



THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE

SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE ECHOES OF THE WOUND ON STAGE:

THE VOICE OF POST-WAR TRAUMA REFLECTED IN

IN-YER-FACE THEATRE AND BUTOH

Master's Thesis

Tuğba DUZAK

Department of English Language and Literature

Master of Arts in English Language and Literature

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Thesis Advisor

Asst. Prof. Dr. Erden EL

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YARANIN SAHNEDEKİ YANKILARI: SURATINA TİYATRO VE BUTOH'DA YANSITILAN SAVAŞ SONRASI TRAVMANIN SESİ

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, hem bireysel hem de kolektif travmanın iki radikal biçimde farklı tiyatro geleneği aracılığıyla nasıl ifade edildiğini araştırmaktadır: İngiliz tiyatro geleneğinden In-Yer-Face (Suratına) Tiyatrosu ve Japonya'nın performansı sanatı Butoh. Freud ve Cathy Caruth'un travma teorilerine dayanan bu araştırma, edebiyat ve performansın, travmanın sesini dile getiren araçlar olarak nasıl işlev gördüğünü incelemektedir. II. Dünya Savaşı'nın yıkıcı sonuçları ve Japonya'daki nükleer bombalamaların ardından, dünya genelindeki toplumlar, geleneksel yollarla ifade edilmesi imkânsız derin yaralarla baş başa kalmıştır. Grafik şiddet, sözlü saldırganlık ve yoğun duygusal anlatımıyla öne çıkan In-Yer-Face Tiyatrosu, izleyiciyi doğrudan karşısına alarak geleneksel tiyatro sınırlarını yıkar ve onları eyleme geçmeye zorlar. Buna karşın Butoh, sessizliğe, grotesk fiziksel ifadelerle ve sembolik imgelerle travmayı içselleştiren, bedensel bir deneyim olarak ortaya koyan bir anlatım biçimine dayanır. Sarah Kane'in Blasted ve Kazuo Ohno'nun My Mother adlı eserlerinin karşılaştırmalı analiziyle, bu tez her bir tiyatro biçiminin travmayı performansa nasıl dönüştürdüğünü incelemekte, yaklaşımlarındaki kültürel farklılıkları ortaya koymaktadır. Her iki gelenek de izleyiciyi sarsmayı ve uyandırmayı amaçlasa da, kullandıkları yöntemler, sözlü vs. fiziksel, yüzleştirici vs. düşünsel, ulusal tarihleri, estetik değerleri ve acı kavrayışlarındaki farklılıkları yansıtmaktadır. Bu araştırma, her iki tiyatro biçimi hakkındaki bireysel akademik çalışmalara katkıda bulunmasının yanı sıra, travmanın performatif ifadesine dair kültürlerarası özgün bir bakış açısı da sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Travma teorisi, In-Yer-Face/Suratına Tiyatro, Butoh, Kolektif Travma, Performans Çalışmaları

THE ECHOES OF THE WOUND ON STAGE: THE VOICE OF POST-WAR TRAUMA REFLECTED IN IN-YER-FACE THEATRE AND BUTOH

ABSTRACT

This study explores how trauma, both personal and collective, is expressed through two radically different theatre traditions: In-Yer-Face Theatre from the UK and Butoh from Japan. Grounded in the trauma theories of Freud and Cathy Caruth, the research investigates how literature and performance function as mediums through which the voice of trauma is articulated. Following the devastating aftermath of World War II and the nuclear bombings in Japan, societies across the globe were left grappling with wounds too deep to articulate through conventional means. In-Yer-Face Theatre, characterized by graphic violence, verbal aggression, and emotional intensity, confronts the audience directly, breaking traditional theatrical boundaries to provoke action. In contrast, Butoh relies on silence, grotesque physical expression, and symbolic imagery to evoke a more introspective and embodied experience of trauma. Through a comparative analysis of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Kazuo Ohno's *My Mother*, this thesis examines how each form translates trauma into performance, highlighting the cultural distinctions in their approaches. While both traditions aim to disturb and awaken their audiences, their methods, verbal vs. physical, confrontational vs. contemplative, reflect differing national histories, aesthetic values, and understandings of suffering. This research not only adds to the individual scholarship on each theatre form but also offers a unique cross-cultural perspective on the performative expression of trauma.

Key Words: Trauma Theory, In-Yer-Face Theatre, Butoh, Collective Trauma, Performance Studies

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INTRODUCTION

As a product of the human psyche, literature is inevitably intertwined with the societal issues of its time. It is therefore not uncommon to encounter literary works that reflect matters of public concern (Reedy, 101). The consecutive world wars that dominated the 20th century shaped the general atmosphere of the era in profound and often devastating ways. The collective trauma inflicted by these conflicts left a deep and lingering impact on every aspect of society. The brutality and savagery witnessed during these wars created wounds that could not easily heal, haunting not only individuals but entire generations. The psychological scars borne by survivors frequently manifested in persistent distress and neurotic behaviours. As Sigmund Freud suggests, trauma is a wound inflicted not upon the body, but upon the mind (Freud, qtd. in Caruth 3). This distinction reveals the profound difficulty of healing a mental wound compared to a physical one. Cathy Caruth expands on this by arguing that trauma speaks through repetition, what she refers to as the “voice from the wound” (Caruth 2), and that this voice is crucial, as it renders the trauma tangible and undeniable. Literature and performance serve as mediums through which this voice can be expressed, becoming tools for articulating the inarticulable.

In the aftermath of war, apocalyptic imagery and pessimistic tendencies began to pervade not only everyday discourse but also artistic expression. A collective melancholy enveloped society, gradually ingraining itself in creative works across genres. Among these, the performing arts, particularly theatre, emerged as especially compelling platforms for engaging with trauma. This study investigates how trauma has been represented in two distinct performance arts: In-Yer-Face Theatre in Britain and Butoh in Japan. These sub-genres are

examined through the lens of trauma theory, particularly as articulated by Freud and Caruth, in order to explore how trauma is expressed culturally and artistically.

The first section of the study focuses on how post-war trauma is reflected in British theatre through the In-Yer-Face movement. Aleks Sierz was the first to describe the term “In-Yer-Face Theatre” which refers to a group of British playwrights known for their use of extreme violence, shocking sexual content, and graphic language (Sierz “Brief History of In-Yer-Face Theatre”,2016) According to Sierz, these works represent a new generation of theatre rooted in traumatic realities (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, “Introduction”). By presenting unsettling imagery and emotionally charged content, these plays aim to disrupt the passive role of the audience, compelling them into an active cognitive and emotional engagement. In doing so, they defy the Aristotelian structure of narrative closure and catharsis, leaving audiences unsettled long after the curtain falls. This section will examine *Blasted*(1995) by Sarah Kane as a key example of this sub-genre.

The second section turns to the evolution of Japanese theatre in the post-war era, with particular focus on Butoh (舞踏), often translated as the “Dance of Death” (死の踊り, Shi no Odori). Emerging in the wake of Japan's disastrous experience with nuclear warfare, Butoh expresses trauma not through language but through the body. The physical and psychological consequences of the atomic bombings created generational trauma that found expression in the grotesque, haunting performances of Butoh. Performers often present distorted, slow, and uncanny movements, visually reflecting both inner suffering and physical mutation, thereby confronting audiences with discomfort and reflection. Unlike In-Yer-Face Theatre's direct verbal confrontation, Butoh adopts an abstract, non-verbal approach to provoke contemplation. Kazuo Ohno's emotionally charged performance *My Mother* (私のお母さん) serves as the primary case study in this section, illuminating how Butoh channels both personal grief and

collective post-war trauma. Through a comparative lens, this thesis will explore the cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical distinctions between these two traditions, examining how each interprets and communicates trauma to its audience.

Previous studies have extensively examined both In-Yer-Face Theatre and Butoh as separate entities. Studies on In-Yer-Face Theatre often focus on the raw portrayal of violence, sexual extremes, and emotional disintegration, especially in the works of Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill. These analyses frequently align with trauma theory, particularly Caruth's emphasis on the belated nature and repetitive structure of traumatic experience (Caruth *Unclaimed Experience*, 3). Kane's plays in particular, have been cited as exemplary of trauma's inability to be fully processed or contained within linear narrative structures (Sidi, 87). While Butoh has garnered less attention in Western scholarship, it has nevertheless been the subject of significant inquiry, particularly in terms of its aesthetic features. Scholars like Fraleigh, Sanders, and Tanaka have explored Butoh's use of non-verbal communication, minimalism, and bodily abstraction, often contrasting these elements with the more text-driven Western theatrical norms. Much of the existing research emphasizes Butoh's philosophical roots, its connection to nature and death, and its (r)evolution from traditional Japanese theatre forms such as Noh and Kabuki (Fraleigh, "Introduction") butoh.

What remains largely absent, however, is a comparative study that places these two traditions side by side within the framework of trauma theory. This thesis aims to fill that gap by offering a unique cross-cultural analysis of how trauma is staged, embodied, and communicated. The study will examine Sarah Kane's *Blasted* as a case study of In-Yer-Face Theatre, and Kazuo Ohno's *My Mother* as an exemplar of Butoh. It will then investigate how each performance tradition not only represents trauma differently but also reflects its respective cultural understandings of suffering, memory, and healing. Furthermore, the technical aspects

of both traditions, ranging from staging and props to language and movement, will be critically analysed to highlight the differing strategies employed in giving voice to trauma. Through this comparative framework, the thesis aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how cultural context shapes the artistic representation of psychological wounds.



PART 1 DEFINING POST-WAR TRAUMA

Originating from the Greek word τραῦμα" (traûma) refers to a wound on the physical body. However, in the modern age the word has begun to be used to define a mental wound. In the core of trauma phenomenon lies the inquiry of what is injured. Before the development of psychoanalysis, the invisible traces of a damage against one's psyche were generally disregarded due to the lack of research done on the topic. However, when many war veterans showed similar symptoms of traumatic neurosis due to the atrocities they faced during World War I, at that time it was not regarded as trauma, but the people used terms like shellshock to define what the war veteran' symptoms. American psychiatrist Abram Kardiner who closely examined patients showcasing concerning physical reactions against varying aggressors suggested that the traumatic neurotic behaviours displayed by the patients was the result of a *physioneurosis* (8). Meaning that the emergence of these neurotic behaviours had both physical and psychological factors. Again, Abram Kardiner observed that the bodies of these veterans continue to re-experience that very terrible, frightening situation, and that event keeps coming back in terms of images, behaviours, and physical sensations (Abram Kardiner qtd. in van der Kolk). Likewise William James compared what the prominent names of psychology- Breuer, Janet, Freud- name trauma, to a "thorn in the spirit"—a suggestive image that likens trauma to a foreign object that becomes lodged in the psyche, like a wound that is covered over and rendered invisible but that continues to fester and cause problems and that can only be truly treated by being uncovered and extracted (qtd. in Kurtz, "Introduction" 3). In many definitions of trauma neurosis, we realize several common elements which determines what constitutes as trauma. In the late 1900s, during the post-war period the psychiatrists who treated the patients suffering

from PTSD- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder- believed that for a trauma to occur a person should go through a major catastrophic event which is hard to comprehend. It should be this extraordinary event outside of human experience that could act as a basis. In similar fashion Judith Herman states that a traumatic event is when an experience overwhelms ordinary adaptations to life (45). For instance, a person who had experienced a horrific car accident on a rainy day and survived with minor injuries, now has difficulty driving a car, especially on rainy days because the recurring pattern will remind them of the accident and the physical body will start to react as if they are reliving the event. A prominent trauma theory scholar Cathy Caruth states that survival quality of the event is what creates the foundation for the traumatic wound ("Introduction", 6). Judith Herman expresses in *Trauma and Recovery* that "traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death"(46). The disastrous event breaches the safety net of the body and the mind scarring it so suddenly that it leaves a lingering trace. The unexpected event prevents the body from perceiving the impact properly. When the brain cannot meet the expected impact, in this case a serious physical injury or an almost-death scenario, stores the reaction against it because the physical body cannot incorporate the emotional almost. Oftentimes even the person themselves does not realize that they have a problem until they are faced with a similar situation (Berger, 570). When an impetus akin to previous experience transpires, the delayed response from the prior event re-surfaces and the brain recreates the same reaction, making the person feel as if they are back in that moment (Kolk, 15). Caruth emphasizes that the latency a term used by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* the belatedness of the response, is what generates a wound in the mental space (qtd. in Caruth, 17). The mind unable to process the shock of the unexpected collision becomes dormant. Similarly, in *Traumatic Neurosis of War*, Kardiner, states that trauma occurs when the adaptation process is injured, disorganized or shattered (74).

The nature of trauma is that an happening enters your ears, into your skin, into your eyes, and it goes down into a very primitive part of your brain that unintentionally perceives what's going on. Is this safe or dangerous? An event becomes traumatic when there is nothing you can do to avoid the inevitable and your body starts automatically going to the state of fight/flight or collapse. The surviving effect of trauma is that you continue to react to mild stressors as if your life is in danger. (Bessel van der Kolk, "How the Body Keeps the Score on Trauma" 4:27)

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud introduces the concept of "compulsive repetition" (Zilboorg, Introduction xiv). He has discovered that over the course of their life, humans have demonstrated some repetitive behaviours that seemingly have no explanation, which reveals itself sometime later after experiencing a catastrophe. "In the course of the following weeks, after the near-death experience, he [the survivor of a catastrophe] develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which one can ascribe only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident" (Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 109). It was especially enlightening to realize that the source of the compulsion which causes the repetitive behaviour is not cognizant. It is almost like an involuntary impulse. The fact that trauma keeps replaying itself, over and over, through the unintentional actions of the survivor, even when the survivor does not want it to, is interesting because it shows that the reaction comes from the subconsciousness (Alexander, 5). The act was so embedded in the psyche of the person that even they are not aware of what they are reacting to or why. Hence, when the survivor encounters a similar stimulus, the reaction that has been latent resurfaces and re-generates the same response from the time it was first encountered (van der Kolk, 15).

He further expands the traumatic neurosis by adducing to the tragedy of Tancred and Clorinda; the story of two lovers who were at the opposite sides of the war and unfortunately met a tragic end. Tancred not knowing the identity of the opponent, kills an enemy soldier who turns out to be none other than Clorinda in disguise. Reeling from the shocking death of his

beloved and filled with overwhelming grief Tancred later exhibits some behavioural patterns which are quite disconcerting. Especially when he is in the Enchanted Forest having to fight a curse which brings out a person's inner fears, he becomes unable to slay the trees because he sees Clorinda's silhouette which calls out to him in agony. The fact that Tancred is being haunted by the tragic end of his lover and that transforming into a physical reaction at a later time exemplifies the traumatic neurosis (qtd in Caruth, "Introduction" 2-3). According to Caruth, the fact that Tancred becomes aware of his own trauma the moment he slays the trees causing another wound in his psyche. Caruth emphasizes that the nature of trauma is paradoxical because in order to realize the existence of trauma, the victim has to relive the same or similar situation again hence infecting oneself with a double wound (Caruth, "Introduction" 4). With decades of work with Vietnam war veterans, psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk points out similar concerns regarding his patients. After the deployment from war, many veterans had trouble adapting to their war-free lives showed signs of recurring nightmares, a tendency to alcoholism and emotional numbness. A patient of van der Kolk named Tom, after losing a close friend during the war in a bout of frenzy attacked a Vietnamese village, killing innocent children and raping women (van der Kolk, 20-26). When he returned to his family however the memories of what he did haunted him and every time he saw his children or his wife, he was reminded of the shameful acts he committed which has put a huge load on his war-torn psyche. In Tom's case his own children and wife becomes the stressors that triggered his traumatic reactions. As Caruth suggested that the recurring of the trauma causes a second wound, which stresses the mind of the survivor, when faced with a similar stressor, must experience the trauma again, hence creating a second wound (Caruth, 9). As the trauma goes unattended the stress levels of the survivor can also pile up due to the repressed emotions resulting in many unwanted physical and mental breakdowns. Leaving the survivor vulnerable to their trauma can result in another traumatic incident.

It is indicated that when an unforeseen event happens to an individual either a physical or mental; the mind cannot comprehend the impact, thus the impact, not being processed properly cannot be counter-reacted. The shock of the event lays the foundation for trauma. The emotional turmoil that comes with the impact is repressed unintentionally at the moment of the event, creating the illusion of apathy against the crisis. The reaction of temporary apathy is due to the mind's inability to adapt to the extraordinary experience. In the second chapter of the *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud especially draws attention to the element of *fright*, caused by the event. He defines fright as "the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it", elevating the element of surprise (Freud,6). When faced with a collision, because the impact is unforeseen; brain struggles to make sense of it in order to generate a proper defence that will save the vessel. During that process however, while the brain is getting the body ready to counter; the impact vanishes, leaving the physical and mental body of the person prepared for seemingly nothing. It is suggested that the unexpected factor of the event creates a disparity in the incorporation of the impact, which in return delays the appropriate reaction time (Balaev,150). This disparity takes roots and leaves a scar in the mental psyche of the person thus developing trauma. Later, when similar circumstances arise, the never scabbing wound- that compulsive repetition- starts reacting repeatedly; the undeliberate repetitiveness of the repressed trauma reaction in different times is a clear proof that the survivor cannot assimilate the traumatic event (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes this as a passive experience, over which the individual has no influence, but in which he meets with a repetition of the same fatality (Freud,16). In another book, *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud connects the emergence of monotheistic religion Judaism to the killing of Moses. He likens the traumatic neurosis that happened from an accident such as a train collision to the Jewish Monotheism; claiming that although these two are fundamentally different their one common quality is latency. After the rejection of the Moses

religion, there was a long period in Jewish history where they did nothing related to the Moses religion (111). Here, Freud dives deep into the relationship between history and trauma, and how historical records of the betrayal of the Jews rekindled the belief in only one God. It can be inferred that according to Freud the collective guilt from killing aka rejection of the Mosaic God, the father and the saviour, has created a want of repentance which transformed into a stronger religious tradition. The point he emphasizes is the waiting period for the religion to get stronger as “the incubation period”; the time it takes for an illness to show symptoms (109). In the case of Tancred and Clorinda story, the moment up to Tancred’s encounter with the enchanted trees which appeared as Clorinda is the incubation period for Tancred’s trauma. The trauma that is festered by Tancred’s memories of Clorinda that turns the event into a tragic wound.

Furthermore, in another work of his Freud touches upon the collective trauma. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud presents civilization not only as a system of protection and order but also as a latent source of collective trauma (77). Although he does not use the term trauma clearly, his exploration of how civilization demands the repression of instinctual drive, particularly aggression and sexuality, reveals a structure in which suffering is systemic and internalized. The individual, compelled to renounce instinct in favour of social norms, develops a harsh super-ego that generates chronic guilt and self-punishment (123-124). This internal conflict becomes a kind of psychic wounding, a trauma not caused by a single catastrophic event but by the persistent denial of the self’s natural desires. As Freud argues, the more advanced civilization becomes, the more it heightens this sense of guilt, thereby deepening the discontent of its subjects (125). In this light, civilization may be understood as a traumatizing force, one that produces neurosis, alienation, and internalized violence as conditions of modern life.

Accordingly, the consecutive world wars the people have gone through, had created psychological, emotional, and societal wounds. The aftermath of the wars affected individuals, communities, and nations as they struggle with the devastating consequences of conflict. The traumatic experiences after the first world war embraces a wide range of areas, from the personal suffering of veterans and civilians to the collective challenges of rebuilding societies and dealing with the memory of violence. Many people who bore witness to atrocious acts during the war period later had difficulty in reintegrating back to their lives for many reasons. The war did not solely affect the veterans who had directly participated in the violent acts, but it also affected the society though indirectly. Therefore, anxiety and depression created by the constant possibility of death, physical injuries, being exposed to inexplicable violence, losing their loved ones, being displaced from their homes and even the guilt from being able to survive altered the lives of both the soldiers and the civilians. The memories of war were ingrained into the minds of the public which generated a traumatized society (Neal qtd. in Alexander, 3). From Tancred and Clorinda to Jews and Moses to the war survivors' traumatic experiences, it can be deduced that at the core of trauma, memory, the remembrance of the event plays an important role. It is the mental connection an individual has with their own past, as Nigel Hunt points out in *Memory, War and Trauma*, "without memory we do not exist" and he maintains "where there is no remembered past there is no present, because the present cannot be interpreted without knowledge of the past" (100). From this statement it can also be argued that history as the record of the past events is a link of identification of a society. The new world created by the societies who had gone through insurmountable tragic events passed the records of this catastrophe from generation to generation creating a collective memory. The collectivity of memory created by the past events establishes a shared understanding in that community, bringing unity through the memory of suffering and surviving together. An individual does not have to experience the tragedy of war first-hand given that the person would be informed of the events indirectly due

to the collective memory. Therefore, with the indirect exposure of the catastrophe through the memories of the collective, the wounds created by the events is also passed through. Nevertheless, it is a given in the modern history discipline that as history is considered a science; it should objectively hold account of the past events, it lacks in maintaining an emotional and psychological impact of these catastrophes on the community. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra states that as well as being impartial, historians should find balance between attesting the truths of the tragic events of the past, and should recognize the emotional significance (35). In curating a collective memory not only the historical records but the personal memory of the individual also plays an important role. Although it is not shown in the official records, the stories about the war, and the retelling of those tragedies will stick in the minds of the other people generating their own memories regarding the event. Hunt continues with “history is generated by an individual, is unequivocal and depends on systematic evidence, collective memory is generated by the group, is multivocal and is responsive to the social framework in which it is created, i.e. the social discourse” (Hunt, 99). A person – a grandchild perhaps – who was born after of the war, through the behaviours and experience of the survivors – their grandparents – who participated in the war as a soldier or as a civilian, can form a memory of the war in their mind. Thus, through the experience of an individual a collective memory is generated, as Halbwachs in *The Collective Memory* suggest an individual’s memory relates to the social groups they belong in. The environment we grew up in is a big determinant of our own perception of the worldly events (26). We identify ourselves in relation to our position in a community. In that aspect collective memory rather than history becomes an essential factor in not only for determining the identity of a person but also the whole society. Because history is and should be objective as well as matter-of-fact; the collective memory becomes the unifying force in generating a national consciousness. With the indirect exposure of the catastrophe through the memories of the collective, the wounds created by the events is

also passed through. As we have mentioned before, at the crux of trauma exists recollection of the event whether conscious or unconscious. When a society's collective memory is built on war experiences, it becomes "fixed in the mind" (Hunt,7) that will affect every little aspect of their lives. The atrocities civilians went through undoubtedly reshaped their own perspective of the world. Janoff-Bulman argued that traumatic events destroy people's essential beliefs and assumptions about the world. Her view is that we have fundamental beliefs that the world is meaningful, that it is benevolent and that the self is worthy (qtd in Hunt, 62). Trauma is a force that destroys our assorted understanding of the world, it is disruptive. Thus, when the fundamentals of a society collapse, the repercussions would be scarring. Considering the function of collective memory in constructing the identity of a community; collective memory fed by the experiences of the survivors causes a collective trauma which is passed through the generations. By doing so the upcoming generations have also become victims of trauma due to their proximity to the survivors' testimony. The wounds left through the collective memory leaves an impression on a group that has experienced a historical traumatic event that may have occurred decades, generations or even centuries ago (Fassin and Rehtman qtd. in Raslan, 184). Similarly, in *Trauma Explorations in Memory* Caruth maintains that a community connected through history or ethnicity relays a traumatic experience transhistorically through verbal or written acts of remembering (153). The tragic events narrated by the survivors become an important record of an individual memory contributing to the collective memory becoming a tool to pass on the trauma to the future:

By collective trauma, I mean an attack to the foundations of social life that harms the bonds connecting people together and damages the prevailing sense of community. The collective trauma works its way gradually and even covertly into the consciousness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma." But it is a form of shock all the same, a progressive realization that the community no longer exists as a potent source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared.... "We"

no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body. (Erikson.132-133)

As mentioned before the memory we deem as individual does not exist by itself; every memory is generated within the framework of the social group we belong in (Halbwachs, 39). To expand more on this idea, it is now broadly understood that memory is an active process where we construct and organize information based on our past experiences and mental frameworks. These frameworks, or “schemas,” help guide how we remember and respond to new situations. As Bartlett explained, a schema is “an active organization of past reactions or of past experiences” that are crucial in recognizing and adapting new experiences (201). Similarly, Mandler described schemas as mental frames that are categorized and identified by our past interactions with objects, events, or scenes (3-4). By setting up unconscious intentions about how things should appear or the specific orders in which events typically occur, these frameworks help a person make sense of the world. The way we emulate and incorporate new information depends heavily on these previously established mental patterns (Schacter, 1987; Neisser, 1967). Therefore, if our understanding of the world sustains a blow to the established schemas then it will naturally have a crucial impact on collective memory.

Bessel van der Kolk suggest that human brain remembers the insults the best due to the emotional state of the individual; an event is stored better if it awakens strong emotions in us (van der Kolk, 212). When it comes to people who suffer from traumatic experiences there are many occasions where the individual is able to remember every single detail about the event due to intensive emotional overload. He interviewed a group of war veterans about the war twice; the first one took place immediately after WWII and the second interview was realized in 1989/90 over a forty-year interval; even though they have suffered from traumatic neurosis, these veterans were able to remember even the least significant detail about an incident occurred during their service; and both of their accounts were the same (211). Nevertheless, it cannot be

said for every person who suffers from traumatic experiences, “confronted with horror, especially the horror of an inescapable shock” the system overloads and breaks down (213). When mental connection is severed, the individual may experience memory loss of the traumatic event. Contrary to history, collective memory is made up from subjective testimonies, it is emotionally charged and sometimes the recollections might be misled due to horrors being repressed. It is based on an individual’s perception of their surroundings which can be misleading according to the state they are in. This is especially important when it comes to veterans and survivors of the world war. For many war veterans who had to kill people and had witnessed their comrades being killed in the war front, their recollections of the events can be too painful to remember. Likewise, many survivors who were sexually abused during their childhood especially by their close family are incapable of reconciliation tend to forget or disassociate from the memory causing amnesia in the individual. The brain represses the horrific event as a defence mechanism to protect the mind but as Bessel van der Kolk says the body keeps the score (van der Kolk, 1). Meaning that the tragic information regarding the event is stored in the body and stays dormant until an external force triggers the forgotten memories to reappear. One of the patients of Kolk remembered being sexually abused by the priest in his hometown when he was a child through a news article. The memory of the repeated abuse kept reappearing in his mind not in full pictures but in fragmented ways; these flooding memories caused him to have several panic attacks driving him to the point of quitting his aspiring career in military (206-207). Another example would be the *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel; in the book incapable of the truth of his family’s horrific death and getting stuck at a shipwreck the protagonist Pi Patel creates an alternative and almost fantastical story to cope with the reality of his situation. Although unconscious, the brain's connection to the past re-generates the reaction which was repressed at the time of the unwanted event.

The position of the survivor is essential in recollection of an event as well. Especially when it comes to war; being on winning or losing side can exhibit variety in the trauma of the collective. Caruth expands on this idea with examples from famous French Japanese movie named *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959). A French woman who lost her German lover who served as a soldier and a Japanese man who fought in the WWII and lost all his family due to the atomic bomb dropped in Hiroshima. One of the lines that are overly repeated in the movie was “You saw nothing in Hiroshima” (qtd in Caruth, 28) from the Japanese man in response to the woman’s claims of understanding the tragedy of Hiroshima. Even though they talk about the same historical event, the atomic bomb represents two different concepts in their minds due to their cultural memory. For a French person and to the rest of the world the atomic bomb signifies the end of the devastating war, nevertheless for the Japanese it is the beginning of decades of suffering due to radiation and chaos it brought (Caruth, 36-37). In general, collective memory mirrors shared experiences but is carved by societal narratives that can glamorize or suppress the truth. The interaction between individual and collective memory shows how trauma reconstructs identities, influencing both personal healing and the historical understanding of conflict. Postwar trauma is not merely a residue of the past, it is a legacy that forges the values of the present. This grim legacy is transmitted through the narratives and testimonies of the survivors of the traumatic incidents.

1.1. Role of Literature in Processing Trauma

Literary trauma theory explores the representation of psychological wounds and their impact on individuals and societies in literature. At its core, trauma theory investigates how trauma disrupts traditional narratives and language, compelling writers to depict experiences that defies typical forms of storytelling. Cathy Caruth, a central expert in this field, emphasizes

the paradoxical nature of trauma, its simultaneous resistance to being fully articulated and its relentless demand to be acknowledged. (Caruth; 4-5) In her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth claims that trauma is not a direct event but a layered encounter that resurfaces in haunting ways. She argues that trauma does not occur in an even portrayal, rather revealing itself through gaps, silences, and disruptions in narrative (44). For Caruth, literature offers a unique medium to affront trauma's inexplicable nature, enabling fragmented voices and disrupted timelines to communicate what history and psychology often cannot. Her theory accentuates the ethical responsibility of witnessing and bearing testimony, emphasizing the relational aspect of trauma, where the listener becomes an essential part of the healing process (32). By bridging personal suffering with collective memory, Caruth's ideals illuminate how trauma reshapes identity, history, and storytelling, fostering a deeper understanding of human resilience and vulnerability.

Using literature; remembering and writing down the experience make the survivor gain control of the helplessness they felt during the experience. Strictly speaking the individual's aim in narrating their trauma is not to be rid of it eternally which is paradoxically may not be possible due to the fact that it was the existence of the traumatic experience that has produced an artwork. Nevertheless, through artistic endeavours an individual conceives a bridge between the known and the unknown, meaning the art here evolves into the role of a mediator between the conscious and subconscious of the person. Trauma is a wound that is made aware not at the moment of impact but at a much later time which is the main factor of its existence. Literature, through its symbolic and imaginative power, offers a space to explore complex, often unspeakable experiences of trauma, vulnerability, and mortality (Schönfelder,29). By fictionalizing and contextualizing these themes, literary texts allow for both emotional connection and critical reflection. Emphasizing the importance of the inexplicable nature of the

trauma, Pollock states that the art tries to fill in the gaps and aims to make some sense of the traumatic incident (Pollock, 259).

If we look closely at the many great works, we will find many examples of characters who were traumatized due to several horrific incidents. Hence, even after many decades people are reminded of the tragic incidents of war. After World War I -when even the idea of trauma was barely recognized- many soldiers were sent to hospitals due to ‘the state of shellshock’, one of these soldiers was Wilfred Owen who resorted to poetry. He wrote many poems about his service in the war which provided deep insights into the mental damage caused by his experiences. Another example would be Australian author Erich Maria Remarque who penned *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a semi-autobiographical work in which Remarque shares his experiences as a soldier. It tells the story of a group of young boys who enlisted to join the war and were disillusioned by the reality and brutality they had to be a part of every single day. Here Remarque transmits his memories of war through literature as a means of ridding himself of the haunting ordeal. Similarly, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which is another example of a trauma narrative, narrates the story of a Holocaust survivor and the work acts as an emotionally saturated record of the brutalities Jews have been subjected to. Trauma narratives often act as microcosms; they tell the trauma of a whole group through the experience of one character or a specific group. Most of the time trauma narratives have been used to deliberate in postcolonial narratives expressing the anguish of the oppressed, therefore, these narratives construct an identity of the oppressed community due to its historical elements. As Elaine Scarry comments War destroys people, material culture, and elements of consciousness (or inner culture), and that the failed state must erase part of its history and begin to reimagine itself, to believe in itself again, to understand itself again, to experience itself again as a complete whole (Scarry, 93). A recent example would be Susan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin*, a transgenerational trauma narrative as we see the struggles of generations of a Palestinian family under the Israeli

occupation. Abulhawa imparts the history of the Palestine occupation through the perspective of Nasr family, following their struggles of being forced to live in refugee camps after being displaced from their own lands, which lasted for over forty years. Amal, the protagonist, was born in the refugee camp and mostly grew up in America; she still possesses a longing for a home that she hardly knew. The fact that she feels a deep bond for a land she barely grew up in is a proof of the transferability of collective memory. Balaev suggests that trauma novels centre an agonised individual but portrays them in a way that makes them an *everyperson* figure (Balaev,155). These protagonists adhere to the traumatic experience of the collective. The written accounts of the trauma survivors may be helpful in recovering from their trauma, moreover, these accounts also become crucial records of collective memory which shapes the societies. As mentioned before collective memory becomes a unifying drive that forges a bond among the members of the community, and gradually, they become definitive part of the culture. According to Jay Winter in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, literature and artistic endeavours encouraged by the governments such as memorials or monuments for the victims of the war have become important means of processing collective trauma and maintaining a connection to the past. The memorials and literary works evolve into sites of memory for the survivors (79). It has been established in the previous section that trauma is repetitive with unknown time frames but at the same time it can be transferred through the individual memory into collective memory which means it can also be transferred across generations. A traumatic experience of a society can be passed on to the upcoming generations by means of literature. With the rapid advance in film industry after World War II many movies or documentaries depicting the atrocity of war has come out which made it easier for the trauma to be transferable. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in her study of how people experienced the 9/11 attacks across Manhattan, argued that the event was inherently tied to spectatorship. Through imagery like snapshots and flashbulbs, she emphasized that photography became one of the strongest ways

people responded. She highlighted the performative aspect of the event, suggesting that the act of witnessing was inseparable from the event itself, especially since it seemed almost designed for large-scale visual consumption, both locally and through the media (Gimblett qtd in Lepecki, 114). The traumatic experience can have the same haunting impact on people who have common historical incidents and those who are a part of the same ethnic group. The mobility of trauma through ages provides the basis for collective trauma which evolves into cultural trauma. The memorials, monuments; the artistic constructions act as the relics of the tragic past for the future generations. This is supported by the following words.

We, who were born after WWII have memories of that war, acquired through talking to people who lived through the war, reading books and magazines, seeing movies and documentaries, seeing warzones in various countries, and seeing memorials – both small memorials to the deceased of particular villages and the larger national memorials that serve not only to honour the dead but also to provide a cultural memory for the living. (Halbwachs qtd in Hunt, 121)

Subsequently it can be stated that due to the unique nature of a cultural memory which shapes a society, the representation of the collective trauma can also be unique to each culture. Winter suggests that when a catastrophe occurs many communities turn to religion or other spiritual practices or rituals to express their grief in their own traditional ways (120). Additionally, in *Worlds of Hurt* Kali Tal defends the unique representation of trauma and argues that universalizing the trauma experiences is not fair to the survivors; and that it minimalizes the impact of the horrific experience (31). Tal puts emphasis on the narratives that are orchestrated by the first-hand survivors, which she calls survivor-authors, with examples of war veterans' writings, claiming that when a non-veteran author writes about the war it becomes a literary choice, 'the war' they chose to write about is nothing more than a metaphor; it is a tool to convey a point(16). Nevertheless, when the survivor-authors – in this case actual veterans who participated in the war, write about the war they also delve into their own personal histories,

these records present the readers with an alternative perspective of an event which can be truth-shattering. As well as by narrating the atrocities they have been subjected to, survivor-authors can rebuild their self which was damaged due to the trauma of war. These records become personal testimonies of war trauma revealing the depth of the wound left by the wars. Literature is an effective medium in the way that it can generate empathy and awareness in readers. Due to its being liberated from the objectiveness of the history, trauma literature is beneficial in the processing of the individual trauma as LaCapra points out in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, literary narratives can provide a transition from “acting out” of trauma referring to the compulsive and repetitive nature of traumatic experience into “working through” the traumatic experience (70). Nonetheless, working through the trauma does not mean that the survivor is able to heal from the experience completely; rather it is a way of making the unspeakable, speakable; by defining the inexplicable nature of trauma it is a way of re-gaining control of the psyche (Balaev, 150).

In addition to the mentioned methods, theatre and performance have long played a meaningful part in helping individuals and societies process trauma, offering a space for expression, contemplation, and relief from trauma. According to Diana Taylor trauma, by nature, is performative (1675). Similarly, Marvin Carlson states that “all theatre ...is a cultural activity deeply involved with memory and haunted by repetition” (qtd in Waterson, 509). As a medium that combines imagination, representation, and collective experience, theatre creates opportunities to confront difficult memories and emotions, reconstructing them into narratives that can be understood and shared. By engaging performers and audiences alike, theatre serves as a joint act of remembrance and exploration, bringing together the unspeakable and the speakable. In his poetics where he establishes the principles of the tragedy genre, Aristotle in his *Poetics* claimed that at the end of a play the audience should have a moment of purgation (8); as in purifying of emotions from the event occurring at the stage. He called this process

catharsis and claimed that it was the most important elements of tragedies; making sure that the audience should empathise with the actors on stage and then be relieved of any lingering woes. By identifying the audience with the tragic character's experiences, play also make the audience empathise with the trauma of the tragic character. What Aristotle suggests here is the use of theatre and performances as a tool for mental respite just like trauma novel.

One of the most significant ways theatre appeals to trauma is due to its ability to construct a safe yet suggestive space where traumatic experiences can be surveyed. Unlike traditional forms of therapy, which often rely on verbal communication between a professional advisor and the survivor, theatre employs physical body, metaphors, and symbols to represent the inexpressible. For individuals who struggle to articulate their experiences, performance can evade the restrictions of language, allowing the body and emotions to communicate directly. French dramatist Antonin Artaud took an incentive in revolutionising the Western Theatre. He published several manifestos on what he introduced as Theatre of Cruelty. The essence of this genre was to challenge conventional theatrical norms by seeking to confront audiences on a much deeper level, ignoring logical thought to delve deeper emotional and subconscious layers (Artaud,1). Artaud visualized a kind of theatre that aimed to disturb the accustomed forms of narrative structures, alternating in exercising intense sensory experiences, such as sound, lighting, and physicality, to provoke an instantaneous, often distressing reaction(Artaud, 1-2). By putting emphasis on the appealing to senses during a performance Theatre of Cruelty intended to shatter the carefully curated society approved masks to breach into a person's raw emotions and reveal their vulnerabilities. In the context of trauma, the theatre becomes a powerful medium for exploring the fractured, non-linear, and often chaotic nature of traumatic memory. By resisting expression through traditional narratives, trauma mimics the fragmented and engaging qualities of Artaud's theatre; performances in this style can elicit the shock and bewilderment that indicate traumatic experiences, offering a space where repressed emotions

and unspeakable pain are embodied and confronted. Moreover, the Theatre of Cruelty aligns with the concept of catharsis in trauma recovery. By deeply engrossing both performers and audiences in elevated, fierce expressions of pain and struggle it creates a shared experience of confrontation and release, fostering an empathetic engagement with the complexities of trauma and its lingering effects. Artaud's cruelty had a different connotation, he regarded theatre of cruelty in the scope of real, for him cruelty was what made the humans, and the societies exist. To him, actors are not performing, they are living, and that the theatre should reflect that cruelty, in one of his letters he states that humans endured war, famine and concentration camps these are the facts of the humanity thus the plays should also envisage that cruelty (qtd in Finter 16-17). The community who went through a gruesome war could relate those topics because it happened and affected their lives. Artaud's aim here was not for healing from trauma, he wanted to reach the audience as deep as he can, his aim was to externalize the inner suffering of the humans. However, Artaud's attempt can also be considered as way to identify what is left unidentified. In his own words van der Kolk states that the people who have been traumatised are afraid of feeling deeply because it means the loss of control (393). Without meaning to, theatre of cruelty paved the way for more experimental attempts at theatre regarding the social and individual matters.

Theatre as a literary device can function as a site of collective memory and mourning, where communities can come together to process shared trauma. This is particularly evident in post-war contexts or after large-scale tragedies, where public rituals of remembrance often intersect with performative acts. For example, in Türkiye on 18th March to commemorate the Gallipoli War performances are held at schools enacting specific events from the war. This type of performances frequently addresses the legacies of war and social upheaval. These works do not merely recount events; they reframe them, offering audiences a lens through which to reinterpret their history and, potentially, their future. Performative acts of mourning, whether

through scripted dialogue, choreographed movement, or divinified repetition, allow public to engage with loss in a methodical and cathartic way, cultivating a sense of collective healing. Trauma occurs because the survivor loses the control they have over their mental and physical reactions due to a catastrophe. The experience creates a gap between body and the mind and narrating the traumatic experience is an act of reclaiming the individual's agency. Our sense of control comes from being connected to our bodies and rhythms, how we wake, sleep, eat, and move shapes our days. To find our voice, we must be present in our bodies, breathing fully and sensing deeply, the opposite of dissociation or passive detachment. Acting is about using your body to claim your place in life (van der Kolk, 388).

Moreover, theatre provides to be instrumental in promoting a means to critique and question the governmental structures that sustain trauma. Theatre empowers communities to reenact and reshape their experiences of oppression, turning the stage into a platform for advocacy and change. Similarly, contemporary works addressing issues such as racism, gender violence, and displacement use theatre as a tool for raising awareness and promoting empathy. By engaging audiences in active reflection, these performances encourage not only understanding but also action, creating the potential for societal transformation. Through its intrinsic immediacy and intimacy, performance has the power to challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives. A very early example could be a play named *Black 'Ell* written by Miles Malleeson in 1916 while the World War I was still ongoing; at a time when war propaganda was at its peak and dying for one's country was glorified, Malleeson's work did the opposite and presented the public with the other side of the medallion. He emphasized the harsh realities of war, by displaying how the soldiers were affected by the horrific events and the psychological toll the war takes on the soldiers' psyche. Malleeson expertly provides a character which is so traumatized even after he comes back home, he is still haunted by the memories (Malleeson,14). Furthermore, the play offers an insight to the anxious wait of the family

members of the soldier who restlessly wait for grim news in their homes (5). Malleon uses theatre as a tool to disillusion the society's empty patriotic discourse.

Finally, the ritualistic and communal aspects of theatre make it uniquely suited to the healing process. The act of gathering, witnessing, and participating in a shared experience reinforces a sense of connection and solidarity, counteracting the isolation that often accompanies trauma. Trauma is about burying the experience deeper into the unconscious part of the brain, so it does not disturb, it is about forgetting the experience to live under the pretence of a normal life. However, theatre is the externalization of these buried sensations, and it is the act of embodying one's inner turmoil in nursing their trauma. It is a method of self-exploration both psychologically and physiologically (van der Kolk, 393). Whether through ancient Greek tragedies, which sought to purge emotions through catharsis, or modern immersive performances, which invite audience participation, theatre highlights the power of collective confrontation in addressing and moving beyond pain. Therefore, theatre and performance are beneficial tools in processing trauma, offering a versatile approach that combines emotional release, collective memory, critical reflection, and social connection. By turning pain into performance, theatre not only helps individuals and communities confront their past but also equips them to envision and create a more volatile future.

A prominent figure in the development of the postwar drama, Hans-Thies Lehmann whose concept of post dramatic theatre, as outlined in his influential work *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999), marks a crucial transformation from conventional dramatic frameworks to empirical forms which disputes the traditional narrative methods. Lehmann argues that unlike Aristotelian drama which maintains a linear structure consisting of clear beginnings, middles, and ends; post dramatic theatre moves toward fragmented, non-linear, and often immersive experiences just like the memory of a traumatic experience which comes out unexpectedly and disorganized (58-59). Inspired by the avant-garde movements of the 20th century, such as Antonin Artaud's

Theatre of Cruelty and Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, post dramatic works prioritize atmosphere, sensory experience, and performativity over storytelling. Lehmann highlights how contemporary playwrights and theatre-makers, including Heiner Müller and Robert Wilson, blur the lines between text, performance, and visual art. Lehmann's theory has profoundly influenced modern theatre, providing a framework for understanding experimental performance practices that reject representation in favour of presence and affect.

So far, this research has introduced trauma theory, outlining the ways in which both individual and collective trauma have been expressed through a range of artistic endeavours. Of particular interest has been the role of live performance and theatre in processing and externalizing traumatic experience. As theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Sigmund Freud have demonstrated, trauma resists direct expression, it leaves its traces in the unconscious, often revealing itself through indirect narratives such as repetition, fragmentation, and bodily reaction. Theatre, with its inherent immediacy and facility for bodily, sentimental, and sensory engagement, emerges as a particularly strong medium for expressing the inexplicable (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 20). Unlike written or visual art, live performance operates in real-time and space, often creating an experience in a communal space between performer and audience, thus enhancing the transferability and visibility of trauma. Over time, this transferability has evolved. What may have once been held privately within the psyche becomes increasingly externalized and shared through public forms of performance. In this context, the stage becomes a site of testimony, where trauma is not only represented but re-experienced, re-enacted, and sometimes ritualistically purged. As the boundaries between the personal and the political blur, trauma performance becomes a vehicle not only for individual catharsis but for collective confrontation and cultural memory.

In the sections that follow, this thesis will examine how large-scale traumatic triggers, such as war, violence, and loss, have shaped and transformed performance traditions in both

Western and Eastern contexts. Beginning with Sarah Kane's groundbreaking and controversial play *Blasted*, the study will analyse how post-war trauma and emotional dissatisfaction are manifested through extreme language, violence, and the breakdown of dramatic structure. Kane's work challenges the conventional cathartic function of theatre, replacing it with what Aleks Sierz refers to as in-yer-face intensity, a direct confrontation with pain, disgust, and vulnerability. The analysis will then turn to Kazuo Ohno's deeply personal and meditative performance *My Mother*, which reflects on grief, death, and memory through the aesthetic and philosophical lens of Butoh. Rooted in Japan's post-atomic trauma and shaped by its own cultural responses to suffering, Butoh offers a radically different, non-verbal, and corporeally driven mode of engagement with trauma. In contrast to the aggressive externalization seen in Kane's work, Ohno's performance invites inward reflection, often through slow, haunting movement and symbolic gestures that evoke the cyclical nature of life and death. By placing these two performance traditions, *In-Yer-Face Theatre and Butoh*, side by side, this thesis aims to explore how trauma has not only influenced content and form but has also fundamentally redefined the ethos of performance. The comparison will shed light on the cultural distinctions, aesthetic strategies, and emotional registers used to process and convey trauma in different historical and geographical contexts.

PART 2 IN-YER-FACE THEATRE ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Previous chapter have established that literature is a powerful medium for the transmission of trauma. Works by trauma authors contribute to the formation of collective memory, a key component in the construction of collective trauma. By doing so, writing novels, plays, poems on the traumatic experiences the people start the process of reliving the trauma hence simultaneously relieving of the trauma. Performance, like literature, enables the re-experiencing of traumatic situations and can facilitate emotional release. Given trauma's relational nature, the audience, acting as witness, becomes a crucial part of the healing process (Caruth, 32). These dynamic positions theatre as both a reflective and transformative space for addressing societal trauma. This chapter examines the development and transformation of British drama in relation to the collective trauma from the aftermath of World War II to the appearance of In-Yer-Face Theatre in the 1990s (see table 1). As a highly confrontational and emotionally charged dramatic form, In-Yer-Face Theatre became a key medium for expressing post-traumatic anxieties and disrupting conventional theatrical norms. In the next section, the theatre traditions that have influenced British drama leading up to the In-Yer-Face will be introduced briefly to better illuminate the movement's background. In-Yer-Face was the amalgamation of its predecessors; considering its rise marked a critical shift in the trajectory of British theatre, particularly in its ability to provoke, confront, and reimagine collective wound.

Table 1: The Progress of British Drama in the second half of the 20th century

Era	Movement	Key Characteristics	Leading Figures	Socio-Political Context
1950s	Angry Young Men	- Kitchen-sink realism- Working-class disillusionment- Male emotional frustration- Anti-elitism	John Osborne (<i>Look Back in Anger</i>) Arnold WeskerAlan Sillitoe	Postwar stagnation Frustration with class system and lack of social mobility
1960s– 70s	Political Drama	- Brechtian influence- Didactic, ensemble-based- Feminist, Marxist, anti-imperialist themes- Use of documentary and non-naturalistic techniques	Caryl Churchill (<i>Cloud Nine</i>)Edward Bond (<i>Saved</i>)David EdgarHoward Brenton	Post-empire anxiety Trade unionism Rise of second- wave feminism Cold War tensions
1980s	Conservative Theatre	Return to well-made plays- Psychological realism- Domestic focus- Less politically overt- Commercial/mainstream dominance	David HareMichael FraynAlan Ayckbourn	Thatcherism Privatization and austerity Fringe vs mainstream divide Art funding cuts
1990s	In-Yer-Face Theatre	Shock tactics- Graphic violence and sexuality- Audience confrontation- Post-traumatic expression- Breakdown of realism	Sarah Kane (<i>Blasted</i>) Mark Ravenhill (<i>Shopping and F**ing*</i>)	Post-Thatcher disillusionment AIDS crisis Media saturation Rise of individual alienation

2.1. 1950s - Angry Young Men

In his encompassing study *The Making of Modern British Drama*, Dan Rebellato states that after the WWII, the situation of the British drama was not pleasing to the public and was often disregarded by the scholars. He reasons that due to the unrelatability of the themes of the staged plays many theatre critics tended to overlook this period. During WWII, Britain faced severe bombing by Nazi Germany in what became known as the Blitz (1940–1941), causing widespread destruction in cities like London and Coventry. The war significantly affected the public life; many people were forced to relocate their homes, losing their loved ones as well as facing hunger (Kynaston,68). These horrific experiences surely left an irredeemable scar on the

psyche of the public. Therefore, people wanted to see what could reflect their turmoil during the postwar period, though they were disappointed until a drastic change has descended upon the critics with the play *Look Back in Anger* penned by John Osborne in 1956. In contrast to the works produced in early fifties which Lumley describes as “[those plays] met the post-war desire for fancy, colour and escape” (qtd in Rebellato, 16); Osborne’s work has brought a new perspective to the drama creating a relatability and a bridge between society and the performance art. For the critics, *Look Back in Anger* was the manifestation of the frustrations of the public. Rather than the fancy plays about the upper classes, gods, and nobility, Osborne’s play was brimming with anger of the ordinary people expressed by the ordinary people. Osborne’s protagonist, Jimmy Porter, expressed deep resentment toward a stagnant class system, cultural elitism, and the emotional repression of postwar society. The play’s emphasis on raw emotion, domestic settings, and anti-establishment rhetoric redefined the role of theatre, moving it away from the genteel comedies and upper-class dramas that had dominated the stage (Osborne xii; Rebellato 24–26). The success of Osborne bore a new understanding among not just the playwrights in British theatre, but it also spread to the whole of the Europe. The ability to express one’s accumulated anger and frustrations on stage has cemented theatre’s place as an outlet for the complicated atmosphere of the period. With his work highlighting the struggles of the public, Osborne’s work cracked open a door that would guide many contemporary playwrights to the irredeemable fact that producing a literary representation of trauma can offer a sense of closure not only to the individual but also to the broader society shaped by shared traumatic events. Thus, other playwrights like Osborne, Arnold Wesker, and Alan Sillitoe employed a style known as “kitchen-sink realism,” characterized by its focus on everyday life, domestic hardship, and political disillusionment (Innes, 169). Their work captured the alienation of a new generation who felt betrayed by Britain’s unfulfilled postwar promises of social mobility and equality. Although not united by established rules the common ground for these

playwrights were their frustration towards the society who were in a state of comatose due to the disillusionment uncovered by the World War II. Despite being often criticized for their single-minded focus on male anger and working-class masculinity, the Angry Young Men movement opened the door for socially aware and emotionally rough theatre, laying the foundation for later progressive experiments in both form and content. With their main themes centring around the real problems faced by the working class and lower middle-class society, the movement was the expected trigger that has sparked the British drama towards new horizons. The budding awareness of the disparity between the social classes later led to a more politicized and marginalized theatre tradition to emerge in 1960s and 70s.

2.2. 1960s–1970s British Political Drama: Theatre of Protest and Ideology

During this period the plays were overly political; illustrated the sociologist ideologies enforced by the appearance and the awareness of working-class. Many theatre troupes of this period were agitprop; meaning they barely used any props and wandered around place to place, performing in front of factories or places where the working-class people crowded. The characters were often allegorical and stereotypical aiming to provoke working-class people to take a stand against the system encouraging them to act. Through their performances their main objective was to educate the working-class. This period marked a transformative era in British theatre, defined by a surge in politically engaged drama that reacted to the encompassing social and ideological catalysts of the time. In contrast to the emotionally driven realism of the 1950s Angry Young Men, this new wave of playwrights embraced theatre as a tool for activism and critique, turning the stage into a space for public interrogation of systems and structures. During this period theatre became a bodily expression of rebellion.

Heavily influenced by Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, many plays of this period rejected traditional narrative forms in favour of direct audience address, non-linear storytelling, and

collective ensemble work (Itzin, 6). Playwrights such as Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, David Edgar, and Howard Brenton tackled issues ranging from class struggle, state violence, and British imperialism to feminism and the politics of sexuality. Bond's *Saved* (1965), with its austere depiction of urban violence and institutional cruelty, exemplified the era's commitment to shocking audiences out of contentment (Bond 12–14), while Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979) used formal experimentation to critique colonialism and gender norms (Churchill xv–xvii). These dramatists often worked together with politically motivated theatre companies such as Joint Stock and 7:84, who prioritized community engagement and radical content over commercialized appeal (Holdsworth 33; Sierz 22). The increase in the numbers of alternate theatre spaces, including fringe venues and local theatre groups, allowed for experimentation outside the restraints of the mainstream West End. While some of these works were met with censors or altercation, en masse they established a tradition of theatre as an unapologetic political act, less about personal catharsis than about collective awareness and ideological confrontation. This legacy would eventually shape, and in some cases provoke, the more visceral, impact-oriented aesthetics of 1990s In-Yer-Face Theatre, which reacted to the perceived failure of purely intellectual approaches to societal trauma (Sierz 4–5; Rebellato 88).

2.3. 1980s: A Conservative Stage

Unlike the previous decades where the theatre flourished in its empirical and ingenious styles, 1980s marked a period of artistic preservation and governmental restriction in British theatre, heavily prompted by the socio-political atmosphere under Margaret Thatcher's reign (1979–1990). This era witnessed the fall of leftist political drama that had distinguished previous decades, which were dominated by agitprop, working-class realism, and overtly leftist theatre (e.g., Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, David Edgar).

Instead, the 1980s heralded in a return to “well-made plays” and a preference for commercial, and character-focused dramas that centred more on personal, relational narrations than on social political critique. Playwrights such as David Hare and Michael Frayn continued to address contemporary issues, but often within the structure of psychological realism and bourgeois scenes that drew in middle-class audiences (Rebellato, 112–114). This artistic conservatism was seconded by governmental alterations, as financial cutbacks and market demands caused major theatres like the Royal Court and National Theatre to give precedence financially doable productions over radical experimentation (Itzin, 322). The decade was also observed by an increasing gap between mainstream– polished, middle-class productions, and fringe– experimental, politically charged, but marginal– theatre, with experimental work progressively pushed to the edges of the cultural background. Critics such as Aleks Sierz have argued that this period created a void in British drama, where the stage became more and more alienated from the crucial social upheavals of the day, such as the AIDS crisis, urban decay, and racial agitation (Sierz 3–4). It was exactly this disconnection that instigated the frenzied arrival of In-Yer-Face Theatre in the 1990s, whose raw emotional ferocity and thematic extremism directly challenged the polite manner and ideological silence of the Thatcheristic stage.

2.4. 1990s The stage is ripe for disruption: In-Yer-Face Theatre

The emergence of In-Yer-Face Theatre in the 1990s cannot be disassociated from the wider cultural and political tensions of post-Thatcher Britain. Ensuing a decade branded by belligerent neoliberal reforms, increasing income inequality, the privatization of public services, and pervasive social estrangement, British society entered a period of disillusionment (Urban, 38-39). The confidence in the promising consumer capitalistic future had given way to demoralization and disappointment, particularly among the youth. In this environment, traditional theatre, with its cordial dialogue and distant critique, felt increasingly irrelevant. In-

Yer-Face Theatre exploded into this void with raw emotional energy, turning the stage into a site of confrontation rather than reflection. Playwrights like Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill presented characters grappling with addiction, violence, mental illness, and abuse, symptoms of a society under psychological siege. As Sierz notes, these plays did not offer political solutions or moral lessons; instead, they mirrored the chaos and intensity of the world outside the theatre, demanding that audiences not only watch but feel the rupture. Theatres became battlegrounds for societal angst, where the veneer of civility was torn away to expose the wounds of a fractured nation.

From these experimental practices emerged the In-Yer-Face Theatre, a genre that has dominated the 1990s in British Drama Tradition. In his prominent work, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001), Sierz traces the origins of this provocative and confrontational drama to various artistic and social influences. According to his argument *In-Yer-Face Theatre* was a reaction against both the conventional, well-made plays of the 1980s and the political theatre of earlier decades. Instead of patently ideological messages, these plays aimed for an instinctive impact, often using shock tactics, explicit violence, sexual transgression, and extreme language, to challenge audiences (Sierz, 5). He also connects *In-Yer-Face Theatre* to the cultural climate of post-Thatcher Britain, where social alienation, economic uncertainty, and media sensationalism shaped a new generation of playwrights. The plays' brutal honesty and immersive intensity, often breaking the fourth wall or implicating the audience in the drama, redefined contemporary theatre. Sierz's analysis remains a cornerstone for understanding how *In-Yer-Face Theatre* revolutionized British drama, forging a legacy of radical storytelling that continues to influence playwrights today.

According to Sierz, In-Yer-Face Theatre is a theatre of sense: jostling both performers and audience out of accustomed reactions, touching a sore spot and causing alarm. (4) It demanded a raw, often distressing closeness with its spectators, making use of shock tactics,

extreme language, and physical or emotional violence to disturb and engage. A recent and a local example can be the play performed by Izmir Devlet Theatre in 2025 Autumn season *Medea Material* written by Heiner Müller. During the play, the sounds of war; people screaming, babies crying, bombs falling, etc. could be heard with the images of Palestine genocide victims reflected on a background screen. Many people in the audience were clearly disturbed by the loud noises, covering their ears or trying to hide themselves. These types of disturbing elements are qualified as In-Yer-Face Theatre elements. These plays destroy the pseudo-calm atmosphere of a theatre which always kept its safe distance from the audience. Nonetheless, with this new movement in drama the safety zone for the audience has been invaded; now the audience is exposed to the harsh realities in the world in the most atrocious way possible. Now when the performer spits saliva would land on the audience. At the end of a play rather than reaching a salvation the audience would be left with a nagging feeling that pertained into their daily life.

Considering these examples, it can be said that the defining features of In-Yer-Face Theatre revolve around emotional extremity, moral ambiguity, and theatrical confrontation. These plays often thematized taboo subjects, rape, suicide, addiction, abuse, with a ferocity that deviated from rational analysis and instead sparked a harrowing response (Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s*, 56). Many drew influence from Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, which capitalised sensory engagement and psychological impact over traditional storyline or character development. In-Yer-Face plays frequently crossed the line between performance and lived experience, straightforwardly incriminating the audience (Urban, 36-37). Instead of offering catharsis or verdict, they left the audience emotionally bare and ethically agitated. This conversion in tone and method signified not just a structural novelty but a redefinition of what theatre could be in a late-20th-century society.

One of the most influential voices in In-Yer-Face Theatre was Sarah Kane, whose emotionally harrowing and structurally innovative plays exemplify the movement's radical

mindset. Her 1995 debut, *Blasted*, sparked immediate controversy for its explicit depictions of rape, cannibalism, and war trauma, drawing harsh criticism yet also heralding the arrival of a daring new artistic vision. The dramatist Edward Bond, in an important early article on *Blasted* saw in its imagery reminders of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Auschwitz, Dresden, Babi Yar (Saunders,3). Kane's work is defined by its refusal to offer moral clarity or emotional comfort. Instead, she compels audiences to confront human suffering in its rawest form, often without narrative resolution or dramatic closure. In plays such as *Cleansed*, *Crave*, and *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane abandons linear storytelling altogether, opting for fractured, poetic structures that reflect the psychological fragmentation of her characters. By collapsing the boundaries between pain, love, death, and desire, Kane created a deeply affective theatrical experience that exemplified the central aim of In-Yer-Face Theatre: to provoke, disturb, and expose. Her work has since become iconic within contemporary drama, establishing her as both a key architect and lasting symbol of the movement.

In-Yer-Face Theatre's legacy remains fiercely debated, but its influence on modern drama is undeniable. At its height, it was accused by critics of indulging in gratuitous violence and sensationalism, with some calling it nihilistic or exploitative. Yet defenders argued that its honesty, intensity, and emotional risk-taking were essential responses to a numbed society and a sanitized stage. Rather than offering neatly packaged narratives, these plays disrupted expectations and forced audiences to engage viscerally with urgent social issues. Over time, the movement's techniques, fourth wall breaking, moral ambiguity, non-linear structure, and emotional extremity, have been absorbed into mainstream theatrical practice. Its impact is also evident beyond Britain, influencing playwrights and directors globally, especially in post-conflict societies seeking to dramatize trauma and instability. In academia, In-Yer-Face Theatre has earned recognition for expanding the language of the stage and rethinking the politics of representation. While its most provocative moments may have passed, the movement opened

new possibilities for how theatre can communicate pain, provoke action, and foster collective introspection.



PART 3 BLASTED BY SARAH KANE

‘Theatre is only alive if it is kicking’

But who is kicking whom? (Peter,96 qtd in Sierz).

3.1.About Sarah Kane

Sarah Kane was one of the most prominent playwrights of 1990s especially with her having a notable role in the emerging of In-Yer-Face Theatre. Although short, Kane’s career was filled with renowned works. She penned five plays, three monologues and one short film scenario. Starting with her monologues in 1992 many of her plays were staged (Urban,36). When *Blasted*, her first play was staged it caused an uproar for the blatant violence shown on stage (Sierz, xii). Although the intensity of the performance brought backlash from the audience, with each play performed, Kane sharpened and polished the understanding of the theatre that would generate unprecedented forms of disturbance on the audience. John Peter of the Sunday Times was a rarity that appraised the play. He stated that “violent plays ‘make you question values’ and that Kane’s work was ‘born of an unleavened, almost puritanical moral outrage’”. Peter described her ‘vision of a self-destroying society’ as ‘aimless, brutish, barren, cannibalistic, prurient, diseased and terror-stricken’. He concluded, however, that the society needs these ethical trials’ (Peter,96 qtd in Sierz).

Kane also believed that theatre was a direct reflection of a society and theatre could be used as a means of evolution. “It [*Mad*] changed my life because it changed me, the way I think, the way I behave. If theatre can change lives, then it can change society”(Sierz,3). Her works are closely linked by life, and by an ability to look agony in the face without flinching (Sidi, 2).

Her works not only attempted to create a spark in the hearts of the humans towards bettering themselves, but it also became an attempt to rehabilitate the society by voicing out the hidden scars.

3.2. *Blasted* Summary

Blasted (1995) is a controversial and powerful play by British playwright Sarah Kane, known for its brutal portrayal of violence, trauma, and the collapse of human connection. The play begins in a very high-end hotel room in Leeds, where Ian, a middle-aged, racist, misogynistic tabloid journalist, brought Cate, a much younger, emotionally fragile woman. The opening scenes are disturbingly intimate, filled with psychological manipulation, sexual coercion, and a growing sense of unease. Ian tries to seduce Cate, who possibly suffers from epilepsy and exhibits childlike behaviour, but their dynamic becomes increasingly dark and abusive. Just as the audience settles into the uncomfortable domestic horror of this relationship, the play takes a shocking turn: the hotel is suddenly invaded by an unnamed soldier, and the outside world, previously only hinted at, bursts into the room. The space is transformed into a battlefield, and the violence escalates. The soldier rapes Ian, then commits an act of cannibalism, and shares haunting stories of wartime atrocities, blurring the line between civilian and combatant, victim and perpetrator. As the play progresses, the boundaries of realism collapse. Ian, now alone, suffers a series of grotesque degradations: he is blinded, left to crawl, urinate, and eat a dead baby to survive. Cate briefly returns, bringing food and sharing that the world outside is destroyed. The play ends in despair but also a strange gesture of human connection: Ian, barely alive, says "Thank you" as Cate feeds him a sausage (Kane, Scene 5).

3.3. War as internalized trauma

Sarah Kane's *Blasted* is widely considered as a landmark piece in the context of trauma theatre, directly confronting audiences with a raw and disturbing portrayal of violence and suffering. The play's setting, a Leeds hotel room, initially appears to be a domestic space, but it quickly transforms into a battlefield. This physical transformation parallels the psychological invasion of trauma, illustrating how personal spaces are no longer safe when global violence intrudes. Moreover, curiously enough, in the play the sense of time is vague. The audience is offered little glimpses of time-passing such as "very early in the following morning" (Kane, Scene 2). Nevertheless, as the events progress the concept of social time as we know it vanishes, the audience loses track of time. Cate's admission that she feels like she is away for minutes or months sometimes, then she comes back just where she was (Kane, Scene 1) resonates with trauma's transferability through time and how it disturbs the linear time as well as individual's control (Felman&Laub, 57-58). The collapse of boundaries between collective and individual mirrors the disintegration of both body and psyche, emphasizing the overwhelming reach of trauma (Herman, 18). This metaphorical collapse later becomes a literal invasion thanks to a bomb that destroys the luxurious hotel room leaving nothing but debris. This literal destruction reinforces the traumatic consequences of war in the minds of the audience. The same deterioration is also reflected in the behaviour of the characters. Ian who was presented to the audience as a respectable journalist throughout the play turns into almost a lunatic due to the traumatic events he has been exposed to. This decomposition starts with the emergence of the Soldier whose presence changes the whole atmosphere of the play. The story shifts from a private and personal place to a universal warzone. This thematic shift of the play mixes personal with public and in a way shows us personal trauma and collective trauma are interrelated as well as makes the audience realize that one cannot run away from the realities of the world.

What makes In-Yer-Face Theatre striking is this quality of preventing the audience from disassociating from the troubles of real world.

Written against the backdrop of the Bosnian genocide, the play critiques how media and society mitigate violence and overlook human suffering. Kane draws from real-world atrocities to depict the raw and brutal nature of trauma, both on a personal and collective level (Sidi, 196). As mentioned above with the seemingly confined setting of a Leeds hotel room drastically falls into a battlefield, unsettles the boundaries between domestic abuse and military violence. This rupture mirrors the disarraying nature of trauma itself, sudden, unavoidable, and relapsing. In line with Freud's idea of trauma as a psychic wound that is not immediately perceived, Kane's narrative lacks a traditional structure and builds on fragmentation. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory becomes particularly useful here. One of the central concepts in understanding *Blasted* through the lens of trauma is Cathy Caruth's idea that trauma emerges not at the moment of the event but belatedly, as a haunting return. *Blasted* embodies this repetition: acts of rape, cannibalism, and degradation recur without resolution, mimicking the obsessive loops of traumatic memory. This is evident in the characters' fragmented behaviour and hallucinatory episodes. In Scene One Cate displays a violent physical reaction where she starts trembling then she bursts out laughing, unnaturally, hysterically, uncontrollably that ends with her fainting. When Ian asks her about these "fits" of her, Cate says that these faintings have been occurring all the time since her father came back (Kane, 1:9). Although it was mentioned briefly, there is an underlying indicator that Cate's relationship with her father was traumatic so much so that it caused her to bodily react to it. It shows that these "fits" were belated responses stored in the body of Cate although she does not remember it is understood that it is related to her father; thus, due to the proximity to the cause of the trauma stimulant, the traumatized reacts to it. Caruth describes the voice of trauma as something that cries out from a wound, something unprocessed and unresolved, and Kane's characters embody this idea intuitively. The

incomprehensible and broken dialogues reflect trauma's refusal to be neatly intelligible. The characters are caught in a cycle of violence and helplessness, each absorbing and re-enacting trauma in different ways. With the arrival of the Soldier, the narrative that has been established until then is transformed. It symbolizes the war not only affects the weakly, but it also has a horrid impact on the socially accepted powerful.

Dehumanization and regression are key themes in the play. Ian's physical deterioration over the course of the play is symbolic of his moral decay and mental disintegration. Each character loses their bodily autonomy throughout the play. As the war intrudes, both Ian and Cate regress into a primal survival mode, stripped of societal norms and emotional complexity. This descent into the animalistic mirrors the way trauma often reduces individuals to their most basic instincts. The atrocious acts performed are a way to create disturbance in the psyche of the audience. In *In-Yer-Face Theatre* taboo subjects are used to create awareness on the audience and most of the time they do it by challenging the traditional narratives. From Soldier's story of how he raped the women of a family to the end of the play where we see Cate coming back with "blood seeping from between her legs" (5:60) there are many allusions to sexual violence in the play. However, there are two on stage rapes. One of them is the rape of Cate by Ian, which occurred while Cate was unconsciousness. Moreover, from the beginning we see Cate refusing the sexual advances of Ian and him trying to gaslight Cate into sexual intercourse with him. This again shows that Ian was the powerful side between them. Next on-stage rape is the rape of Ian by the Soldier. Comparing these two, the fact that the rape of a man is a tabooer subject than the act of rape itself is a clear indication of the sexual violence shown towards women is mostly ignored and not uncommon. It is as if accepted traditionally that rape happens only to the women who are seen as the inferior sex. Therefore, when it happens to a man it outrages the audience. Chippendale claims that despite the fact that the rape against men

is a reality, media and the society treat it as a myth because it is unthinkable that a real man can be raped. Thurchik explains the common rape myths as such:

- (a) men cannot be raped; (b) 'real' men can defend themselves against rape; (c) only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; (d) men are not affected by rape (or not as much as women); (e) a woman cannot sexually assault a man; (f) male rape only happens in prisons; (g) sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; (h) homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; and (i) if a victim physically responds to an assault he must have wanted it (pp. 211-212, qtd in Chippendale,59).

By showing the rape of both Cate and Ian on stage, the play immerses the viewer in unrelenting decay, underlining the inescapable consequences of violence for both genders. The constant reminder of sexual violence also contributes to the repetitious narrative of trauma. Through sexual violence on the individuals, Kane shows the impact of war on the collective because war destroys any kind of personal boundary by taking control over the bodily autonomy.

Importantly, Kane positions the audience not as passive observers but as witnesses. The play's shocking content demands an emotional response, deliberately preventing a purge of emotions, catharsis. Instead, the audience is left disturbed and complicit, forced to process their own discomfort. This aligns with Dominick LaCapra's theory of trauma, where the process of witnessing becomes central. The theatrical space becomes a platform not for resolution but for recognition, for carrying the wound beyond the performance.

In Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, the use of bodily horror, extreme violence, and abjection is not merely for sensationalism, it functions as a deeply affective mechanism for confronting trauma, particularly through what Sarah J. Ablett has termed "dramatic disgust." This concept positions disgust not just as a physiological reaction but as an aesthetic and ethical force within performance that compels audiences into a deeper, often uncomfortable engagement with traumatic realities. In the tradition of In-Yer-Face Theatre, *Blasted* seeks to abolish the distance

between stage and spectator, mirroring the disruptive nature of trauma as articulated by Cathy Caruth. Caruth contends that trauma is a paradoxical phenomenon: it is both unassimilable in the moment and insistent in its repetition. Similarly, *Blasted* shatters conventional narrative structure, rapidly evolving from a relatively contained, naturalistic hotel-room drama into an apocalyptic warzone. This structural rupture is a theatrical mimicry of trauma's disjointed temporality. The audience is never granted the security of narrative coherence, just as trauma victims are often denied the linearity of memory.

This disintegration of form is made even more powerful through the play's affective use of disgust. Kane's theatrical world is populated with raw depictions of bodily functions, defecation, rape, cannibalism, and physical mutilation, all of which provoke visceral disgust. According to Ablett, dramatic disgust functions as a 'disruptive affect' that unsettles the viewer, opening a critical space where emotional, political, and ethical dimensions can be processed (116-117). Unlike horror or fear, which might allow for some emotional distancing, disgust implicates the body of the viewer. It is involuntary and intimate. It cannot be rationalized away. In *Blasted*, the audience is not merely observing trauma, they are physically affected by it, forced into a mode of witnessing that transcends traditional theatrical spectatorship. In the play, Ian's gradual descend into madness is emphasized with a series of behaviour that elicits the feeling of disgust which prevents any feeling of sympathy towards him. The victimization of Ian is pushed back due to the repulsive acts. For example, after raping Ian, Soldier out of hunger, sucks out Ian's eyes and eats it (Kane, 4:50). The surge of repulsion from such an unexpected and outrageous act creates an awareness in the mind of the audiences. Nevertheless, it also illuminates the trauma of war that which affects the fulfilment of the basic needs.

Ablett builds upon the theoretical framework of abjection developed by Julia Kristeva, who identifies the abject as that which must be expelled from the self to maintain identity, bodily fluids, death, decay, and trauma itself (96). These expulsions, while necessary for

psychological order, are inherently unstable. They return, haunting the edges of the self and of society. *Blasted* thrives in this liminal space. The boundary between private and public, self and other, is continually broken down. Ian, a former tabloid journalist exuding patriarchal dominance and racist rhetoric, ends the play as a blind, raped, starving, childlike figure who soils himself and eats a dead baby. His transformation is grotesque, but it is also symbolically rich. Kane renders his degradation as a form of exposure: the concealed horrors of masculinity, imperialism, and war are externalized on his body. He becomes a living metaphor for post-traumatic ruin.

The shift from aggressor to victim in Ian's character arc is critical in understanding how *dramatic disgust* functions. As viewers are compelled to look upon his wounded body, they must also contend with their own discomfort. This moment is pivotal: disgust becomes an ethical force. Rather than turning away, the audience must bear witness. Caruth argues that trauma demands a witness, not to resolve it, but to acknowledge its reality. Disgust, in this context, is not antithetical to witnessing; it is the very means by which witnessing occurs. Freud renders disgust as a social mechanism that operates to contain libidinal drives to differentiate humans from their animalistic ancestry (Ablett, 58). Through the end of the play Ian behaviours complicate the line between human and the animal. Due to trauma, Ian becomes a shell of a human but becomes a slave to his primitive needs. For instance, his hunger gets to a point where he succumbs to cannibalism and eats the body of the buried baby. He then puts back the remains of the baby back (5:60).

Furthermore, the presence of bodily fluids on stage, blood, vomit, feces, semen, urine, are central to Kane's strategy of *dramatic disgust*. These fluids are signifiers of both life and death, pleasure and revulsion. They defy containment and, when displayed publicly, disrupt social decorum (Ablett, 110). Theatres are traditionally seen as clean, contained spaces where human ugliness is either sanitized or symbolized. Kane desecrates that expectation; Ian

masturbates and shits on stage (5.60), similarly, the Soldier urinates in the middle of the room. In doing so, she collapses the boundary between audience and performer. The theatre becomes a site of contamination, and that contamination becomes a metaphor for the inescapability of trauma. The trauma within *Blasted* is controlled first by Ian, then by the soldier, and then by no one: it is the collapse of society which lets these shocking tragedies to occur. As spectators recoil, they are also being called into an ethical relationship with what they are witnessing. The trauma is no longer an abstract concept, it is present, bodily, and inescapable.

William Ian Miller, in his work, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, redefines the Darwinist understanding of the term disgust which was defined by the sense of taste. Regarding taste as a metaphor for the socially accepted notions, Miller suggests that anything that is not categorized in social schemas is treated as disgusting because these actions do not confine to what is considered as normal. This redefinition applies to the ethical concerns as well; according to Miller acts of “rape, child abuse, torture, genocide, predatory murder and maiming” are not socially and ethically accepted, hence they are repulsive and disgusting (85 qtd in Ablett). The disgust in this context can reactivate the traumatic response. Trauma, by definition, is something that occurs outside of one’s daily experience, as Caruth says trauma is the story of a wound that cries out, which calls out us to convey the reality or the truth that is not otherwise applicable (9). Moreover, the ethical provocation embedded in dramatic disgust is political. *Blasted* was written during the Bosnian War, and Kane has acknowledged that images from news coverage, particularly of women being raped and cities being bombed, informed her work.

Soldier: Some journalist, that’s your job.

Soldier: Proving it happened. I’m here got no choice. But you. You should be telling people.

Ian: No one’s interested.

[...]

Ian: I write ... stories. That's all. Stories. This isn't a story anyone wants to hear.

Soldier: Doing to them what they done to us, what good is that? At home I'm clean. Like it never happened. Tell them you saw me. Tell them...you saw me.
(3:47-48)

This again stresses the transferability of trauma through media as a medium. The play, then, functions as an indictment not just of war, but of the media's desensitization and the West's complacency. Ian, a journalist, is a failed witness, he cannot make sense of or report on the atrocities around him. Ian as the voice of the world as a media representative fails to make his voice heard by the world. This failure symbolizes the broader incapacity of media or rational discourse to contain the horror of war. The violence in *Blasted* is globalized, it is not just about one nation or event, but about the way trauma is circulated and ignored until it breaks through in monstrous ways. This collapse is crucial to In-Yer-Face Theatre's mission, to shatter emotional detachment and awaken the audience to the immediacy of social and personal issues.

Additionally, the mere existence of the Soldier is also political. The fact that there is no mention of Soldier's name or which side he is on shows us that this unidentified soldier could be anyone from any nation. Kane presents the audience with the possibility of a universal experience of trauma. This universalizing of the traumatic experience does not diminish the impact of the trauma on the audience like Kali Tal defends, it offers the brutality of the situation against an audience that chooses to remain impartial. Kane becomes the pen of a public, in this case the Bosnian people, who cannot voice their suffering.

Soldier: [...] My girl , Not going back to her. When I go back. She's dead, see. Fucking bastard soldier, he,(3:44)

From this line it is understood that the Soldier was also victimized by war, and he had lost his loved ones to this violence. Kane portrays Soldier as a deeply traumatized being who keeps getting traumatized over and over as well due to brutality of war. Soldier's overly descriptive acts of violence on his victims; the details of raping women, shooting, stabbing and

torturing people are an indication of his own trauma. Disgust here is a catalyst for awareness, a refusal to look away. Ablett's concept of dramatic disgust allows us to see this not as mere provocation, but as a form of political resistance. Kane shows the audience the futility of war because it not only brings peace but also it is an endless cycle of trauma and repetition. In this way, *Blasted* is not just a performance but an act of protest.

In parallel with this notion, the language in *Blasted* is weaponized. Kane employs brutal, crude dialogue that functions less as communication and more as a manifestation of psychological distress. Soldier's graphic depiction of his torture stabbing a woman in the spine, raping little girls and killing make both the violence and the trauma tangible. Sierz declares that words often generate more offence than the acts they refer, therefore the swearwords are good indicators of what a culture feels ashamed and scared of (Sierz, 7). Language in the play, has a crucial role in conveying trauma, or more precisely, its limits. It can be understood that at the beginning, as the aggressor in the communication, Ian's use of racial slurs 'wog, Pakis, nigger' signifies a fear of refugees and to some extent it indicates a touch of nationalism. Ian as a journalist is the othering force at the beginning but with the Soldier, Ian is the one being othered. Through the end of the play, a similar pattern but in reverse can be witnessed. This time Ian losing the ability to make a coherent sentence after experiencing traumatic events such as being raped by the soldier and having his eye eaten. The shift in the dynamic, from predator to prey, creates a reversal in the speech patterns as well. When communicating with the Soldier, Ian mostly stays quiet and answers only when spoken to by the Soldier. He does not and cannot stop him. Ian, initially verbose and controlling, eventually loses his capacity for coherent speech.

Likewise, even in stage directions Kane states that when under stress Cate stutters; meaning the audience is already presented with a character that has a difficulty in forming healthy communication. From the beginning Cate was presented as the prey/the victim; as the traumatized one; and unlike Ian who had a reversal of his role, Cate increasingly withdraws

into silence. With aggressive remarks, Ian tries to manipulate and gaslight Cate into having a sexual intercourse which causes so much distress on Cate that her speech collapses. At the beginning of the Scene II, there is an insinuation that overnight Ian did something unwanted to Cate; after fainting due to one of her fits, this time Ian rapes Cate. In a bout of rage, Cate destroys the seams of Ian's jacket then starts attacking him slapping his head, punching and kicking. At the end of their wrestle, Cate gets a hold of the gun Ian brought with him and points it to Ian's groin, which is a powerful indicator of a sexual assault. These violent behaviours demonstrated by Cate are indicators of trauma response and it is reflected not only through her behaviour but also through her speech.

Ian: Easy, easy, that's a loaded gun.

Cate: I d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-

Ian: Catie, come on.

Cate: d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d- d

Ian: You don't want an accident. Think about your mum. And your brother. What would they think?

Cate: I d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d- d-d- (2:26)

The fact that Cate becomes completely unable utter a single word against Ian especially after he assaults her shows us the impact of trauma on the ability of using one's basic functions. The accumulation of trauma hinders our capability perform a healthy lifestyle. The speech impediment or nonverbality symptom emerges as a common trauma response. Often this inability to speak about the trauma is caused by the inability to voice the trauma. The breakdown of language reflects the inadequacy of words in the face of horror. This interplay between speech and silence captures the two-fold nature of trauma: the desperate attempt to articulate, and the simultaneous impossibility of doing so. In *Blasted*, language collapses under the weight of suffering, pushing communication into the bodily and visual. The speech is punctuated by silence and incoherence, symbolizing the failure of language in the face of overwhelming pain.

Ablett's theory also intersects productively with Elaine Scarry's notion that pain is resistant to language (Scarry, 172). In *Blasted*, much of the horror is indeed communicated not through words, but through physical action. When Cate brings the baby with her, she says that it is crying, it is apparent that baby's suffering is conveyed through the only way a mute being can. Language breaks down as violence escalates. Just like Cate who starts stuttering under stress, after traumatizing events, Ian can no longer articulate his suffering; it is expressed through his body, through his wounds, his silence, his excretions. This breakdown of language again echoes Caruth's trauma theory: trauma speaks through symptoms, not narrative. Kane seems acutely aware that traditional theatrical dialogue is insufficient for expressing the magnitude of war, rape, and mental illness. Thus, she stages the body itself as the primary site of meaning. The viewer's revulsion is not incidental; it is the very tool by which the play communicates the unspeakable.

The blatant use of swearwords integrates multiple layers of disgust, it becomes a verbal act of aggression; moreover, on stage 'bad language' seems rousing due to its being used openly. Through Ablett's framework of *dramatic disgust*, Sarah Kane's *Blasted* emerges as a radical act of trauma expression. With Ian's first line "I have shat in better places" (1:3), The audience are 'urged' to imagine the explicit act of defecation, which not only involves a breach of bodily boundaries through the holes, but also the production of rancid smelling waste which social life have taught us to consider as pollution (cf. V.i body qtd. in Ablett 133). The dramatic disgust uses the aesthetics of revulsion not merely to shock, but to provoke an embodied response that makes visible the otherwise unspeakable dimensions of suffering. Disgust becomes a communicative tool, a rupture in the emotional and psychic fabric of the audience that mirrors the ruptures of trauma itself. In confronting the grotesque, the abject, and the unbearable, Kane forces us to reckon with the violence that haunts both history and the human psyche. And in

doing so, she expands the stage into a site of moral confrontation, where trauma can finally, if painfully, be witnessed.

As the hotel room transforms into a warzone, the boundary between internal and external collapse. The audience is forced to confront war, not as a distant event, but as a psychological condition embedded in everyday life. Ian, a journalist, is a failed witness, he cannot make sense of or report on the atrocities around him. Ian as the voice of the world as a media representative fails to make his voice heard by the world. This failure symbolizes the broader incapacity of media or rational discourse to contain the horror of war. The violence in *Blasted* is globalized, it is not just about one nation or event, but about the way trauma is circulated and ignored until it breaks through in monstrous ways. This collapse is crucial to In-Yer-Face Theatre's mission, to shatter emotional detachment and awaken the audience to the immediacy of social and personal issues.

The dramatic disgust in *Blasted* is essential in dismantling traditional Aristotelian notions of catharsis as well. Kane does not offer purification through pity and fear. There is no resolution or moral closure in *Blasted*; instead, the trauma lingers unresolved. The grotesque visuals, disturbing acts, and emotional disintegration refuse the audience the comfort of distance. The hotel room, destroyed and invaded, represents a psychological state of ruin. The post-dramatic structure, fragmented, cyclical, and nonlinear, disrupts narrative expectations and mimics the disorientation of trauma. The final scenes, in particular, deny any sense of redemption. Cate's gesture of sharing a sausage with the blind, raped, dying Ian becomes a haunting act of survival and fractured humanity rather than reconciliation. Cate being the one feeding Ian a sausage where at the beginning it was Ian who tried to force Cate to eat meat. It is significant in the sense that this reversal in roles emphasizes the loss of individual values during war. The war creates a collective suffering leading to collective trauma. This lack of closure is crucial, as it resists the neat containment of trauma and instead lingers, much like the

traumatic memory itself. This refusal echoes Caruth's concept of trauma as a voice that must be heard but cannot be fully understood. In *Blasted*, Kane offers the audience no happy ending, no narrative closure, and no moral clarity. The play ends ambiguously, with Ian mumbling his thanks to Cate after she feeds him. The line is heart-wrenching in its simplicity, resisting sentimentality while exposing a flicker of human connection amidst horror. Instead, she leaves her audience contaminated, unsettled, and ethically implicated. This failure to resolve is not a flaw, it is the very mechanism by which the trauma persists and insists. The unresolved ending leaves the audience in a state of emotional suspension, mirroring trauma's persistence. Just as trauma survivors are unable to "move on," Kane's audience is denied the luxury of narrative closure. The disgust they feel is meant to linger, to continue its work long after the curtain falls. In this sense, *Blasted* becomes a traumatic echo chamber, where the grotesque is not an end but a language through which trauma speaks.

Ultimately, *Blasted* externalizes trauma and forces its audience to confront what is often hidden or sanitized. The theatre becomes a space of ethical and emotional confrontation, not escapism. By presenting characters who are both victims and perpetrators, Kane invites a more complex understanding of trauma, one that includes complicity, helplessness, and repetition. In doing so, Kane turns the stage into a space of exposure, resistance, and reckoning. The audience leaves not healed, but altered, carrying with them the residue of what they have witnessed. Trauma, in this context, is not resolved, it is transferred.

Kane herself admits that *Blasted* is a shocking play, but she also states that shocking quality is not some kind of life-altering revelation; it is more like unveiling the truth. "Personally, I think it is a shocking play, but only in the sense that falling down the stairs is shocking, it's painful and it makes you aware of your own fragility, but one doesn't tend to be morally outraged about falling down the stairs" (Sierz, 94).

PART 4 BUTOH(舞踏): THE DANCE OF DARKNESS

The spirits of the departed
have taken refuge in my body. (O&O, 267)

4.1. Introductiona to Butoh(舞踏)

The word "Butoh" emerged as "Ankoku Butoh (暗黒舞踏)" in the early 1960s. The word "ankoku" means complete darkness and it reflected Tatsumi Hijikata's perception of performance. Now just the term Butoh has been in use in reference to the avant-garde style of dance theatre that appeared in Japan after WWII, embodying themes of rebellion, transformation, and the grotesque beauty of human existence (Breiten, 6-7). Developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Butoh rejected traditional performance aesthetics, instead embracing slow, controlled movements, contorted postures, and intense emotional expression. The conventional performance arts like Kabuki or Noh that has prioritized the aestheticism of the stage, performativity of the character, and structurisation of the plot; Butoh on the contrary, aims for complete destruction of the aesthetics to dive deeper into the subconscious and primal aspects of human nature. Butoh is: shocking, provocative physical, spiritual, erotic, grotesque, violent, cosmic, nihilistic, cathartic, and mysterious (Stein, 110). Richard Philp claims that the performers reduce themselves to "animal" basics performing naked, shaved heads and white makeup. The content of the movement explored deep, wounded areas of our collective unconscious, and exerted to bare man's most archaic impulse of survival at the cost of brutality, killing, destruction and death (qtd. in Sanders, 150) Hijikata's aim was to strip off the social mask on Japanese society and expose the dark reality behind it. (Stein, 115).

It can be argued that there are several reasons that have influenced the progress of Japanese theatre. The most impactful one was none other than the atomic bombs that rattled the whole world and left a traumatic wound not just nationwide but also worldwide. Deeply rooted in the cultural and psychological aftermath of World War II, Butoh arose as a response to the devastation following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and its aesthetic of suffering and transformation can be seen as deeply resonant with the lived experiences of the survivors of these nuclear weapons (*hibakusha*), Japan's loss of imperial power, and the rapid Westernization that followed (Fraleigh, *Butoh* 42). At a time when Japan struggled to reconcile its identity with modernity, Butoh provided an outlet for raw, intuitive expression (Marshall&Braun, 66-67). The two key pioneers of this genre, Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, developed Butoh as a deeply personal and philosophical practice, rejecting existing artistic norms in favour of exploring themes of death, decay, eroticism, and the grotesque. This section explores the historical roots of Butoh in post-war Japan, the contributions of Hijikata and Ohno, and the underlying philosophy that continues to define Butoh as a unique and evocative performance art.

4.2. Historical Roots: Post-War Japan and the Birth of Butoh

The origins of Butoh are inseparable from Japan's social and cultural upheaval following World War II. In 1945, Japan faced unprecedented devastation, with its cities reduced to rubble and its people grappling with loss, trauma, and the consequences of imperialist expansion. The country underwent a rapid transformation under American occupation, embracing Western democratic ideals, capitalism, and industrialization (Fussell, 20-22). This shift created tension between traditional Japanese values and modern influences, leading to a cultural identity crisis (Breiten, 5). In the 1950s and 1960s, to get a better understanding of their own individual identity as well as cultural identity, a wave of avant-garde movements swept

across Japan, particularly in theatre, film, and literature. Influenced by European existentialism, Surrealism, and Dadaism, Japanese artists sought new ways to express the absurdity and fragility of human existence (Baird, 200). In this climate, Butoh emerged as a radical response to both Western modernism and Japan's own traditional performance arts.

Tatsumi Hijikata, often regarded as the father of Butoh, was instrumental in shaping this new performance form. Critic Donald Richie, who has lived in Japan for more than forty years, says Hijikata's objective was to agitate the adamant, and class-conscious Japanese nation into validating the existence of its outcasts, its non-humans: the homeless, prostitutes, whoremongers, drunks, and the destitute. Imperfections on the nation's otherwise perfect mask, these vagabonds became Hijikata's analogy for anybody who was othered by Japan's classical definition of beauty (Richie qtd in Sanders, 148). He rejected the refined, controlled movements of classical Japanese dance and instead developed a raw style that emphasized the grotesque and the subconscious. Hijikata's early works, such as *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colors, 1959), shocked audiences with their provocative imagery and transgressive themes. Performed in a small Tokyo theater, *Kinjiki*, inspired by Yukio Mishima's novel of the same name, explored themes of eroticism and taboo, featuring disturbing movements and homoerotic undertones. The performance, which ended with Hijikata strangling a live chicken on stage, was a declaration of Butoh's defiance against traditional dance conventions (Breiten, 16).

Kazuo Ohno, a contemporary and collaborator of Hijikata, brought a more ethereal and spiritual quality to Butoh. While Hijikata's work often delved into darkness, grotesque imagery, and rebellion, Ohno's performances focused on themes of memory, loss, and transcendence. Ohno was deeply influenced by German Expressionist dance, particularly the work of Mary Wigman. His seminal work *Admiring La Argentina* (1977), an homage to the Spanish dancer Antonia Mercé, displayed Butoh's ability to evoke deep emotion through minimal, yet highly expressive, movement (O&O, 145). Together, Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno shaped Butoh into a

distinctive art form that resisted easy categorization. Though they took different approaches, Hijikata favouring raw, surrealist, and often disturbing imagery, while Kazuo leaned toward a more poetic and spiritual expression, their collaborations solidified Butoh as a powerful mode of avant-garde performance (Klein qtd in Breiten, 9).

4.3. Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986): The Architect of Ankoku Butoh

Tatsumi Hijikata is widely considered the founder of Butoh. Born in the rural Akita Prefecture, he was exposed to the harsh realities of rural Japan, which later influenced his artistic vision (Breiten, 8-9). He moved to Tokyo in the 1950s, where he trained in modern dance before rejecting its structured techniques in favour of something more primal. Although he was trained in classical dance, as a newly emerging artist his disposition was transformed fully due to the aftershocks of the atomic bomb as was the case with the Japanese socio-political climate (Sanders, 148). Hijikata's Butoh, which he called *Ankoku Butoh* (Dance of Darkness), was heavily influenced by Surrealist literature, German Expressionism, and the writings of Jean Genet, Antonin Artaud, and Yukio Mishima (Baird, 204). His choreography often depicted grotesque, contorted bodies, slow-motion movements, and eerie, dreamlike sequences (Marshall&Braun, 68). He built his new dance using vulgar physical moves and coarse habits such as defecatory stances and perverse sexual gestures, attacking head-on to the concept of refinement (*Miyabi*/雅) and understatement (*Shibui*/渋い) so valued in Japanese aesthetics (Sanders,149). He viewed dance as a means of tapping into the subconscious, often describing Butoh as a form of resistance against both traditional aesthetics and contemporary society. One of his most famous works, *Hijikata to Nihonjin: Nikutai no hanran* (translated by Baird as *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People: Rebellion of the Body*), was a deeply unsettling performance that incorporated grotesque imagery, nudity, and distorted movement to explore themes of transformation, trauma, and decay (Baird, 306). His later works became more abstract,

moving away from narrative-driven performances toward a philosophy of movement that emphasized the body's physical limitations and psychological depth.

Hijikata's influence on Butoh cannot be undermined. Rather than learning choreographed steps, Butoh performers immerse themselves in metaphorical and often disturbing mental landscapes, imagining their bodies as melting wax, rotting corpses, or floating ghosts (Kurihara, 20). Hijikata's legacy lives on through the dancers he trained and the continued evolution of Butoh as a global art form.

4.4. Kazuo Ohno (1906–2010): The Spirit of Butoh

If Hijikata was Butoh's architect, Kazuo Ohno was its soul. Ohno often stated that the act of focusing too much on techniques or structures took away the real aim of Butoh; hence he prioritised the spirituality (O&O, 12). A former soldier and physical education teacher, Ohno discovered dance relatively late in life, but his deep emotional expression and boundless energy made him one of Butoh's most celebrated figures. Unlike Hijikata's dark, confrontational approach, Kazuo's Butoh was poetic, deeply personal, and often spiritual (O&O, 12-13). His performances were marked by a profound connection to memory and emotion, and even maternal instincts. It is said by his son Yoshito Ohno that Kazuo's performance was a way of conveying his gratitude towards the things he feels indebted to his mother and to the life itself (O&O,18). Hence, his works are a reflection of his experiences as a soldier in World War II, his admiration for feminine energy, and his reflections on aging and mortality.

His performance, *Admiring La Argentina* was a turning point in Butoh's history (O&O, 147). Inspired by his encounter with Spanish dancer Antonia Mercé decades earlier, the piece blended dreamlike gestures with delicate yet powerful movement, creating a transcendent experience for audiences. Likewise, another one of his famous work *The Dead Sea* Ohno depicts the brutality of World War II which he participated as a soldier and ensuing trauma

(O&O, 112). He continued to perform into his 90s, embodying Butoh's philosophy that performance is not about technical mastery but about revealing the raw essence of life itself (O&O,47). His teachings and philosophy remain central to Butoh's practice worldwide. This thesis will mainly focus on Kazuo Ohno's another work called "*My Mother/私のお母さん*"; in this work Ohno dramatizes the life of his own mother who played a significant part in his life. His close relationship with his mother and the trauma of losing her overlaps with his dreadful experiences as a soldier during the World War II. It is a tragic performance where the personal and the collective trauma intersects. Through the performance, Kazuo not just represents his own mother but a collective mother figure that has been lost during the war.

4.5. The Philosophy of Butoh

Butoh seeks to strip away artificiality, revealing the raw and often unsettling truths of human existence (Sander, 35). Butoh performers embrace the body's imperfections, utilizing slow movements, contorted postures, and intense facial expressions to communicate profound emotions. At its core, Butoh explores themes of transformation, death, rebirth, and the subconscious (Marshall&Braun, 68). It challenges conventional ideas of beauty, instead embracing the grotesque, the uncanny, and the ephemeral nature of life. It is not about performance in the traditional sense but about *becoming*, embodying a moment, an emotion, or even an abstract state of being (Breiten, 37-38).

Kazuo Ohno first crossed paths with Hijikata Tatsumi in 1954 (O&O, 130). Years later approached by Hijikata, Ohno performed a solo dance called *Divinarian* which was choreographed by Hijikata himself particularly for Kazuo. It has become the start of partnership lasting for almost a decade (O&O,134). Although there had been some productions in which they performed together but mainly it was Hijikata who choreographed the performances. Yoshito Ohno, son of Kazuo Ohno and a fellow Butoh performer, states that his father took

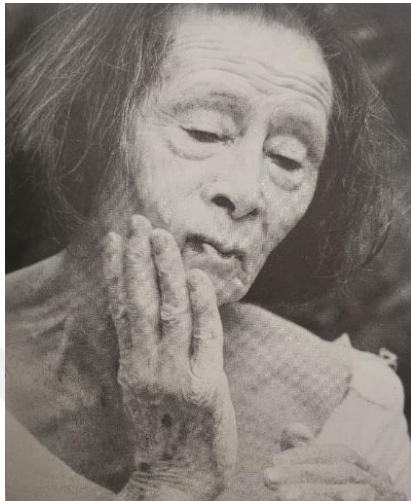
every suggestion given to him by Hijikata quite seriously and always adhered to his instructions (132). Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, although both credited as foundational figures in the creation of Butoh, articulated radically different philosophies that shaped the genre in divergent yet complementary directions. Hijikata conceptualized Butoh as an artistic revolt against established aesthetic and social conventions (Kurihara,18). For him, the body became a site of resistance and transgression, marked by grotesque transformation, historical trauma, and the erasure of individual identity (Fraleigh, 2010). His choreography often emphasized convulsive, animalistic movement and thematically explored taboo subjects such as death, decay, sexuality, and mental disorder (Goldberg, 2019). In contrast, Ohno's vision of Butoh was deeply spiritual, lyrical, and autobiographical. He often stated that his Butoh was born out of love (O&O, 79). His work drew inspiration from memory, particularly his relationship with his mother and the Spanish dancer La Argentina, serving as an elegiac tribute to lost time and human connection (O&O, 204). While Hijikata's Butoh was influenced by surrealist literature and the theatre of cruelty proposed by Antonin Artaud, Ohno's performances emerged from a Christian-inflected worldview, treating dance as a form of prayer and transcendence (Fraleigh & Nakamura, 2006). Their distinct approaches reflect a fundamental tension within Butoh between destruction and redemption, the grotesque and the poetic, one that continues to define the form's complexity. As Baird notes, this tension enriches Butoh's expressive range, positioning it as both an avant-garde critique of modernity and a deeply personal medium of embodied memory (306). Both Butoh performers led impoverished lifestyles growing up. Hijikata Tatsumi who lost a sister due to the said poverty asserts that his sister lives inside his body. He carries her within, and she comes out brutally when he performs Butoh (Kurihara, 20). He claims that the deceased are his Butoh teachers (Hijikata qtd in Breiten,9). A similar statement was made by Kazuo Ohno, with the loss of his mother he declares that "the origins of dance come from within the mother's womb. The roots of my dance come from inside that womb, that universal womb" (O&O, 118).

Although they had contrasting approaches to Butoh, both claimed that in their Butoh they gave a chance for the lost ones to express themselves.

4.6. Embodied Performance

Kazuo Ohno asserted that Butoh begins with the abandonment of the self. He emphasized this quality often in his workshops as well in particular to his mother. When he was a child, his mother always read him Lafcadio Hearne's *Japanese Ghost Stories* particularly the story of a princess. Kazuo Ohno talks about how his mother embodied the princess both bodily and emotionally while she was recounting the story as if bewitched (O&O, 243-244). Therefore, by abandoning the self, and fully incorporating the character or the situation Ohno declares that a performer should saturate oneself as though one is possessed (245). Likewise, Hijikata Tatsumi too would encourage the Butoh performer to transform into something else entirely. He stated that if the performer were to act as a disabled, they should not just imagine it but want to be disabled so bad they wished to be born that way. They should not have memories of being able-bodied. Only then a complete transformation was achieved (Breiten, 25). What Kazuo did during his performances was that he would connect to a subconscious part deep inside himself and channel that. What they, Kazuo and Hijikata, mean by abandoning the self is their everyday 'mask' as if making a new discovery within themselves. Although the audience cannot see the transformation the performer undergoes for their role, they should still be able to sense the queerness of the experience reaching them on an emotional level. To prepare the body to become a vessel by separating the ego, performer applied white makeup (shiro-nuri) which has been used not only Butoh performances but other traditional Japanese theatre forms (O&O, 65). According to Breistein, it has been helpful for performers in concealing and cancelling their identities so that they could fully incorporate the perspective of another (26). White makeup erases the body and the mind of the performer and liberates it for more perspectives. Yoshito

Ohno claims that “this self-obliteration allows the vessel deconstruct itself” which is in line with Butoh’s aim (65).



*Figure 1: Workshop studio, 1988.
Photographed by Alain Denis.*

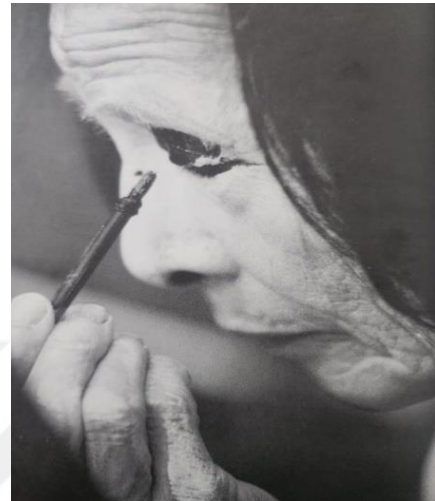


Figure 2: Applying makeup for studio rehearsal, 1988. Alain Denis.

Butoh challenges the Cartesian dualism that separates mind and body, instead privileging the body as a site of memory, trauma, and transformation. As Japanese scholar Kurihara Nanako argues, “Butoh is not about movement but about the body that has been moved, by memory, by time, by death” (Kurihara, 12). As if supporting this claim, Yoshito states that sometimes during performances, his father’s face would express an emotion that felt like not belonging to this lifetime. This statement is parallel to the Kazuo’s own saying that thanks to the ones who came before him, the spirits of the deceased, his performance was enhanced (O&O, 269). The performance lifts the restriction the consciousness allowing the performer to reach deeper into their psyche as well as materialize it through their body. This distinction underscores Butoh’s unique emphasis on internal sensation over external form. The body in Butoh does not perform a role in the conventional theatrical sense; rather, it becomes a vessel for subconscious material, a medium through which personal and collective histories are transmitted in often disturbing, distorted, or poetic forms. The slow, contorted movements and

ghost-like bodies of Butoh dancers induce images of irradiated flesh and psychic fragmentation, mirroring the physical and emotional scars carried by atomic bomb survivors (Fraleigh, Butoh 43). Hijikata Tatsumi's early works often mirrored the grotesque and the decaying body, symbolically embodying the devastation of war and radiation (Baird, 109). As a form born out of a shattered cultural landscape, Butoh functions not only as an artistic revolt but also as a silent testimony to unspeakable suffering, offering a space where the trauma of hibakusha can be processed and embodied without words.

Western scholars have similarly emphasized Butoh's embodied and affective dimensions. Susan Leigh Foster describes Butoh as 'corporeal thinking,' where "the dancer does not represent a narrative or idea but materializes it through flesh" (Foster, 101). Hijikata's own methodology reinforced this idea by creating a "Butoh-fu," a choreographic notation system made of surreal poetic images meant to evoke inner landscapes rather than dictate specific steps (Fraleigh and Nakamura, 173). This internalization of movement, where gestures are felt before they are expressed, transforms Butoh into a practice of somatic excavation. The dancer, often using grotesque or minimalist movement, does not aim to communicate with the audience through symbolism but through the raw presence of the body itself. In this sense, Butoh aligns with phenomenological performance theories that centre embodied experience as knowledge production, rejecting the mind/body binary. As Sondra Fraleigh notes, "Butoh is a bodily response to cultural rupture, a lived memory of devastation, and a call to reimagine being" (Fraleigh, 58).

Moreover, Butoh's embodied nature is deeply informed by Japan's postwar condition (Fussell, 25). The trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, combined with the collapse of imperial ideology, which created a crisis of physicality in Japanese identity. In response, Butoh dancers returned to the primal body, stripped of codified technique, and engaged in a process of becoming "other", a corpse, an animal, a genderless being (O&O, 79: 82). This transformation

is not theatrical in the Western sense but ontological. Ohno Kazuo, whose dances were inspired by spiritual reflection and maternal memory, believed that 'one must dance with their entire life', revealing the inextricable link between embodiment and existence (O&O,34). Through such philosophies, Butoh redefines performance as an act of being rather than doing, one in which the performer surrenders to the unknown within their own body. Ultimately, Butoh stands as a powerful example of embodied performance, challenging not only dance conventions but also our understanding of identity, presence, and the expressive potential of the human form.

4.7. Silence of Butoh

The nonverbal dimension of Butoh plays a critical role in understanding its deep entanglement with trauma, particularly in a postwar Japanese context where silence and embodiment became necessary strategies for survival and expression. Trauma theory emphasizes that certain experiences, especially those marked by violence, war, or systemic repression, often evade linguistic articulation. Cathy Caruth famously argues that trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature, the way it was precisely not known in the first instance, returns to haunt the survivor" (Caruth, 4). Butoh, with its rejection of conventional narrative, dialogue, and even music, enacts this haunting return through the body. The performer does not recount trauma but *becomes* it, through fragmented, contorted, and often agonizing movements that bypass cognition and instead emerge from a somatic depth. In this way, Butoh aligns closely with Bessel van der Kolk's assertion that "the body keeps the score"; it becomes a site where memory is not verbalized but lived and re-experienced (van der Kolk, 21).

Furthermore, a religious conception called *mujō* (無常), translated as impermanence, is focal to Japanese Buddhism and aligns deeply with the aesthetic and philosophical

establishment of Butoh. The silence functions as more than an absence of sound, it becomes a profound expression of brevity and the ephemeral nature of existence. This silent serenity reflects the Buddhist understanding that all things are in constant flow, emphasizing the vulnerability and temporality of the human body (Fraleigh, *Butoh* 65). By rejecting narrative structure and verbal expression, Butoh aligns with Zen Buddhist practices that value silence as a path to deeper awareness (Fraleigh, "A Philosopher Looks at Butoh" 9). The dancer's body, suspended in quietude, becomes a living meditation on decay and mortality, echoing *mujō* not as abstract doctrine but as visceral experience. Bruce Baird notes that Hijikata's use of stillness and slowness often evokes a sense of death and decomposition, confronting the audience with the body's inevitable decline (148). Just as Zen meditation cultivates presence through silence, Butoh's meditative stillness invites both performer and viewer into a shared space of reflection on life's impermanence (Fraleigh, "We Are Not Solid Beings", 468).

Tatsumi Hijikata's choreography, particularly his use of Butoh-fu facilitates a turn inward, encouraging the dancer to surrender to involuntary, often grotesque imagery sourced from subconscious or collective trauma. These movements are not mimetic or symbolic in a traditional sense; they are affective gestures that emerge from what Hijikata called the "darkness of the body" (Hijikata, qtd. in Kurihara 19). The silence of Butoh thus becomes a space where language fails, and yet meaning proliferates through sensation, vulnerability, and corporeal presence. Moreover, the dissociative aesthetics of Butoh, where performers become corpses, spirits, or genderless forms, mirror the fragmentation of identity often experienced in trauma. Judith Herman notes that trauma disrupts narrative coherence and results in a "shattered self," and Butoh captures this fragmentation without attempting to resolve it (Herman, 52).

For Kazuo Ohno, too, Butoh was a form of silent prayer, a means of mourning and honoring memory beyond words. His performances often commemorated his mother or spiritual figures, and his dance became a ritual of remembrance where the unspeakable could

be touched, if not spoken (O&O, 34). Through this lens, Butoh serves not only as an embodiment of trauma but also as a potential site for its transformation. In the absence of speech, it allows for a shared witnessing between dancer and audience, echoing Dori Laub's theory that testimony must often begin in silence before language can be restored (Felman and Laub, 1991). Thus, the nonverbal quality of Butoh is not a lack but a mode of knowing and being, one uniquely suited to the demands of performing trauma. As Artaud also puts into perspective the western world relies too much on language and words thus diminishing the prospect of a deeper connection with the audience. Western theatre and dance mainly rely on technique and expression for communication. In contrast, Butoh introduces elements like cosmic mystery, violence, absurdity, eroticism, and transformation, which Western artists find fascinating because it challenges them to engage their imagination. Butoh serves as a symbolic language pointing to something deeper and more profound, something beyond the rational self. Its power lies in being non-verbal (Kuniyoshi, qtd in Stein, 114). By incorporating the performance with dance and music and bodily expression Butoh not only allows the audience to fully experience the represented trauma on stage, but it also gives way for audience to connect and reflect their own trauma.

PART 5 *MY MOTHER/私のお母さん* BY KAZUO OHNO

Kosawa Heisaku a Japanese psychoanalyst who was a student of Freud came up with a theory in 1932, which he called Ajase complex. Based on the Buddhist story of Prince Ajātasattu, who betrays and later repents his actions toward his father, the Ajase Complex shifts the focus from paternal rivalry to the child's ambivalent relationship with the mother. Rather than emphasizing desire and aggression, it focuses on feelings of guilt, shame, dependency, and the deep emotional bond between mother and child. Kosawa viewed that this resonated more with Japanese cultural values, which prioritize interdependence, social harmony, and filial piety, in contrast to the Western focus on autonomy and individuation (Kosawa qtd in Okonogi 352). According to Kosawa Heisaku and Doi Takeo, another Freudian psychoanalyst, the interest in mothers resurfaced partly because the traditional father figure, symbolized by the emperor and Japan's defeated military, lost credibility. In response, some people began to view mothers as potential saviours, while others blamed them for supporting the war effort by raising sons to die for the nation. Although there are two opposing perspectives on the role of the mothers after the war, Japan's culture continues to be strongly centred around mothers, even while remaining shaped by male dominance, illustrating a complex mix of both maternal and patriarchal forces (Sorgenfrei, 9). Additionally, Fraleigh claims that Butoh is deeply rooted in the concept of the dark feminine, an instinctive, subconscious force that shapes its aesthetic. Its connection to the feminine aligns with broader Japanese traditions, where feminine expression is central, and the main mythological figure is the Sun Goddess Amaterasu (Fraleigh, 58). After the defeat of Japan, the trust in the emperor and what he stood for lost its meaning. The emperor, the nation's father, was defeated and lost. With the declaration of defeat through a radio broadcast, many Japanese had their faith in the divinity of the empire shattered (Bix, 299-300). Many believed they could

and would continue fighting despite the disaster that had fallen on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nevertheless, the emperor's speech caused a deep scar. It can be said that the humiliating loss of the father figure deeply affected the Japanese nation who had complete faith in the empire. Nevertheless, the public, traumatized in more ways than one, was in tatters. By staging a performance centring on a mother figure seems as though Kazuo tries to not only relieve his own trauma but also transmit the collective trauma of the nation.

In the wake of Japan's defeat in 1945, many artists struggled with how to speak the unspeakable: a nationwide trauma fused with the nuclear bombings and decades of warmongering. The disillusionment on the Japanese nation's unconditional greatness was damaged thus the public was in disarray (Dower, 275). The collective trauma emerging from this wound remained inexplicable. Ohno's solo performance *My Mother* (1981) is often read as his most intimate response to that legacy. Scholars such as Sondra Fraleigh observe that Kazuo Ohno's frail, androgynous body "lets memory seep through skin and bone," turning personal grief into a collective elegy (Fraleigh, 95). In *My Mother* Ohno creates a mixture of personal and collective trauma and presents it to a nation that has been trying to get back on its feet. In an interview Robert Schechner asks him how he creates his choreography which Ohno answers thus:

OHNO: My mother was my director. She was the one I thought about. The movement motifs of *My Mother* came from what I thought I was doing in my mother's womb. I was in her-what was I doing there? Then came the costume-how to wear the costume. I feel that the costume is the cosmos. I must wear the cosmos and move within it. (Schechner, 164)

Kazuo often talked about his mother's influence on his education and his fascination with performance. As mentioned above, his mother's lively enacting of Lafcadio Hearn's stories inspired him with his work. Yoshito Ohno recounts that once Kazuo dreamed that a hairy

caterpillar crawling up on his arm. Later Kazuo realized that the insect was his mother. Driving her to be an insect Kazuo Ohno was overcome with sorrow. Dancing is a way of atonement for not realizing her mother's deep sorrow during life. Working from Cathy Caruth's premise that trauma "returns belatedly, inscribing itself on the body when language fails" (Caruth, 5), this analysis reads *My Mother* as a choreography of belated testimony: a dance in which the performer's slowed, trembling gestures stage the very latency Caruth identifies. Bruce Baird adds that Butoh's 'grotesque serenity' reframes the post-atomic body, lingering on decay to resist the rapid forgetting demanded by Cold-War optimism (Baird, 2012). By weaving these scholarly perspectives with close performance reading, the following essay argues that *My Mother* functions simultaneously as an autobiographical lament and a national memorial, demonstrating how embodied silence can articulate what post-war Japanese discourse often repressed.

In Kazuo's works the themes of life and death are always interwoven. To him Buto is an expression of the people who had lived before him. In his body, like Hijikata says resides many ghosts of the past. And what he does is nothing but relay their experiences. He says, "the physical form I now assume is but the fruit of what I have inherited from those who existed before me" (O&O, 254). Although Kazuo's performances reflect morbid themes, he himself does not think that death is something that one can stay away from. His son Yoshito claims that although his father converted to Christianity long before he was to serve in the WWII, his experiences during the war notably influenced his later performances and his reflections on life and death. Kazuo was drafted to the army when he was 21 and he served 9 years abroad. It is said that he did not directly involve in the battlefield but still the thing he had witnessed were more than enough. Yoshito states that his father rarely talked about his experiences of war, but he remembers Kazuo mentioning that once he was so scared the hair on his body would stand on end. He remembers the wild dogs eating the dead bodies and the constant unease he felt as

if any second an enemy soldier would spring (O&O, 110). These account from Yoshito is a clear indication that although Kazuo did not fight in the front lines, he was still exposed to the atrocity of war and was deeply traumatized. In another anecdote about Kazuo goes like this ; he was in a ship with a group of war prisoners who were released; during their journey several of them died due to the unpleasant conditions of the ship. Kazuo was affected by the sea burial given to those deceased thus when he finally came back home one of his first choreographed pieces was a performance a called “The Jellyfish Dance”(O&O, 112).

Kazuo’s profound belief in the interrelatedness of life and death can be attributed to both his experience of war and always being in a proximity to the death. The way Kazuo conveys the collective war trauma in Butoh or more specifically in his *My Mother* performance can be linked to first the physical appearance of the performer. It is mentioned above that in Butoh makeup is used as a tool to mask the face of the performer so that they can unmask their true self. It is to make a clean slate to perform a new self. Although white powder is used, it does not determine the aesthetics of the performer. The Butoh performer creates a mask that is almost repulsive to look at. The first look at the performer should disturb the audience. It is almost there is an uncanny feeling that makes you uncomfortable. As Fraleigh states “like eruptions from the subconscious, Butoh performances can take any shape. They may shock and surprise, edify and enlighten, disgust or delight” (58).

It can be claimed that another reason for the uncanniness of the performer is to make tribute to the victims of the atomic bomb. Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a website that offers a platform for the hibakusha/atomic bomb survivors according to many testimonies of these survivors, Hideo Tsuchiyama, Sakamoto Namio, Honda Chitoshi Kawaguchi Hiroko to name a few, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed, the impact of the nuclear energy destroyed many people on the spot. Even though there were many survivors they were affected by the radiation unfortunately did not survive long (MOFA: Testimony of Hibakusha).

Nevertheless, the perils of the radiation lasted for decades and caused deformities in the upcoming generations. The trauma of the atomic bombs and the war was transmitted not just through the media and or literature, but the bodies of the Japanese people became sites of memories where the collective and the individual trauma collided. In a Butoh performer, the subtle hint of deformity or wrongness is conveyed through grotesque makeup and the erratic behaviour of the performer. Throughout the show, the movement of the performer is hard to predict, and this unpredictability is what makes the audience alert and focused. In *My Mother*, Kazuo represents his mother and himself however these two identities intertwine with each other. Crucially, *My Mother* creates discomfort without brutality. Unlike In-Yer-Face Theatre's direct confrontation, the grotesque in Kazuo's performance, his painted face, haggard movements, and aberrant pacing, disturbs by asking the audience to slow down and sit with the uncanny. He performs not for the audience but as a ritual, a mourning rite, a memory repeated through every step and stillness.

The generated feeling of discomfort brings us back to the dramatic disgust that has been discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the In-Yer-Face Theatre. To revisit the term dramatic disgust refers to the notion that the performers or the author makes use of the bodily fluids, extreme violence physical and verbal, the taboo subjects, etc. Ablett claimed that the function dramatic disgust is to raise awareness of the audience by planting discomfort in their minds. In *Blasted*, Kane achieved this through using bad language, sexual violence to both Cate and Ian, cannibalism and display of bodily excretions. However, in Buto the performer attains this through their physical appearance and bodily movements.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the term abjection as “vortex of summons and repulsion” (1) meaning that the abject is something that both fascinates and disgusts a being. To Kristeva, the abjection is a liminal space because it is neither admirable nor entirely repellent. The feeling is in-between. When we look at *My Mother*, Kazuo Ohno also performs an in-

between: memory and loss, life and death. The abject feeling is enhanced by the grotesque appearance of the performer. According to Kristeva the abject is the binary of the self (1). The dramatic disgust is a tool to create a line between the self and the non-self, by doing so the audience who is subjected to the abjection can validate their identity.

The yearning for validation through the abject is another consequence of the traumatic severance from the womb. Kristeva declares that abjection is a necessary process for an infant to gain a sense of self, to experience itself as different from its surroundings and the m/other (67, Kristeva qtd in Ablett). The act of birth is an act of rejection of the mother which Kazuo Ohno calls a forced severance from the womb (O&O,269) which is the first trauma. It can be deduced that the human life begins with a trauma and everyday spent apart from the mother's womb is re-living of the trauma. Additionally, Kazuo often states that the stage is the mother's womb. What he means with this statement is that the womb was the place where a human was restriction-free. The mother's womb was a haven for baby not yet sullied by the abject of outside world. When humans are born, they lose "the ultimate freedom" (Fraleigh, 67), mourn that loss (O&O,269). Thus, *My Mother* is an evocative Butoh performance that channels deeply personal trauma into an abstract yet profoundly moving visual language. When Yutaka Haniya sees Kazuo lying on the stage floor in a foetal position, he calls it "an embryonic meditation" (O&O, 118). Suggesting that Kazuo's performance is full of life and almost a calming innocence.



Figure 3: Ohno lying on the floor in foetal position during a rehearsal of *My Mother*, 1981. Photographed by Teijiro Kamiyama.

While Sarah Kane's *Blasted* externalizes violence and trauma with brutal clarity, *My Mother* internalizes pain, allowing it to unfold through the body in slow, deliberate movements. Although the piece is a tribute to Kazuo's deceased mother, but more than a personal eulogy, it reflects collective post-war trauma, grief, and the haunting persistence of memory. The trauma here is not spoken or shown explicitly but is instead suggested through the silence, stillness, and eerie beauty of Kazuo's corporeal expression.

The absence of dialogue, *My Mother* relies on gesture and movement to convey emotion; Kristeva asserts that the trauma of the first abjection is stored as a memory of the body remaining with the vessel (Kristeva 68 qtd in Ablett). This absence itself is significant; it mirrors the unspeakable nature of trauma, which, as theorized by Cathy Caruth, defies straightforward articulation. Similarly, as Elaine Scarry states physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it (Scarry, 172). In Butoh we do not see the trauma reflected through the collapse of the language, but we understand it through the absence of speech. Rather than "voicing the trauma" the Buto performer embodies the trauma. In *My Mother*, Kazuo relays his mother's last words to him.

“Kazuo, a deep-sea flounder is swimming inside my body. You know, long, long ago it was shaped like a globular fish but overtime it was flattened due to the surrounding water pressure on the ocean bottom. When you dance Kazuo move in such a way that the entire universe rumbles; dance like that flounder does as it jumps forth from the sand on the seabed.” (O&O, 21)

According to Yoshito who was also shocked by his father’s words, clarifies that usually during the performance Kazuo hardly speaks, aside from several exclamations. Yoshito thinks that his father spoke as though he was in a trance when he uttered those words. The unusual behaviour of Kazuo strengthens the notion that Butoh is not just a performance of trauma but an embodiment of it. The unconscious outburst from Kazuo shows that the memory of the trauma resurfaced without Kazuo’s knowledge when he remembered the moment of his mother’s passing. In Buto body empties itself of the conscious self to welcome the hidden. The distorted gestures, trembling hands, and ghostly pacing of Kazuo’s body on stage reflect the inner turmoil that words fail to express. The voice of trauma, which Caruth identifies as emerging from a wound, is here expressed not through language but through the physical body as text. In a workshop on *My Mother*, Kazuo tells the participants to remember their freedom in the womb and move accordingly (Fraleigh, 61). As Kazuo likens the stage to a womb, the stage becomes the utmost place to attempt at a complete freedom. He can do anything and everything he wants on the stage; during the performance, Kazuo uses a small tea table which he presents as an embodiment of his mother. Like a child he plays with “his mother”; playfully annoying her, laughing with her, mischievously hiding from her. His eyes take the look of an innocent child (O&O, 118).



Figure 4: In rehearsal for My Mother, Kamihoshikawa,1982. Photographed by Teijiro Kamiyama.-1



Figure 5: In rehearsal for My Mother, Kamihoshikawa,1982. Photographed by Teijiro Kamiyama.-2



Figure 6: In rehearsal for My Mother, Kamihoshikawa,1982. Photographed by Teijiro Kamiyama.-3

In *My Mother*, Kazuo Ohno's embodiment of his mother channels the aesthetics of grotesque realism, particularly through the distortion, fragmentation, and exaggeration of the aging and dying body. Rather than showcasing the mother figure as a symbol of holy grace or idealized femininity, he emphasizes physical vulnerability, using trembling hands, awkward movements, and an unstable posture to evoke a body that is not complete, penetrable, and deteriorating. This aligns with grotesque realism's focus on corporeal excess and the lower body layer, where the body is not confined or finished but open through orifices and bodily functions, connected to cycles of life, death, and renewal. Kazuo Ohno's portrayal resists transcendence and instead grounds the performance in earthy materiality, echoing Bakhtin's carnival body while inviting the audience to confront the raw, affective truth of embodiment. (Bakhtin qtd in Breiten, 17-18). Ohno's movements are often slow, childlike, or ritualistic which invites the audience to contemplate rather than react. This subtle pacing builds a meditative atmosphere that mirrors the lingering quality of memory and loss. His costuming, often including lace, veils, and feminine garments, blurs gender and identity, reinforcing the theme of transformation through grief. The grotesque, the feminine, and the ethereal coexist in his portrayal of his mother, turning the performance into a space where boundaries dissolve: between self and other, male and female, life and death. This ambiguity enhances the universal nature of the trauma Kazuo Ohno enacts. Kazuo often remarks that in the womb there is no gender; thus, he is often seen wearing both feminine and masculine clothing. As it was Kazuo's desire to attain utter freedom through performance it is said that his affinity to wear dresses is an attempt to feel close to his mother (O&O, 79).

In *My Mother*, trauma is not visualized as a wound caused by external violence but as a slow erosion of the self, caused by memory and longing. His bent posture and sometimes fragile movements convey physical deterioration, aging, mourning, and remembrance become indistinguishable. Japan's post-war condition, as the only country to have suffered atomic

bombings, is subtly evoked through these motifs of physical fragility and spiritual endurance. Kazuo does not need to reference war directly; his performance speaks to a national and generational trauma embedded in his very being. The silence of the performance is particularly powerful. Silence here does not imply absence but is filled with reverence and mourning. It becomes a medium through which trauma is transmitted. Kazuo's slowness, stasis, and repetition mirrors trauma's cyclical nature, the way it returns unbidden, not in narrative but in gesture, echo, and atmosphere. Like trauma itself, the performance lingers, resists closure and asks to be remembered. Buto approaches the trauma narrative as if approaching to a scared animal that needs to be protected. Despite suffused with grief, Kazuo's performance conveys an acceptance of the traumatic experience.

Conclusively, *My Mother* stands as a moving testament to the power of performance to express loss, trauma, and memory. Unlike the violent ruptures of *Blasted*, Kazuo's Butoh work whispers rather than shouts. Yet it cuts just as deeply. Technically, Butoh resists Western theatrical conventions like *Blasted*. There is no plot, no climax, no resolution. The stage is minimal, the lighting soft or shadowed, and the music, when present, is atmospheric rather than narrative. In *My Mother*, the absence of linear structure is a deliberate choice. Kazuo performs memory as a non-linear phenomenon, fragmented and permeated with absences. This aligns with trauma theory's understanding of time as disjointed in the aftermath of a wound. The past is not behind but always pressing into the present. Through minimalism, bodily distortion, and poetic pacing, *My Mother* channels a voice from beyond the grave, grief made visible, memory made flesh. In this way, Kazuo Ohno, like Sarah Kane, bears witness to trauma not just by representing it, but by allowing it to inhabit the stage itself.

CONCLUSION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRAUMA IN IN-YER-FACE THEATRE AND BUTOH

Throughout this thesis, the complex relationship between trauma and performance has been investigated through the lens of two diverse yet thematically complementary performing arts: In-Yer-Face Theatre, represented by Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, and Butoh, depicted by Kazuo Ohno's *My Mother*. Both theatrical forms, although appeared from different cultural traditions and historical events, serve as powerful mediums through which the unspeakable pain of trauma is embodied, voiced, and transmitted. The objective of this comparative study has been to explore how trauma, in both its individual and collective aspects, is articulated and processed through live performance, while also uncovering the cultural characteristics that shape these expressions. The study has emphasized how the theatre, and performance more broadly, act as a fundamental spaces for witnessing to suffering, offering a unique approach to negotiate and possibly transform traumatic memory.

The comparison between In-Yer-Face Theatre and Butoh reveals a foundational difference in their aesthetic approaches to trauma. In-Yer-Face Theatre, particularly Kane's *Blasted*, embraces a willfully antagonistic style, using graphic violence, coarse language, and intense emotional realism to provoke the audience into a state of discomfort and moral reckoning. Kane's dramaturgy challenges the traditional Aristotelian structure by denying catharsis, thereby forcing the audience to carry the emotional and psychological burden beyond the theatre space. This insistence on unresolved tension serves as a critical strategy, compelling the audience to not merely observe trauma but to be implicated in its narrative. Trauma, in Kane's work, is not a private affliction but a social wound that demands collective

acknowledgment and ethical response. In comparison Kazuo Ohno's Butoh performance *My Mother* embodies trauma through a apparently different aesthetic. Rather than verbal confrontation, Butoh relies on the body's capacity to embody memory and suffering. Ohno's movements, often slow, deliberate, and seemingly disjointed, elicit an inner world of grief and yearning. The performance becomes a meditative ritual, one that blurs the line between personal mourning and collective memory. In *My Mother*, trauma is not manifested through explicit representation but personalized and communicated through a vocabulary of gestures, silence, and symbolic resonance. The absence of spoken language and the presence of a distorted, often grotesque body underscore the inexplicable nature of trauma, suggesting that some wounds exist beyond the realm of articulation.

The historical and cultural contexts of these works further illuminate their differences. Kane's *Blasted* emerges from a post-Thatcherite Britain struggling with social disillusionment, the erosion of empathy, and the existence of mediated violence. The play mirrors the shattered psyche of a society numbed by war, political failure, and interpersonal alienation. The visceral brutality on stage reflects the internal devastation brought by these forces. In contrast, Kazuo Ohno's Butoh originates in post-World War II Japan, a nation traumatized by the unprecedented horror of atomic bombings followed by American occupation. Butoh emerged not only as a response to Westernization and cultural breach but also as a means of reconnecting with repressed memories and buried emotions. In this light, *My Mother* can be seen as an act of resistance against historical forgetfulness, a performance that reclaims the body as a site of memory. Despite their aesthetic and cultural disparities, both *Blasted* and *My Mother* come together in their approach towards body as the main medium of trauma. In *Blasted*, the body is repeatedly violated, subjected to physical and psychological degradation, transforming into a battlefield of pain and survival. Kane's staging of rape, cannibalism, and war-torn mutilation strips the body of its purity, offering it as the utmost testimony to humanity's capacity for cruelty.

The audience's confrontation with the destroyed body disturbs their moral compass, compelling them to confront the proximity of violence in everyday life. Meanwhile in Butoh, the body is also a focal, but its function is much more diverse. Instead of dramatizing violence, Kazuo's body adapts and mirrors suffering. His often fragile and worn out form does not demand sympathy through spectacle but invokes a quiet and unwilling awe. The grotesque aesthetic of Butoh, with its ghost-like makeup, deformed postures, and slow movements, disconcerts the spectator not through shock but through an eerie beauty that gestures toward the sublime. The body, in this context, becomes a sacred vessel that channels collective trauma without reducing it to mere representation.

One of the most compelling aspects of this comparison lies in the role of the audience. In *Blasted*, the audience is forcefully involved. Kane's defiance to offer emotional space means that the viewer becomes an unsuspecting participant in the display of suffering. The experience is designed to linger, to haunt, much like trauma itself. This aligns with trauma theorist Cathy Caruth's notion that trauma is not fully grasped in the moment of its occurrence but returns insistently, demanding delayed comprehension. Kane's theatre enacts this return by denying closure, leaving the audience in a suspended state of awareness and discomfort. In contrast, Kazuo Ohno's *My Mother* invites the audience into a contemplative space. There is no direct appeal, no accusatory gaze. Instead, the audience is drawn into a quiet witnessing, where meaning arises not from narrative but from affective resonance. The trauma here is not didactic but experiential, communicated through atmosphere and sensation. This aligns with the Buddhist-inflected philosophies often associated with Butoh, where suffering is not something to be resolved but to be inhabited and transformed. The audience is not shocked into action but gently guided toward introspection.

The role of disgust, a central concept in Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, provides another point of commonality. In *Blasted*, abjection is undisguised: the human body is reduced

to its most base elements, excreting, bleeding, consuming itself. The horror lies not only in what is done to the body but in its resemblance to our own, forcing a recognition of shared vulnerability. Kane uses this recognition to collapse the boundary between self and other, producing an ethical demand. The abject here is the unavoidable reality of mortality and violence. In *My Mother*, abjection operates more subtly. The performer's aged body, stripped of theatrical glamour, confronts the audience with decay, fragility, and death. Yet, unlike Kane's violent presentation, Kazuo's abjection is saturated with tenderness. The maternal theme introduces an emotional layer that redefines death not as terror but as return. The body, though grotesque, becomes a site of communion. This aligns with Kristeva's assertion that the abject is both repulsive and fascinating; it draws us in even as it horrifies. Kazuo's performance exemplifies this tension, using abjection to provoke reflection rather than revulsion.

From a performative standpoint, the staging and use of space also highlight key contrasts. *Blasted* is set in a single hotel room that deteriorates into a war zone, collapsing the private and the public, the personal and the political. The claustrophobic setting reinforces the inescapability of trauma. The audience watches as familiar spaces become uncanny and fragmented, mirroring the destabilization of identity in traumatic experience. Although the concept of time and space is fragmented, the linear progression of destruction, both spatial and psychological, emphasizes the cumulative weight of violence. *My Mother*, on the other hand, unfolds in a more abstract space. The performance defies spatial realism, preferring instead for symbolic environments shaped by light, shadow, and movement. The stage becomes a liminal space, neither here nor there, reflecting the threshold state of the traumatised subject. Time, too, becomes fluid; memories emerge and fade without a clear order. This dreamlike temporality mirrors the disjointed nature of traumatic memory, as described in trauma studies. Kazuo's spatial ambiguity allows for a multiplicity of interpretations, inviting the audience to project their own emotional landscapes onto the performance.

What ultimately binds these two works is their shared insistence on keeping trauma visible. In different ways, both *Blasted* and *My Mother* refuse the comfort of forgetting. Kane's brutal realism and Kazuo's poetic abstraction converge in their ethical commitment to remembrance. They demonstrate that trauma, while deeply personal, is also inherently communal. It is carried in the body, articulated through art, and sustained through cultural memory. Their performances become acts of testimony, not only for themselves but for those whose voices remain unheard. Furthermore, this comparative study highlights the importance of cultural uniqueness in the representation of trauma. While Western theatre may prioritize catharsis and direct engagement, Eastern traditions like Butoh offer alternative modes of understanding and expressing pain. These differences are not merely aesthetic but philosophical, reflecting divergent worldviews regarding suffering, memory, and the role of the individual within society. By placing these forms in dialogue, this thesis underscores the necessity of intercultural perspectives in trauma studies.

In conclusion, the juxtaposition of In-Yer-Face Theatre and Butoh reveals the multifaceted nature of trauma and its representation in performance. Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Kazuo Ohno's *My Mother* stand as sentimental examples of how theatre can serve as both a mirror and a healing balm for wounded societies. They challenge us to confront pain, to listen to the silenced voice of trauma, and to recognize the body as a living archive of memory. Their works affirm that while trauma may resist language, it finds expression in the ephemeral, embodied, and affective realm of performance. As long as theatre exists, so too will the possibility of bearing witness to the wounds that shape us, individually, collectively, and across cultures.

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