, reshuffle, and recompose. Through the relations into which they enter, bodies express the unity inherent in "the principle of their production" (304) together with the infinity of their grades of intensification and openness. As the figures of the play undergo a variety of morphisms, their literary world recomposes its ontological texture anew and becomes open for a redefinition of its constituents.

This model aligns with Spinoza's notion of elasticity as presented in *Expressionism in Philosophy*: the ability of a relation to stretch so that an entity undergoes a limitless number of stages while retaining its essence, "passes through so many stages that one may almost say that a mode changes its body or relation leaving behind childhood, or on entering old age" (222). In the context of *Cleansed*, each morphism corresponds to a particular intensification of a relational composition that remains nevertheless the same in order to continue to exist within the flux of expression. What is expressed in this relation is an event, a threshold of novelty that constitutes an openness. This openness is to be understood as a momentary capture within the

process of individuation that carries within itself a potency of a new magnitude and hence a new line of re-expression. It is in this openness that *Cleansed* reinstates itself as a spectacle of hope – the violent image of the last scene can recompose in a second step, congealing into an entity that is radically novel.

In retrospect, *Cleansed* showed us not only two lovers put into an ingenious torture machine but also how the expressive, generative quality of mimesis allows a play's fabric to recompose anew and arrive at novel encounters. Here a technique that can be aligned with Plato's 'diegesis through mimesis', a telling through showing, helped us to flesh out a morphogenetic scenario whereby we witnessed how Grace's and Carl's bodies undergo a series of elaborate surgical interventions. In the final scene of *Cleansed*, Grace is moulded into the body of her brother and Carl's genitalia is removed before he is reunited with Rod. As the characters begin to fold into one another, fantastic elements invade the scenes. A flower rises from the ground and bursts open; rats come out to gnaw at the wounds and bandages of Carl and Grace. As subjectivities intertwine and traverse their prefigured boundaries, the play begins to generate versions of the union of Graham and Grace. Towards its end, by having produced the chimerical creature Grace/Graham/Carl/Grace, the play subjects each of its characters to erasure but also retains the possibility of a new, positive refiguration of the given. The play recomposes its ontology several times to open up a territory for the complete redefinition of substance in a scenario of incessant creation whereby entities become maximally open and capable of reconstituting themselves anew.

The Case of Laura Wade's *Breathing Corpses*

Another such example of a morphogenetic or 'expressionist' mimesis presents itself with a recent play by Laura Wade. Rather than employing the technique of 'diegesis through mimesis' observed in *Cleansed*, here we have a mode of reality creation that can be aligned with a technique called 'mimesis through diegesis'. That is to say, rather than having a scenario of 'telling through showing', in this case we encounter a diegetic form that can be said to unsettle the level of enactment through the encroachment of narrative turns within the play.

Breathing Corpses (2005) distances itself from postdramatic tendencies of the plotless and characterless play; it has clear spatiotemporal outlines and does not appear to disrupt spectatorial expectations. In fact, the realities it depicts appear rather mundane and we are led to perceive *Breathing Corpses* as a clever murder mystery that, however, does not do much in

challenging our ontological assumptions. At the same time, some features of the play make it difficult to trivialize. The play tests out the ontological certainty of its emulated reality on several occasions; this takes place through the installment of ever-morphing images of boxes and pervasive smells throughout the play.

Because of the arbitrary and seemingly unnecessary nature of these images, but also because of the ways they affect the advancement of action within the play, here one could speak of a postdramatic tendency to infuse non-linear, non-entelechial, and even non-actional narrative within an otherwise congruent literary world. In this case, however, we do not speak of the aesthetic technique of displacing enactment through narrative. Rather, we are presented with a different ontological arrangement whereby certain images (of boxes and smells) generate their own narrativity and, because of this, alter the play's linear progression. For this reason, it becomes difficult to see *Breathing Corpses* as a typical postdramatic play that is less drama and more like narrative. Rather, here we encounter a dialogue between the dramatic and the postdramatic. That is to say, we encounter a diegetic level that presents itself at an ontological layer that is different from that of the overarching drama, generates its own narrativity within the play, and thus infuses it with inherences of a different ontological texture. I call this level eventual but also 'diegetic' because of its capacity to generate narrativity that affects the play's action and causes a series of transmorphoses in the course of its unfolding.

Whereas *Cleansed* was a more straightforward example of a postdramatic play, both in terms of its ontology and scenic aesthetics, *Breathing Corpses* displays postdramatic qualities mostly on the level of its ontology. The play is constructed around a singular event, and its most poignant feature is the infusion of auto-generative narrativity that disrupts the layer of 'mimetic' enaction, thus creating a clash between dramatic and postdramatic narrativity. In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann concludes that even works such as those of Beckett or Brecht are mere stepping stones towards the postdramatic because of their continued reliance on the mimesis of action: "Certainly the theatre revolutionaries broke with almost all conventions but even in their turn toward abstract and alienating means of staging they mostly still adhered to the mimesis of action on stage" (Lehmann 2006: 22). Postdramatic theatre, in contrast, is "a multiform kind of theatrical discourse" (ibid.) that makes us aware not so much of the action but of an underlying process of production. One such processual quality is discernible in *Breathing Corpses* whereby the entire play hinges on an ongoing tension between the dramatic and the postdramatic. We have dramatic mimesis when we look at the play's level of action, but a postdramatic event when we turn to the play's diegetic layer. In the case of the latter, we en-

counter a singular evental constituent that is continually played out in different variants, altering the fabric of the play's level of mimetic enaction.

Scene 2 introduces Jim, who runs a self-storage service business, his wife Elaine, and the employee Ray. The three are preoccupied with a strange smell coming out of one of the units, enjoying bacon sarnies and recalling a customer who had forgotten the contents of a kebab van in a storage: "Don't realise it's A Five till the maggots start crawling under the door" (Wade 2013: 27). It is not until Scene 3 that we become aware of the play's darker undercurrents as we are shown how perpetrators of violence are not so much rational actants but unwitting figures at the sway of forces as arbitrary as a heat wave. Here we witness another domestic scene, a home on a hot September day. Kate, who had found a murder victim in the park the previous night, repeatedly kicks the dog responsible for sniffing a woman's corpse under a bush: "but I didn't I didn't want it to be me and your stupid fucking dog that found her / either" (41). Scene 4 takes us back to Jim and Elaine who had already opened the storage unit. It emerges that Jim had unsealed a box storing the decomposing body of Kate from Scene 2, strangled and with a dog lead still around her neck: "JIM: I keep wondering if – Like maybe if I hadn't found her, maybe she wouldn't have been dead" (59).

A recurrent appearance throughout the play is that of boxes. *Breathing Corpses* starts with a scene in the boxed space of a hotel room, "not *a great hotel, a mid-price hotel that trades on its views over the town*" (9), and ends with a scene involving a Boxter, a silver-coloured convertible. In Scene 2 Elaine tells a story about a phone conversation with a support operator helping her to fix her Skybox. She then leaves the scene with the explanation, "Back in my box" (30), and hands over a box of chocolates. In Scene 3, Ben decants a box of dog food and Scene 4 contains Jim's reminiscence of opening a box within a box, the storage containing the boxed body of Kate.

Smells and boxes, the contradictory images of pervasiveness and enclosure, operate within the play in what appears to be an arbitrary manner. Whereas the advancement of the action and the construction of the separate episodes follow a simple causal logic, the images of boxes and smell are arranged in ways that demonstrate a high degree of contingency. The appearances of boxes and smells in the separate episodes do not follow a prefigured pattern and do not seem to be connected in any 'logical' manner. Rather, they appear to 'infect' one another: the images of smells and boxes form networks that connect both characters and events in quasi-causal ways more compelling than the causal relationships that construct the play's overarching mimesis.

In using the term 'quasi-causality', I evoke Deleuze's discussion of the event of sense as pertaining to a species of causality that is indifferent to 'real' causality (1990: 6). Following this principle, the various morphisms

of boxes – the tin can, the storage units, the box of chocolates – adhere to a causality that is indifferent to the remaining givens of the play. *Breathing Corpses* can thus be said to be structured like a dream with constellations of images of boxes and smells forming areas of intensification that operate outside of the rules of linear causality and form a causality of their own. They can be said to function as "an aggregate of noncausal correspondences which form a system of echoes, of resumptions and resonances . . . in short, an expressive quasi-causality, and not at all a necessitating causality" (Deleuze 1990: 170). While of no significance for the advancement of the plot, these local areas of intensification resonate throughout the entire play, affecting the linear chain of events and altering its texture.

The play presents us with a number of episodes wherein the images of boxes and smells take on a variety of guises. First, we encounter Elaine speaking of a Skybox, a box of chocolates, the box that is her home, and the numerous storage units her husband operates. Then, we have the decanting of dog food in Scene 3 presaging the unsealing of Kate's box in Scene 4. The envelope containing a suicide note left on the dressing table in Scene 1 transmutes into a box containing a carving knife. In the play's last scene, it then swiftly morphs into a Boxter. A similar non-causal logic presents itself as we begin to look at the way the play aligns the smell of perishable food and dead bodies. Jim has begun to smell in Scene 1. The smell coming from one of the storage units evokes a memory of a kebab van in Scene 2. The decanted dog food smells unbearably in the heat of Scene 3, and the ghost of a smell pervades Scene 4. The transmorphisms that smells and boxes undergo as the play progresses allow us to speak not simply of an allusive similarity between a can of dog food and a woman in a box, but also of quasi-causal relations that allude to the work of what Deleuze calls 'an event of sense'.

In *Breathing Corpses* the region of the event of sense positions itself as a second (diegetic) ontological layer within the play and begins to work within the linear chain of events of *Breathing Corpses*. Yet it does so in a manner that evades causal relations. Rather, it manifests itself in certain locales within the play as an utterly contingent and unnecessary inherence. These local manifestations of the event of sense are exactly the various incarnations of boxes and smells throughout the play. While displaced and seemingly unnecessary with regard to the plot, they appear to advance a 'shadow play' within the play, one that is entirely dependent on the workings of a "quasi-cause" (Deleuze 1990: 35). This is the type of causality that belongs to the region of the event within dramatic mimesis. The work of the event, however, is 'pervasive', at once 'everywhere and nowhere', as an event's appearance in one scene affects all others and disrupts the steady linearity of the play's mimetic layer. Smells not only invade the scenes

they stem from but 'infect' the play's remaining scenes, eventually causing deaths. The same applies to the presence of boxes, innocently making an appearance in Scene 1 as chocolates or a Skybox, yet transmuting into precipitators of violence in the scenes to follow. Charlie's Boxter, a phonetic evocation of the word 'box', has even ceased to resemble an actual receptacle. We witness the same process towards ever-greater abstraction followed by increasing amounts of violence in the travels of smell across the play. As *Breathing Corpses* progresses, the smell becomes more and more ethereal, eventually becoming a phantasmatic presence that cannot be shaken off: "JIM: Just outside the door, and inside opening the box, my lungs got full of – Sticks like tar, it's stuck to the inside of my nose I can't get –" (Wade 2013: 59-60).

In this way, one witnesses the formation of two ontological planes within the play: one of linear causality and one pertaining to the quasi-causal event of sense. Whereas the former is 'mimetic' as it pertains to the level of enactment, the latter can be called 'diegetic' because of its capacity to generate its own narrativity and thus actively change the states of affairs on the mimetic plane through the encroachment of narrative turns. The quasi-causal event of sense leaves its imprint on the representational ontological layer as it operates through the play's various morphisms of smells and boxes. The play thus submits to the workings of a diegetic non-linear quasi-causality, and the various arbitrary transmorphoses that smells and boxes undergo are one attest to the work of quasi-causality within the play. Within this arrangement, each affected item (envelope, box, storage unit, tin can) replicates itself further. The Skybox maps itself onto a box of chocolates, which in turn morphs into Elaine's referring to her home as a box, mapping itself onto boxes as shorthand descriptions of the storage units, a dog's tin can and, eventually, a Boxter. These manifestations are aberrant spots within an otherwise coherent ontological layer where the play breaks open to explicate an ontological region of a different texture.

The appearance of smells and boxes within the play is utterly unnecessary, a superfluity that nevertheless can be said to glue the play together, supply unity, and in fact even make the play what it is. *Breathing Corpses* would have lost its entire brilliance if it were not for the subtle interfusion of these images of enclosure and pervasiveness. The play's layer of dramatic mimesis reaches out towards the evental only through the inclusion of these 'aberrant' inherences. The images of smells and boxes do not aim to represent. They rather operate as captures of the event of sense and its self-generated narrativity within an otherwise dramatic milieu.

The quasi-causal diegetic layer precipitates a rearrangement of the play's episodes that is indifferent to temporally or spatially governed relations of cause and effect. The images of boxes and smells are perfectly su-

perfluous and of no significance for the evolvement of the play's linear plot. They rather function as empty spots within the play's fabric, as places of void significance. Still, it is in their emptiness that an evental component that generates its own narrativity is to be found. Rationalisations remain insufficient in supplying a logic that envelops them and exposes their texture. Jim's suicide, the dead woman under a bush, Ben's unmotivated outburst of violence, and the murder anticipated in the last scene are rather the manifestations of a clandestine event that invades the play's representational layer, unites and sustains them. This event remains unnamable and incorporeal, only showing itself in local areas of capture. The work of an event of sense only becomes visible in the metamorphosed manifestations of an enclosure trope and a pervasiveness trope. These, in turn, alter the fabric of the play in unexpected ways. In scaffolding a scenario of 'mimesis through diegesis', *Breathing Corpses* shows us how a diegetic quasi-causal layer fuses into the play's level of enactment, unsettling its habitual ontological texture. In staging a dialogue between the dramatic and the postdramatic, the play discloses the processes by which its quasi-causal layer, which I aligned with the domain of Deleuze's 'event of sense', operates within the layer of dramatic mimesis, altering the fabric of the latter and generating its own singular ways of telling.

Conclusion

Both *Cleansed* by Sarah Kane and *Breathing Corpses* by Laura Wade exhibited very similar ways of worldmaking that are auto-generative and emergent. In this way, we could witness a type of genesis that originates in substance itself. The two plays were shown to recompose their ontological fabric to accommodate an aberrant constituent, an 'event of sense'. This aberrant constituent precipitated intensive changes in its surroundings and caused the plays to recompose. The ontological texture of this constituent became palpable from a vantage point that I called 'expressionist'. The term 'mimesis' should be understood as synonymous with generative, processual, and relational ways of worldmaking in drama that allude to the possibility of a spontaneous morphogenesis from within a work. *Cleansed* presented us with a worldmaking scenario that could be aligned with the aesthetic technique of 'diegesis through mimesis', or narrating through enacting. The play's literary world was generated through intensive enactment onstage and its various transmorphoses were mostly rendered by means of action – here it was the enactment that generated the narrativity. *Breathing Corpses*, in turn, acquainted us with a situation that could be characterized as 'mimesis through diegesis'. In this case, the play's level of enactment was continually altered

by the workings of a supra-mimetic ontological layer within the play that generated its own narrativity and thus influenced the mimetic layer.

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