

Reproductions and No Original Gender and Traumatic Memory

BY

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I Trauma Culture and Cultural Memory

With reference to two representative plays of ›Trauma Drama‹, a body of anglophone plays that have been staged since the late 1980s, my essay engages with two current cultural trends: the fascination with issues of performativity and the intense preoccupation with questions of individual and cultural memory – in particular, with traumatic memory.¹ Increasingly, contemporary culture defines its own moment through trauma.

As a trope, trauma negotiates cultural meanings that are interconnected with but exceed the nosology of the psychic ›disorder‹ established by psychiatry and psychoanalysis, which argues that trauma designates an event or experience that is so intense that the subject is unable to respond adequately to it, and instead suffers from long-lasting, post-traumatic psychic consequences.² In the last thirty years, the concept has gained increasing prominence in psychiatric and psychological discourses. Since the late 1980s, trauma-related diagnoses, such as ›multiple personality disorder‹ (now renamed ›dissociative identity disorder‹) and ›post-traumatic disorder‹, have abounded in the influential *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which is used both in the USA and in Europe. The growing importance of traumatisation in psychiatry and psychology is concomitant with its increasing employment as a cultural trope. Culturally, the concept serves as an explanatory pattern to account for the experiences, biographies, and behaviours of individuals, but it is also, on a more abstract level, employed to explain collective and socio-

1 This essay draws on arguments which I have developed in a different context in *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia. Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (Basingstoke, New York 2007). My thanks go to Palgrave Macmillan for their permission to reproduce material from this study.

2 For a definition of trauma, cf. Laplanche, Jean/J.-B. Pontalis: *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Transl. by Donald Nicholson-Smith. London 1972. p. 165

cultural phenomena. Trauma is considered such a dominant cultural formation for Western societies that critics have employed the labels »traumaculture«³ and, referring to the original meaning of τραύμα, »wound culture«.⁴

Trauma, and in particular childhood trauma, plays a crucial role in the work of distinguished contemporary artists, such as Gillian Wearing, Tracey Emin, Nan Goldin, and Tracey Moffat.⁵ In 2001 and 2002, a British national touring exhibition called *Trauma*, curated by the Hayward Gallery, gathered the work of twelve international artists to explore how contemporary art reflects the »fascination with trauma in contemporary society«.⁶ The topic has become ubiquitous in TV shows and almost all literary genres. In addition to a vast number of crime fiction, self-help books, and novels, comics such as *Spiderman*, *Rex Morgan*, and *Gasoline Alley* have dealt with trauma,⁷ and it has even been discovered for commercial advertisement, which offers cures for »traumatised hair«.⁸

Observing the social and theoretical fascination with trauma, studies in the field, such as Kirby Farrell's *Post-Traumatic Culture. Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (1998)⁹ and the aptly named essay collection *Trauma. Zwischen Psychoanalyse und kulturellem Bedeutungsmuster (Trauma. Between Psychoanalysis and Cultural Paradigm, 1999)*¹⁰, suggest, respectively, that trauma is a way of interpreting the cultural centennial crises of the 1890s and the 1990s, and that trauma is a new means of interpretation for modernism and modernity in general, designating that part of personal or collective history which cannot be made up for, which remains inconceivable and inadequate, and which cannot be integrated into narrative memory. Whereas in narrative memory, »the past is con-

tinually being re-made in the interests of the present«,¹¹ traumatic memory is taken to truthfully preserve the past in its perceptual reality. While narrative memory is flexible and, moreover, a social act because we compare our stories about the past with those of others or adapt our versions of the past to the particular addressee, traumatic memory has no social component; it is delayed, inflexible, and invariable.¹² Although traumatic memory thus seems to offer a more adequate and immediate form of recollection, it must be understood as an experience that is encapsulated in the body but cut off from consciousness. Hence, it cannot be recounted verbally. Instead, the inadvertent activations of traumatic memories make the traumatised subject feel as if he or she has returned to the initial situation. Since trauma not only makes accurate narrative recollection difficult but also distorts chronology and refuses historical boundaries through its deferred action, a crisis, or even a collapse, of witnessing proceeds from trauma.¹³

The employment of both memory and trauma as cultural tropes has on the one hand risked the generalisation of these terms to the point of meaninglessness. As Ian Hacking laments, trauma has become »a metaphor for almost anything unpleasant«.¹⁴ Similarly, critics have observed a terminological profusion and semantic overload of the concept of memory.¹⁵ Nonetheless, both trauma and memory remain »immensely loaded and highly debated term[s], around which some of the most pressing cultural questions are negotiated«¹⁶. It is my contention that contemporary drama employs these highly loaded concepts to negotiate »pressing cultural questions« about gender identity.

3 Luckhurst, Roger: Traumaculture. In: *New Formations*, 2003, no. 50, pp. 28-47.

4 See Seltzer, Mark: Wound Culture. Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere. In: *October*, 1997, no. 80, pp. 3-26 and Seltzer, Mark: *Serial Killers. Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*. London 1998.

5 Seltzer 1998, pp. 39-47.

6 Bradley, Fiona/Katrina Brown/Andrew Nairne: *Trauma*. In: *Trauma. Catalogue of the National Touring Exhibition*. London 2001, pp. 6-9; here p. 6.

7 Hacking, Ian: *The Making and Moulding of Child Abuse*. In: *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, 1991, no. 2, p. 253-288; here p. 255.

8 Berressem, Hanjo: *The Horror! The Horror! (Re)Presenting Trauma – Lecture Script 1*, <http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/englisch/berressem/docs/trauma/Trauma1.htm>, 14/10/2003, p. 1 (accessed October 30, 2007).

9 Farrell, Kirby: *Post-Traumatic Culture. Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*. Baltimore, London 1998.

10 Bronfen, Elisabeth/Birgit R. Erdle/Sigrid Weigel (eds.): *Trauma. Zwischen Psychoanalyse und kulturellem Bedeutungsmuster*. Köln 1999.

11 Bartlett, Frederick C.: *Remembering. A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. Cambridge 1967 [1932], p. 309.

12 Van der Kolk, Bessel A./Onno van der Hart: *The Intrusive Past. The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma*. In: Cathy Caruth (ed.): *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, London 1995, pp. 158-82; here p. 163.

13 See Laub, Dori: *An Event without a Witness. Truth, Testimony and Survival*. In: Shoshana Felman/Dori Laub: *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. London 1992, pp. 75-92.

14 Hacking, Ian: *Rewriting the Soul. Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*. Princeton 1995, p. 183.

15 See for example Klein, Lee: *On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse*. In: *Representations*, 2000, no. 69, pp. 127-150 and Kansteiner, Wulf: *Finding Meaning in Memory. A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies*. In: *History and Theory*, 2002, no. 41, pp. 179-197.

16 See Berressem 2003.

Given the versatile cultural adaptations of trauma, the attraction of the concept seems to stem from its very capaciousness, which allows trauma to act as a projection surface for psychic pain, social rupture and loss as well as epistemological crisis. For contemporary anglophone drama, however, the cultural significance of the phenomena can be specified. A large number of plays, which I propose to call 'Trauma Drama', deal with traumatisation. The clear majority of these plays focuses on the experience of sexual child abuse,¹⁷ which corresponds to the public preoccupation with the phenomenon; as various critics have noted, sexual child abuse is the most dominant form of traumatisation discussed in the 1990s.¹⁸ Acknowledging the 'popularity' of the topic of sexual child abuse in the theatre and its easy exploitation for sensationalism, critic Paul Taylor has polemically argued that »[i]ndeed, in the past decade or so, it would be hard to find a dramatic subject that has been more abused than abuse«. ¹⁹ Whilst reviewers have wearied of the theatrical negotiation of the topic, its persistence in contemporary anglophone drama to the present day points to its unrelenting cultural relevance.²⁰

17 Plays such as – to name but a few – Michael Wilcox's *Massage* (1986), Phyllis Nagy's *Butterfly Kiss* (1994), Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), Claire Dowie's *Easy Access (for the Boys)* (1998), Bryony Lavery's *Frozen* (1998), Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* (2000), Arnold Wesker's *Denial* (2000), Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence* (2000), Judith Jones and Beatrix Campbell's *And All the Children Cried* (2002), Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* (2004), and David Harrower's *Blackbird* (2005) have explored the issue of sexual child abuse. For a more detailed analysis of Trauma Drama, see Wald 2007.

18 Cultural critics acknowledge the social and epistemological importance that the issue of sexual child abuse had gained by the beginning of the 1990s. Hacking states in his seminal study *Rewriting the Soul. Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* that »the most sensational trauma of recent times is child abuse« (Princeton 1995, p. 15), and Roger Luckhurst notes that the experience of sexual child abuse had by the late 1980s become »the privileged origin of trauma« in the public awareness (Luckhurst 2003, p. 31). Lynne Segal calls the fate of the helpless and vulnerable child in the abusive family »the most culturally ubiquitous narrative available for explaining all manner of social problems and individual failures and misfortunes today« and »one of the central moral tales of our time« (*Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology, Politics*. Cambridge 1999, p. 119).

19 Taylor, Paul: Review of *Easy Access (for the Boys)*. In: *The Independent*, 07/04/1999.

20 In addition to the plays that deal with sexual child abuse, contemporary anglophone Trauma Drama also stages other forms of traumatisation, such as the experience

of war (for example Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*, Martin Crimp's *Cruel and Tender*), genocide (for example Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*, Diane Samuels's *Kindertransport*, Julia Pascal's *Holocaust Trilogy*), violence and (mass) murder (for example Anthony Neilson's *Normal*, Phillip Ridley's *Ghost from a Perfect Place*, Rona Munro's *Iron*), and racial discrimination (for example Winsome Pinnock's *Mules*, Roy Williams's *Fallout*). Recently, traumatic experiences in the context of terrorism have gained particular prominence on the British stage (see, for instance, Victoria Brittain and Gilian Slovo's *Guantanamo*, Mark Lee's *The Private Room*, and Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists*).

Focusing on two representative plays, Sarah Daniels's *Beside Herself* (1990) and Victoria Hardie's *Sleeping Nightie* (1989), I will argue that the plays of Trauma Drama invoke trauma as a trope of the performative quality of gender identity. Trauma is presented as a 'performative malady' that highlights and illustrates the mechanisms of gender performativity, which usually remain naturalised and can hence only be perceived with difficulty. This close interconnection of issues of traumatisation and gender performativity in the plays offers a valuable starting point for a theoretical reflection about how the central concepts of trauma and memory theory and poststructuralist gender theory can be aligned productively. In the field of trauma theory, such a theoretical synthesis has so far been limited to studies on sexual child abuse which have identified the preponderance of male perpetrators and female victims and explored the gendered power structures underlying abuse.²¹ In the field of poststructuralist gender theory, Judith Butler, at several points in her writings, briefly evokes trauma as an experience which fuels gender performance in non-visible ways.²² She refrains, however, from theorising trauma in relation to gender more extensively.

In the following, I will first sketch the characteristics of the psychoanalytically informed concept of trauma which both psychiatry and cultural studies draw on. Second, I will elucidate how the plays stage trauma as a 'performative malady' – that is, how they theatricalise traumatisation and employ it as a trope of gender performativity.

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21 See for example Herman, Judith Lewis: *Trauma and Recovery. The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York 1992.

22 See for example Butler, Judith: *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. London, New York 1993, pp. 123-124 and Butler, Judith: *Quandaries of the Incest Taboo*. In: Judith Butler: *Undoing Gender*. London, New York 2004, pp. 153-160.

III Trauma Theory

Belatedness

One of the crucial reasons why the notion of trauma translates so successfully into contemporary culture is its temporality of belatedness and the logical paradoxes resulting from this unusual temporal structure. Freud identified the principle of belatedness in his work with hysterical patients, when he realised that traumatisation sets in only *after* the event, »[d]uring the interval between the experiences of those impressions and their reproduction«. ²³ According to Freud, the »traumatic kernel« which instigates the hysteric symptoms stems from the interaction of two scenes. Because of its suddenness and overwhelming quality, the initial traumatic moment cannot be fully experienced and grasped but only »lived through« at the time of its occurrence. It is only during a later, possibly trivial event that the memories of the initial event are triggered and that the affect associated with them is reactivated. Thus, Freud posits, the interaction between both scenes causes the subject's traumatisation, which is belatedly shifted to the initial experience. For Freud, *Nachträglichkeit* (belatedness, deferred action, or retrodetermination) means not only the latency period after which the traumatic symptoms occur but also the retrospective character of every traumatisation. Following this trajectory, the traumatic event as such has never taken place: the past is belatedly created through its seeming repetition in the future. Therefore, the term »traumatic event« is, strictly speaking, catachrestic.

Recent trauma theory no longer assumes that every case of traumatisation is the result of an interaction between two scenes. Nor does Trauma Drama stage such a form of belatedness. Today, traumatologists from diverse disciplines, such as the neurologist Bessel van der Kolk, the literary critic Cathy Caruth, and Judith Herman, a feminist psychotherapist, assume that trauma has an immediate impact. Nonetheless, the logic of belatedness as established by Freud remains central to present-day trauma theory, which assumes that the traumatic experience is so overwhelming that it cannot be grasped emotionally or intellectually at the time of occurrence and resists being accounted for coherently or meaningfully after the event. Trauma is that which cannot be narrated. As a sudden and

23 Freud, Sigmund: Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses. In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Ed. by James Strachey/Anna Freud. Vol. III. London 1962 [1898], pp. 261-285; here p. 281. See also Freud, Sigmund: Die Sexualität in der Ätiologie der Neurosen. In: Gesammelte Werke. Vol. I. Frankfurt/M. 1999 [1898], pp. 489-516; here p. 511.

chance event, it breaks with narrative patterns of making sense of one's past and instead returns in forms that are distinct from narrative memory. Hence, the traumatic event is not possessed knowledge, which could be narrated, but instead itself possesses the subject, which can only belatedly, in its psychic returns, experience trauma. The nature of these intrusions is a contested issue in trauma theory. While some critics understand them as a literal return to the perceptual reality of the traumatising event, others consider them to be a reproduction of the trauma that is always already distorted.

Acting Out and Working Through

Traumatic repetition compulsion, which makes the subject reproduce aspects of the trauma, generally entails two different but intersecting modes of repetition, *acting out* and *working through*. According to Freud, the acting out of a traumatisation enables the traumatised subject to develop belatedly the affect that was not aroused by the traumatic experience, because trauma is too devastating to allow intellectual and emotional processing at the time. The repetition compulsion inherent in traumatisation hence means that the subject does not experience – in the sense of witnessing and grasping its happening and impact – the trauma as a *repetition*, but *for the first time*. Thus, paradoxically, the event which is repeated has never actually taken place for the subject. The subject repeats without being aware of repetition. In his article »Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten« (»Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through«), Freud concludes, »we may say that the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it«. ²⁴ Rather than integrating the event into narrative memory, the traumatised person hence actualises it as an action that appears unconnected to the past.

While re-enactments of the traumatic experience can offer the »experiencing« of the trauma in the sense of »going through it emotionally«, they can also be an unconscious attempt to master the traumatic experience,

24 Freud, Sigmund: Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psychoanalysis). In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Ed. by James Strachey/Anna Freud. Vol. XII. London 1962 [1914], pp. 145-156; here p. 150. See also Freud, Sigmund: Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten. In: Gesammelte Werke. Vol. X. Frankfurt/M. 1999 [1914], pp. 126-136; here p. 129.

to work it through. Freud uses the example of the *fort-da* game to illustrate how the subject attempts to master the situation by staging the trauma: Freud's one-year-old grandchild repeatedly threw away a little wooden spool that was attached to a rope and declared it to be »o-o-o-o«, »fort« (»gone«), only to fetch it back and pronounce it »da« (»here«).²⁵ Freud interpreted the child's game as a way of coming to terms with the absences of his mother. Rather than being taken by surprise by the mother's departure and enduring it passively, the child restages the experience in an altered context which allows control of the event. The game emanates, according to Freud, from the child's *Bemächtigungstrieb* (instinct for mastery).²⁶ While the traumatic repetition compulsion as characteristic of intrusive recollections and nightmares implies a mimetic reproduction of the trauma, the repetition compulsion as exerted in the *fort-da* game implies a modification of the reproduction. In a creative move, the game turns »pathology« into a semi-conscious act which attempts to master the traumatisation.²⁷

IV Trauma and Gender: The Performative Malady

Trauma Drama approaches trauma from an almost invariably post-traumatic perspective, thus sharing the suggestion of trauma theory that trauma is constituted belatedly. Given that the »traumatic event« is so overwhelming for the subject that it cannot be grasped at the moment of

25 See Freud, Sigmund: *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*. In: *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. XIII. Frankfurt/M. 1999 [1920], pp. 1-70; here pp. 11-15. See also Freud, Sigmund: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. by J. Strachey/A. Freud. Vol. XVIII. London 1955 [1920], pp. 3-64; here pp. 14-17.

26 Freud 1999, vol. XIII, pp. 1-70; here p. 14. See also Freud 1955, pp. 3-64; here p. 16.

27 The complementary aspects of trauma's actualisation, acting out and working through, have alternatively been conceptualised in terms of »unstory« or plot versus story. The difference between the unfolding plot, or the »unstory«, which repeats the pain, and the unfolding story that provides relief can, as Ruth Leys suggests, alternatively be grasped through the terms *mimesis* and *diegesis*. The working through/*diegesis* of trauma belongs to the conscious, psychic, and intellectual processing of trauma. Deriving from Freud and Breuer's talking cure, it is considered a step towards detraumatisation in trauma therapy to this day. Leys emphasises that acting out and working through are not mutually exclusive, but both »internal to the traumatic experience« and in fact interact with each other. Leys, Ruth: *Trauma. A Genealogy*. Chicago 2000, p. 40.

occurrence, it would be an inappropriate representation and most probably a belittling of trauma to stage the moment of traumatisation, that is, in the plays discussed here, the moment of sexual child abuse. Rather than depicting abuse, Trauma Drama puts on view the post-traumatic, psychic repetition compulsions and traces the protagonists' attempts to come to terms with their traumatisation. Theatre is particularly suitable for the artistic representation of traumatisation since on the stage, trauma's bodily symptoms can be visualised. Moreover, the concurrent levels of action as typical of psychic dissociation can be enacted simultaneously.

Traumatisation as staged by the plays proves a productive site to explore the characteristics of performatively gendered subjectivity. The connections between traumatisation and gender performativity in the plays oscillate between metaphor and metonymy. On the one hand, the plays highlight that gender and traumatisation are causally related and thus suggest a metonymic link. For instance, the culturally condoned notions of men as perpetrators and women as victims of sexualised violence are presented as a source for the traumatisations of women. On the other hand, and I will focus on this relationship in the following, traumatisation is a metaphor for gender performativity, since it can be compared with the workings of gender performativity via a number of shared characteristics. As I will argue in the course of this essay, both traumatic memory and Butler's concept of gender performativity involve the ambivalence of performing and being performed, the belated construction of an »original« (»femininity« and »masculinity«/the »traumatic event«), the iterative, performative production (which poses as an imitation) of this ostensible original, and the possibility of *working through*/resignifying the »original« that depends on its reiterative, performative production. As a metaphor for gender identity, traumatic memory therefore not only emphasises the compulsory aspects of the incessant repetitions and exclusions that constitute gender, but the potential *working through* of traumatisation also highlights ways in which gender norms can be resignified.

In the following, I will focus on two select plays from the large body of Trauma Drama to illustrate ways in which aspects of traumatic memory can be interpreted as metaphors for gender performativity. While my discussion of *Beside Herself* concentrates on the issue of psychic dissociation, my analysis of *Sleeping Nightie* will investigate the gradual transition from acting out to working through.

In *Beside Herself*, the protagonist's traumatisation serves as a metaphor for the exclusions that shape gender performances, since the play makes these exclusions visible in a double figure. The doubling of the protagonist, Evelyn, is motivated by her psychic dissociation after the traumatic experience of incestuous sexual child abuse.²⁸ As Evelyn constantly has to interact with both her double, Eve, who remains invisible for the other characters, and her ›real‹ environment, the play makes audiences partake in the dissociative state of the traumatised protagonist.

When Evelyn in the opening scene of *Beside Herself* enters her father's house with the words »It's only me«, Eve is already awaiting her on stage, thus disproving Evelyn's statement. In the play's original production, the staging of Eve's first appearance suggested that Eve represents a part of Evelyn's existence that she attempts to block out. Rather than making Eve visibly wait on stage as the script suggests, Eve was made to crouch in the refrigerator that Evelyn opens early in the scene to put away the food she bought for her father. Unexpectedly confronted by Eve, »Evelyn is visibly shaken by Eve's presence.«²⁹ Eve's emergence from the refrigerator gives Evelyn's following lines ambivalent meaning:

GEORGE (*jovially*): Evelyn, will you please stop fussing.

EVELYN (*putting things in the fridge*): It's no good leaving things uncovered in there, they just rot.

EVE *laughs softly*.³⁰

The play suggests that Eve is a leftover of the past, which ›rots‹ Evelyn's sense of self as long it is not addressed. This impression was reinforced in the original production by having an adult actress, Marion Bailey, play Eve in a girl's dress of the period in which Evelyn grew up. The director, Jules Wright, in this way presented Eve neither as the abused child nor as the fully-grown middle-aged abuse survivor, but made Eve represent Evelyn's abused childhood self as an adult's (re)projection. Although the script does not specify Eve's age and Eve occasionally behaves more maturely than Evelyn herself does, Wright's decision to give Eve a child-



Fig. 1: *Double consciousness: Dinah Stabb and Marion Bailey as Evelyn and Eve in Beside Herself, by Sarah Daniels for the Women's Playhouse Trust, directed by Jules Wright, 1990. The author would like to thank Jules Wright for her generous permission to reprint the picture.*

like quality follows suggestions later in the play that present Eve as a disapproving observer once split off from the abused child. Evelyn recollects that during the abuses in the back of her father's car, »I wished myself away. It was as though I was standing outside the car looking in, looking down on another me that I despised.«³¹ *Beside Herself* here draws on the clinical picture of psychic dissociation, although the double configuration does not strictly adhere to the typical symptoms.³²

31 Daniels 1994, p. 184.

32 Recent psychological and psychiatric research has shown that a number of disorders that are connected to childhood trauma share a high prevalence of dissociation (van der Kolk, Bessel A./Alexander C. McFarlane: *Conclusions and Future Directions*. In: Bessel A. van der Kolk et al. (eds.): *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*. New York, London 1996, pp. 559-75; here p. 570). The most severe case of dissociation is multiple personality disorder, now renamed dissociative identity disorder, a syndrome that was intensely discussed in the 1990s in medical, popular, and cultural theorist discourses. The theatrical device of doubling in *Beside Herself* evokes these classi-

28 *Beside Herself* shares this stylistic decision with later plays of Trauma Drama, such as Jessica Townsend's *Terms of Abuse* and Helen Cooper's *Three Women and a Piano Tuner*.

29 Daniels, Sarah: *Beside Herself*. In: Sarah Daniels: *Plays Two*. London 1994 [1990], pp. 95-188; here p. 105.

30 Daniels 1994, p. 107.

Although the opening scene does not yet explicitly reveal that Eve is connected to the issue of incestuous abuse, her presence gives the domestic scene in Evelyn's former home a decisively *un-heimliche* atmosphere, which signals the darker side of the father-daughter-relationship. From the play's beginning, the presence of Eve thus poses a riddle for audiences. Eve serves as a symptom, which invites audiences to speculate about its cause. It is only in the ninth of twelve scenes that Evelyn and Eve confess their trauma and hence resolve the suspense-creating hermeneutic task of the audience – only to replace it with the renewed suspense that stems from Evelyn's decision to confront her father George with her memories.

Up to this peripeteia, Evelyn attempts to deny and conceal her traumatisation by presenting herself as a ›normal woman‹, which requires concealing ›non-feminine‹ feelings that stem from the trauma, such as rage. She is obsessed with the wish to be accepted as a ›normal woman‹ and takes pains to fulfil the norm of the white heterosexual middle-class housewife. For example, she supports her father without ever addressing the abuses, she neglects her husband's love affair and, for the sake of his political career, does charitable work in a hostel for the mentally ill despite her reluctance to confront psychic pain. However, through the device of the double, *Beside Herself* displays those aspects which Evelyn systematically excludes from her complacent behaviour. As Eve renders intelligible the concealed underside of Evelyn's normative performances of femininity, it broadens the play's possibilities for staging the workings of (gender) performativity. *Beside Herself* thus manages to visualise how un-performed psychic aspects fuel gender performativity, which is, according to Butler, characterised by an interaction of performing and repressing: »[W]hat is performed works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, un-performable.«³³ Therefore, Butler emphasises, »the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake«;³⁴ performativity encompasses more than those aspects that become intelligible.

fications, but does not fully conform to their clinical pictures. Thus, the doubles do not alternate as is characteristic of multiple personality disorder but are present simultaneously and even interact. Moreover, the play does not offer several ›alters‹ which fulfil specific roles and represent particular sides of the host's personality but makes Eve represent both a detached, sneering supervisor and the abused child.

33 Butler 1993, p. 234.

34 Ibid.

Evelyn's dissociation metaphorically highlights how the system of gender performativity not only governs what is to be performed but also what ought to remain barred from performance. By means of the double, the play counterpoints the conformist behaviour of Evelyn on the level of external reality with the transgressive conduct of Eve on the level of internal reality. For example, Evelyn performs according to the ideal of the caring and obedient daughter, while Eve acts out both her fear and her hatred of her abusive father:

GEORGE *stands suddenly, accidentally knocking his cup and saucer on the floor. They smash. The noise makes Evelyn and Eve jump in fright.*

EVE covers her face and drops to the floor.

GEORGE (*pathetically*): Damn! Damn!

EVELYN (*shakily*): It's all right. It was only an accident. No real damage done.

GEORGE (*sits down again, miserably*): Oh God, I can't bear getting old.

EVE: Then drop dead.

EVELYN (*shocked, responds to Eve*): I'm sorry, I didn't mean that.

GEORGE: What?

EVELYN: To make you angry.³⁵

EVE: I am smashing my fist [...]. I am smashing all the things in my father's house. Everything is splintering around me [...]. I am crashing my way through the brickwork and plaster, the rendering and the mortar until nothing, nothing is left of my father's house but rubble and dust. And it goes on and on and it will never stop.³⁶

Initially, Evelyn tries to ignore her alter ego's fear, anger, and aggression and constantly transforms it into polite and self-denying behaviour as in the above-quoted example. The device of the double thus establishes a double consciousness for Evelyn but also for audiences. The play not only continually contrasts Evelyn's and Eve's gender performances, but also makes Eve repeatedly comment on Evelyn's behaviour and criticise it. For example, she prevents Evelyn from establishing any self-confidence as being someone who feels normal, who is »good«, »okay«, and »all right« and instead characterises her as »stupid«, »dirty«, and »worthless«.³⁷

35 Daniels 1994, pp. 95-188; here pp. 108-109.

36 Daniels 1994, p. 172.

37 Daniels 1994, p. 115.

The play's linkage of traumatisation and gender performativity has, in a similar form, been suggested in trauma theory. Evelyn's behavioural pattern corresponds to the psychograph of abuse victims as outlined by Herman:

[A]dult survivors who have escaped from the abusive situation continue to view themselves with contempt and to take upon themselves the shame and guilt of their abusers [...]. In the effort to placate her abusers, the child victim often becomes a superb performer [...]. She may become an emphatic caretaker for her parents, an efficient housekeeper, an academic achiever, a model of social conformity [...]. None of her achievements in the world redound to her credit, however, for she usually perceives her performing self as inauthentic and false.³⁸

Taking into account Butler's notion of gender as »a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief«,³⁹ the abuse victim differs from her environment, as she cannot participate in the willing suspension of disbelief and has a constant critical distance to her »superbly conformist performances« of gender. Through the interaction between the protagonist and her double, *Beside Herself* stages trauma as a self-conscious performative malady, as the suffering that derives from the inability to »perform gender in the mode of belief«. Towards the end of the play, after Evelyn has begun to articulate the abuses, the protagonist herself in retrospect expresses her disbelief in her own earlier performance: »I [...] was doing what was expected of me, a hollow performance, almost convincing.«⁴⁰

The double furthers Evelyn's feeling of inauthenticity by constantly mimicking her attempts to fulfil the (gender) expectations of her environment. Wright's production reinforced Eve's continuous verbal undermining of Evelyn's attempts at normality through body language. Whenever Evelyn interacted with other characters, Eve mirrored her gestures in a cynical, mocking way. Under Wright's direction, Eve thus became »a

cruel parody« of Evelyn.⁴¹ By mimicking Evelyn, Eve distorts all attempts of Evelyn to perceive her own (gender) conduct as natural or authentic. This technique of copying (which paradoxically challenges the status of the »original«) creates an effect that Butler calls »gender parody«. With the example of female impersonators, Butler argues that gender parody reveals the imitative structure of gender in general:

The notion of gender parody [...] does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of an original; [...] so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect – that is, in its effect – postures as an imitation.⁴²

As Eve mirrors Evelyn's gestures in a sneering way, she parodies Evelyn's normative conduct and reveals it to be a performatively constituted fabrication. Thus, Eve once again serves as a Brechtian alienation effect for both Evelyn and audiences, as the double undermines any belief in the »naturalness« of Evelyn's gender performance.

In *Beside Herself*, Evelyn's traumatisation elucidates the unconscious and compulsory repetition processes and forms of acting out that are characteristic of gender performativity. Emphasising the anxiety and pain involved in the repetition compulsions that constitute performativity, the play stages trauma as a performative *malady*, even though it does not assume that the characters could be cured from this state.

Victoria Hardie: *Sleeping Nightie*

By contrast, plays such as *Sleeping Nightie* show that traumatic repetition compulsions not only actualise the traumatisation and thus reinforce the malady, but can also bring about a gradual *mastery* of the traumatisation. For the metaphorically invoked field of gender performativity, this potential working through by means of the very mechanism of reproduction can be linked with Butler's concept of *resignification*. Butler argues that the perpetual reproductions which continually re-establish gender norms allow for the resignification of these norms through repetitions which slightly diverge from the ideal and can thus effectively, over time, change these performatively maintained norms. *Sleeping Nightie* demon-

41 Wright, Jules: *Conversation with Christina Wald*. London, 23/03/2005.

42 Butler 1999, pp. 175-176.

38 Herman 1992, p. 105.

39 Butler, Judith: *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*. In: Sue-Ellen Case (ed.): *Performing Feminisms. Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Baltimore, London 1988, pp. 270-282; here p. 271; Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London, New York 1999 [1990], p. 179.

40 Daniels 1994, pp. 95-188; here p. 184.

strates this ambivalence of repetition between the acting out (the reinforcement of trauma/gender norms) and the working through (the creative modification of trauma/gender norms).

The play portrays an artist in her thirties, Molly, who, equipped with a Super-8 camera, approaches men in the street, invites them to physically and sexually abuse her, and films their reactions, which range from amusement to shock, from escape to aggression. None of the men, however, reacts with sexual arousal or with the sexualised violence demanded. Molly edits these filmed encounters and replays them in a video installation. *Sleeping Nightie* encourages audiences to speculate on whether the agenda of Molly's video project is connected to a repressed but not fully forgotten event in Molly's biography. While Molly denies any autobiographical motivation for her artistic project, her sister Laura, who witnessed Molly's sexual abuses as a small girl, immediately suggests a causal relationship between Molly's past trauma and her present project: »You know perfectly well why you are doing this and I know. [...] Face up to where the inspiration came from. You wouldn't have the guts.«⁴³ It is only towards the end of the play, after the vernissage of the installation, that these speculations are confirmed, when Molly acknowledges the project's relation to her childhood trauma. Prior to this scene, Molly's invitations to abuse are presented as a form of traumatic repetition compulsion, through which she attempts to re-enact her childhood experience. This attempt vacillates between a deliberate staging and moments in which Molly appears to be seized by the re-enactment, between the attempt at mastering the traumatising and the reliving of pain.

Molly's choice of material for her video project reflects the paradox of trauma, in which the greatest exposure to an event is also a numbing to it,⁴⁴ because the event is so overpowering that it is not mentally registered by the subject, and thus escapes his or her ability to recall the event in narrative memory. The event only belatedly makes itself felt to the traumatised subject, when it returns in the distorted, uncanny forms described above. When Molly explains her use of video film for her artistic project, she describes a similar paradox: »The image hardly exists at all. It has a ghostliness. Mine's the sort of art that you can see through. No.

43 Hardie, Victoria: *Sleeping Nightie*. In: *First Run 2: New Plays by New Writers*. Selected and introduced by Kate Harwood. London 1990, pp. 97-161; here p. 103.

44 See Caruth, Cathy: *Trauma and Experience*. Intro. In: Cathy Caruth (ed.): *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, London 1995, pp. 3-12; here p. 8.

Don't quote me on that. Sorry. Crass. [...] Video is immediate. Raw.«⁴⁵ Whereas the traumatic repetition compulsion inherent in Molly's artistic project involves the »rawness« of reliving the painful aspects of the original event, this reliving only ever takes place in an uncanny, ghostly form, as Molly's accosting the men on the street is a displaced and transformed version of the abuses by her godfather. Thus, *Sleeping Nightie's* intermedial use of video resorts to a medium that is characterised by a paradox similar to the traumatic event on which the play's action centres. Compared to Molly's engagement with painting and sculpture earlier in her career, video allows for greater immediacy and rawness insofar as Molly's filming can document the reactions of the accosted men in real-time. However, the filmed records of these encounters do not have the same sense of material substantiality; compared to paintings, the video images »hardly exist [...] at all.«⁴⁶

In addition to the ambivalent quality of the video image, between ghostliness and immediacy, the way in which the play includes the video film sequences in its structure reflects Molly's traumatised perception. Molly replays her accosting of the men at several points throughout the play. The filmed passages break into and interact with the action onstage and hence create two concurrent levels of action which, for audiences, metaphorically stand for the intrusion of Molly's traumatic past into her perception of the present. Consequently, no more extracts from her video project are shown after Molly has verbalised her abuse memories and thus has, as the play suggests, begun to integrate them in her understanding of the present. *Sleeping Nightie's* use of intermediality therefore, both by its choice of video material and the way it integrates the filmed passages into the play's structure, reflects the traumatic mode of Molly's perception.

However, the repetition compulsion involved in the video project has a second function. Not only does it induce a painful *re-experiencing* beyond Molly's conscious control, it also is an attempt to turn the frightening childhood experience into controlled action. The repetition compulsion as staged in Molly's project thus also sets about working through traumatising, both on a personal and a social level. Since Molly locates the cause for sexual child abuse in an overall male violent behaviour that is condoned and even encouraged in popular media, she does not treat sexual child abuse merely as her personal story but transforms it into a political issue. Arguing that (sexual) violence is part of the notion of a

45 Hardie 1990, p. 101.

46 Ibid.

»real man«,⁴⁷ Molly aims to revise »the heart of masculinity«.⁴⁸ Through her artwork, she means to create men who are »not needing to be violent«. Molly trusts in the power of repetition to achieve this ambitious aspiration:⁴⁹

Each man is supposed to come to the exhibition and buy himself. A view of himself ... not needing to be violent. So that ... each time he assumes he has the right to be out of control ... he has this to remind himself ... and others who will flock to the show ... he has the tape to show the absurdity ... how it looks even to think about those terrible madnasses and that he needn't be a real man.⁵⁰

Her artistic project thus connects the traumatic repetition compulsion to the repetition compulsion inherent in the performative construction of gender norms. Given that gender norms are, according to Butler, based on ritualised and compulsory repetitions, Molly's attempt at resignification, at creating »new« men, utilises the repetition compulsion of trauma to modify the repetitions by which gender norms are maintained. By acting out and working through her trauma of sexualised violence, Molly at the same time acts out the gender norms (men as perpetrators and women as victims) and attempts a working through, that is, a resignification of these stereotypes.

Employing the repetition compulsion inherent in traumatising to achieve a working through of gender, Molly's artistic project puts forward a concoction that Butler has proposed in a different context. In *Bodies that Matter*, she suggests linking the traumatic repetition compulsion to the repetition compulsion of gender and emphasises the subversive potential of both:

Where one might understand violation as a trauma which can only induce a destructive repetition compulsion [...], it seems equally possible to acknowledge the force of repetition as the very condition of an affirmative response to violation. The compulsion to repeat an injury is not necessarily the compulsion to repeat the injury in the same way or to stay fully within the traumatic orbit of that injury.⁵¹

47 Hardie 1990, p. 116.

48 Hardie 1990, p. 112.

49 Hardie 1990, p. 116.

50 Ibid.

51 Butler 1993, pp. 123-124.

Although Butler does not explicate the reference, she here seems to allude to the kind of repetition which enables partial mastery of trauma. Later in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler more explicitly proposes such a Freudian *Bemächtigung* of the trauma. Referring to queer street actions such as die-ins and kiss-ins, she argues that theatre can become a forum to collectively enact traumata in order to weaken their damaging impact: »[T]heatrical rage reiterates those injuries precisely through an »acting out«, one that does not merely repeat or recite those injuries«.⁵² Calling for a form of acting out that exceeds the actualisation of pain, Butler appears to invoke the working through of trauma, which can offer ways of coming to terms with the trauma.

Given the elusive transition from acting out to working through, such a project, promising as it is, is continuously at risk of repeating and renewing injuries rather than healing them. *Sleeping Nightie* highlights that a feminist project based on working through is unpredictable and fragile, since it will always border on acting out. Molly assumes that she can control the reception of her artistic project, that the accosted men will come to the exhibition, buy a video of themselves, and replay the video sequence of themselves (literally or in their minds) until they have assimilated to Molly's construction of themselves as non-violent men. This assumption indicates that her project is informed by an aspiration for control that borders on megalomania. However, Molly's attempt at mastering male sexualised violence fails, both on an artistic level, because the vernissage of her installation neither attracts the filmed men nor raises the public attention she hoped for, and on a personal level, since her partner physically and sexually abuses her. Hence, although Molly's project is presented as a form of empowerment and *Bemächtigung*, both in terms of traumatising and in terms of gender repression, *Sleeping Nightie* also highlights the backlashes inherent in any project of working through trauma or resignifying gender.

Suggesting ways in which trauma theory and gender theory can illuminate each other, my investigation of Trauma Drama has argued that the manifestations of traumatic memory in the plays can be interpreted as complex yet concrete tropes for the workings of gender performativity. As the example of *Beside Herself* illustrates, the psychoanalytic/psychiatric notion of traumatic dissociation is adapted as a theatrical device of doubling the traumatised protagonist. Through the double figure, the play not only makes palpable Evelyn's traumatising, but also offers an un-

52 Butler 1993, p. 233.

usual perspective on gender performativity, since it manages to render intelligible the exclusions that shape gender performances. By transferring these exclusions to the double figure who not only contrasts Evelyn's performance but also mocks it, the play distorts, for both the protagonist and audiences, the performance of gender in the mode of beliefs. *Beside Herself* thus stages trauma as a self-conscious performative malady. While the relationship of Evelyn's traumatising to her gender performativity on the one hand is metaphoric, since it allows understanding the structures of one semantic field, gender performativity, through those of a different semantic field, traumatising, the fields are also causally linked in the play: Evelyn clings to her normative gender performances – and exaggerates them – as she feels the need to make up for her 'non-normality', her traumatising.

In *Sleeping Nightie*, Molly's 'art of trauma' on the one hand highlights the degree to which Molly's childhood traumatising informs her stereotypical perception of men as (potential) perpetrators and of women as (potential) victims of sexualised violence. It thus brings out the causal connection between Molly's perception of gender norms and her childhood traumatising. On the other hand, the play also shows how by working through, by repeating with a difference, Molly can, at least partially, master her traumatising. This potential working through of trauma by the very mechanism of its reproduction can be linked, I have argued, with Butler's notion of resignification. Being caught in circles of repetition compulsion, Molly is able to resignify gender norms by modifying the incessant repetitions of gender performativity. *Sleeping Nightie* thus suggests a way in which the complementary modes of traumatic repetition compulsion – acting out and working through – can intersect with the actualisation and resignification of gender norms. Both plays thus use traumatising as a trope which helps to make visible and elucidate the mechanisms of gender performativity. Moreover, *Beside Herself* and *Sleeping Nightie* offer productive suggestions for bringing together trauma and gender theory, a project which is still in its beginnings.