# Demystifying Cruelty: Artaudian Intention in Art and Life

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**--- ABSTRACT ---**

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This thesis paper revisits the early writings of theatre practitioner Antonin Artaud [1896-1948] while addressing two important influences in his vision for a theatre of cruelty: a) avant-garde theatrical theory during his life-time, and; b) typical experiences of schizophrenia, from which the artist suffered since adolescence. Understanding these factors, as they relate to his proposal for a mystical theatre experience, serves to clarify what was original among Artaud's limit-exceeding intentions. This paper also briefly reviews select artists' interpretations of Artaud's theatrical prescriptions, where attempts have been made to translate theory into practice, arriving at both innovations and outcomes Artaud had not foreseen. While affirming his desire to mirror a collapse of all boundaries between art and life, as he had lived it, the artist's polemic presents practical challenges that merit precaution if aspiring to emulate attributes of a theatre of cruelty. Lastly, as a point of departure for further discussion, I touch upon popular manifestations of cruel immersions and spectacles that contextualize the twenty-first century cultural conditions within which interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary artists now experiment. Where new technologies increasingly enable the magical effects Artaud imagined, I question whether cruelty is necessary, or even fruitfully disruptive, in today's cultural milieu.

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# Demystifying Cruelty: Artaudian Intention in Art and Life

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As a young performing artist I was, as are many emerging artists today, taken with Antonin Artaud's prescriptions for a theatre of cruelty, presented to us in his book *Le Théâtre et son Double* (The Theatre and its Double) (1938/1958). Like so many artists around the world since, I wasn't concerned with accuracy of interpretation, nor did I feel obliged by the theoretical context within which the material was written. As artists we often glean inspiration and launch our aspirations from unspecified sources merely as a springboard from which experimentation and exploration is sprung. This is in keeping with the spirit in which the artist himself wrote and created work. The French actor, whose career spanned theatre and film, to poetry and drawing, is nonetheless among the most referenced writers across disciplines today. Embarking on a scholarly investigation of this book, however, I agree with Susan Sontag, who stated that to evoke Artaud's name is far easier than to understand what he has produced. His writings on art are often contradictory, and meanings are multiplied or obscured, providing for a plethora of partial interpretations. Sontag suggests that Artaud's infamy exemplifies occasions where an author becomes a part of a canon precisely because their body of work remains unread (Sontag lix). Accordingly, my research has extended beyond Artaud's writings on the theatre in order to understand his fullest intentions. By further contextualizing *The Theatre and its Double*, my investigation is intended to satisfy an accurate understanding of his prescriptions, essentially demystifying his intentions for the stage.

In 1925, Artaud stated "where others offer up their works I pretend to nothing more than showing my mind," adding that "I can't conceive of a work detached from life" (Hirschman 26). There is indeed unanimity between the artist's intimate struggles and the role that he assigns for art. The artist's dedication and, at times dire need, to make consciousness tangible is no less

evident in his journals than in his creative treatise. Taken as a whole, his writings surpass the limits of reason, as much as it escapes the discursive basis of conventional theory. Sontag's claim that his work can never truly be assimilated is a well-informed and well-supported one (lviii). The challenge itself however may explain why so many philosophers, cultural anthropologists, psychologists, and performance researchers have taken up interest in his life's work. This analytic scope of implications surrounding Artaud's seamless art-life paradigm is well beyond the parameters of my research. Instead, this paper highlights the artist's early life condition of health and the arts industry he participated in, as the two most significant contingencies in his vision for a theatre of cruelty.

While the artist did not acknowledge any fealty to strains of theory, he was highly cognisant of the artistic milieu within which worked, often staking out intellectual stances and aesthetic ground. In particular I trace the influences of the avant-garde Symbolism movement, which preceded the surrealists, during Artaud's lifetime. Theoretical discussions stirred his imagination and, at times, earned his rebuke. *The Theatre and Its Double* is highly attentive to passing trends, intrigues, and conflicts among dramatists. By presenting this background my intent to is foreground what was unique to Artaud's vision.

Lee Jamieson further specifies that the artist's work is inseparable from his life and body (10). Meanwhile, Clayton Eschleman notes that, upon review of Artaud's overall work, one sees his theatre as the "greatest example in art of the imaginative retrieval of a life that was beyond repair" (1). The relationship between the artist's works and his experience of schizophrenia is, without doubt, inextricable. By deferring to the symptomology of this diagnosis, and acknowledging its relevancy to his creative vision, we uncover a second dimension in his reference to the theatre's double (Sass 187). Many of his more ambiguous theatrical aspirations relate to his preternatural worldview and mystical explanations for an illness he was motivated to cure. My aim is to explicitly synthesize these relevancies and establish a more secular frame within which to interpret his intentions.

Many investigators arrive at a view of the artist as a mystic, a prophet, or a seer, and are only implicit in their reference to the maladies he suffered from. On the other hand, studies focussed

more specifically on Artaud's theatre of cruelty too frequently dissociate, what Edward Sheer refers to as, his "demonological dramaturgy" (8). A lasting contradiction, inherent to a close reading of *Theatre and Its Double*, is the pertinence of the artist's mysticism to discerning what of his imaginings can be applied. This assists us in delineating theory from practice, the impossible from the plausible, and the aspirations from inspirations. Artaud never did produce a theatre of cruelty and there is little in review of his practice to support his concept. In terms of a legacy, where the performing arts are concerned, Artaud's significant influence is primarily in the realm of polemics. For these reasons I have attempted to retain the re-doubling character of his writing while at the same time providing critical feedback from artists who have attempted to transpose his ideas to the stage.

A final discussion section of this paper will point to popular manifestations of the artist's edicts in contemporary light. Specifically, and in keeping with a view that his vision is emblematic of our times, I will remark upon trends in our broader cultural milieu that meet with Artaud's call for immersion in cruel spectacle. As a performing artist working with new technologies, I can foresee all the more potential for creating theatres of cruelty, but question the ramifications of doing so. Whether or not demystifying Artaud's proposal will be necessary in the future, as cultural producers, should we expect cruelty to induce experiential opportunities for transformative change?

## Background:

Antoine Marie Joseph Artaud [1896-1948] was born on September 4 in Marseilles, France. His parents were cousins, inheritors of a wealthy Provençal family ship-fitting business, passed along to male successors for hundred and fifty years (Knapp 2). He was referred to as Antonin, in order to distinguish him from his father, who had expected him to take up the family business (Knapp 4). His parents had nine children of which only three survived. He suffered a series of illnesses throughout early childhood, and is said to have had nervous and irritable fits as a youth, with his parents frequently intervening to administer special treatments (Eschleman 1, Knapp 3). He nonetheless produced a literary magazine so as to publish his own poems (Knapp

4). Generally considered an astute student, his concentration was philosophy, until a nervous breakdown deterred him from attaining his baccalaureate (Knapp 5). Raging outbursts, over-sensitivity, severe bouts of exhaustion, and persistently acute headaches disrupted his relationships (Knapp 5, 4). Later, Artaud would trace his battle with schizophrenic symptoms back to about 1915, along with experiences of mystical visions, "complicated by corresponding psychic troubles" (qtd. in Eschleman 2). His mother arranged various 'rest-cures', in several locations throughout Europe, which continued from youth into adulthood (Eschleman 1). It was during these years that Artaud was first prescribed opium, which he would alternate with heroin and laudanum, cultivating a life-long addiction.

Drafted to the 3$^{rd}$ Infantry regiment at Digne in 1916, he served nine months before being discharged for mental instability (Eschleman 2). His health further deteriorated until he required a full time nurse (Knapp 5). At this time his mother introduced him to Dr. Dardel at a Swiss clinic near Neuchatel (Eschleman 2). Over the coming two years Dr. Dardel encouraged Artaud to write and draw and fostered his interest in the creative arts (Eschleman 3). In 1920, he arranged for Artaud to stay in Paris under supervision with Dr. and Madame Toulouse. The doctor studied creative genius and the two were devout patrons of the arts. They too stimulated Artaud's desire to write, providing him assignments and projects, with the doctor himself acting as his secretary (Knapp 6). It was with this support that he produced translations, short stories, and poetry, while drawing posters, sets, and costumes for the theatre. During his time with the couple he also decided that he would act. His first ambition of this kind was in film but, like many artists at the time, he would move between the stage and the screen. This launched the young artist into a highly productive career, spanning 1920 to 1936, which would come to be referred to as his 'early period' of works.

Artaud in the meanwhile still harboured ambitions as a poet. Many of his poems and letters described the way his illness prevented him from concentrating (Knapp 10). He complained of suffering from feelings of emptiness, swinging from a total absence of feelings to a sense of chaos, and expressed terror over an inner void. Bettina L. Knapp summarizes that in these early years he had faced down the rabbit-hole dangers of narcissism, the dissolution of his ego, a loss of identity, and a "lapse into insanity" (13). Despite all this, and in response to such

experiences, he self-published three booklets between 1923-25, comprised of fragments of prose and poetry, reactions to artwork, and reworked letters (Eschleman 4). Having not succeeded as a poet, and struggling against structures of the written word, he soon began denouncing all formal literature (Eschleman 5).



During his lifetime the artist was best known as a film actor. His uncle, Louis Nalpas of *Nalpas Productions*, introduced him to some of the most acclaimed filmmakers of his day (Knapp 68). Artaud grew to openly resent the film industry, but his father had died in 1924, necessitating his financial independence, and the need to take commercial film roles through to 1935 (Eschleman 4). In all he acted in more than twenty films and wrote fifteen screen scenarios (Eschleman 4, 8).

Fig. 1. Antonin Artaud in 1926; "Antonin Artaud"; *Wikipedia.com*, 19 April 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonin_Artaud#/

It was Artaud's ambitions in the world of theatre that he would most be remembered for. As the artist himself saw it: "It is impossible to compare a cinematic image which, however poetic, is confined to the skin, with an image from the theatre which obeys all the demands of life" (qtd. in Vanoye 180). There are reports that he was not considered a successful stage actor, lacking in fluid physical coordination, he had trouble adapting to differing character traits, and was understandably unable to live up to the routines of production (Knapp 50,7). Impressively, he determinedly went on to perform in twenty-two plays, published aesthetic arguments written for speaking engagements and translated existing works (Eshleman 8). This early period, from which I will draw upon in this paper, culminated in publication of his vision for a theatre of cruelty. The latter represents a significant and lasting contribution to the liberal arts that has spanned geography, language, disciplines, and generations. In order to further understand the creative milieu within which his ideas for this theatrical concept emerged, it is helpful to review the major movements at the time, most of which date back to the nineteenth century.

## The Theatrical Landscape:

Prior to the Great War (1914-1918) there were deep, interdependent, and dialectical relationships between scientific scholarship, philosophy, and the arts throughout the industrialized world. Cross-cultural debates, new adaptations of foreign theory, the publication of letters and manifestos, as well as utopian statements of intent set the course of challenges in practice for French theatre artists. More specifically I follow major discussions surrounding Symbolism, from which surrealism in theatre emerged, while primarily referencing Marvin Carlson's book, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (1993).

Artaud's creative endeavours were closely aligned with French avant-garde experimentation in art, which roughly spanned the years between 1880-1935, starting with the naturalist rebellion (Zarrilli et al 331). Émile Zola [1840-1902], who had led Naturalism in attacking what he saw as a moralizing and legislating Idealism, was heralded among those seeking depiction of the truth upon the stage (Carlson 274). Whereas the idealists expected to expose hidden universal truths and reflect eternal revelations, the naturalists looked to science and to the concretely physiological attributes of life (Carlson 248). For some artists these interests would be conjoined with the concern for social change espoused by Karl Marx [1818-1883] and Friedrich Engels [1820-1895] to produce more realistic works encouraging a historical consciousness in relation to present day struggles.

Romantics, on the other hand, emphasized the irrational and paradoxical attributes of life. Rather than communal figures pitted against fate, poetic heroes were pressed by circumstances that would, by espousing contemplation and reflexion, advance spiritual insight (Carlson 249). In France, as elsewhere, a new generation of theorists were looking back at practitioners such as Richard Wagner [1813-1883], who pushed these aims to the limit (Carlson 253). In 1848, he pointed to the function of Greek drama as a unified artform that served the population both politically and spiritually. His intent was to rest this artform back from capitalism's fragmented allocations, reject indulgent modern cultural influences, and express "the deepest and noblest expression of the people's consciousness" (qtd. in Carlson 254). This popular opera was

conceived as a conservative revolutionary act. Here drama had become "the dead form of literature" whereas the *Volk*, or the people, should be given the opportunity to rediscover the universal meaningfulness of a 'total artwork' (qtd. in Carlson 255). This artform would therefore revive the value of myth, as opposed to 'godless science', and excise poetry from its relationship to literature, while avoiding "shallow realism" (qtd. in Carlson 255). An artist that is both poet and musician could reunify the arts for this purpose and, in turn, satisfy the people with expression of their 'total being' (Carlson 255). Wagner's theory included an attitude toward gesture as visual communication, which expressed all that language and melody cannot, ensuring none merely imitate the other (Puchner 43).

Friedrich Nietzsche [1844-1900], whose cultural critiques impressed Artaud as a youth, provided among the most influential interpretations of theatrical tragedy in 1872, rising into prominence into the twentieth century. He saw a dualism, in romantic context, as oppositional forces upon which he built a metaphysical system. He described an Apollonian world of dreams and illusion in relation to the process of personal individuation that was contrary to a Dionysian loss of self in an intoxicating primordial unity of creation and destruction (Carlson 261). The modern was therein countered by the ancient while promoting the use of myth. He provided the example of Greek tragedy as having moved through terrible histories and cruel nature to rescue life through art (Carlson 262). For him the playing of great poetic allusion against ecstatic primitivism was intended as complimentary, through iteration it would serve to highlight Dionysian wisdom, and ultimately promote the balanced union of these two modes. He saw the loss of the Dionysian having resulted in moralizing and rationalistic artwork that had ignored vital interest in the mysteries. He also demanded a union between that which is signified and its referent, synthesizing a new symbolic order of representation, just as music had found expression without words (Baker 12). The philosopher had praised Wagner's operas as exemplary of the new romantic tragic artform (Carlson 263). Artists throughout Russia and Europe were at the time exploring Asian, Middle Eastern, and African traditions, cultivating broader interest in the 'primitive'. In 1838, Alfred de Musset [1810-1857] determined that the romantic vision, along with aims to revitalize ancient spirituality, was so influential it must be seen as a French tradition (Carlson 270). Though the official movement was short-lived its impact would last into the twentieth century.

The naturalist movement influenced other artists to add emphasis on stagecraft, creating a realistic milieu for their actors, while borrowing from the romantics an expectation of uniqueness for each work (Carlson 277). In Paris, André Antoine [1858-1943] opened *Théâtre-Libre* (1887), and published statements a few years later in support of Zola's ideas. He criticized traditional acting and stated that his actors, taking on natural gestures, would explore vocal effects. Famously, his dramatist, Jean Jullien [1854-1919], would explain that real properties and surprising action would comprise a play that "is a slice of life placed on the stage with art" (qtd. in Carlson 279). Jullien imagined pantomimed scenes instead of a constant use of language. He had even considered that the essence of drama may stray from using words altogether (Carlson 280). August Strindberg [1849-1912] was at first influenced by the work presented at *Théâtre-Libre*. He was attentive to the psychological, physiological, social, and environmental forces driving his characters, believing that "people's minds work irregularly" (qtd. in Carlson 281).

Some naturalists saw Zolaesque work as unscientific, pessimistic, grotesque and base (Carlson 285). Ugly depictions of 'the truth', depictions of vulgar and obscene human 'animalism', became the topic of much debate. For those with more mystic leanings, romantic inclinations and Idealism would at this juncture coalesce, and their criticisms featured prominently in the influential magazine *Revue wagnérienne*. Instead of seeing art as an expression of society these critics and practitioners aimed to unveil a deeper spiritual reality (Carlson 286). For many dramatists, the total artwork was seen as promising to reflect this deeper reality, creating a more profoundly affective artwork. Teodor de Wyzewa [1867-1917] echoed Wagner in stating that the "soul first receives Sensations, which it organizes into Notions, which mixed with other and more powerful Sensations give way to Emotions" and this, as he saw it, were united elements then that would "reflect the total life of the soul" (qtd. in Carlson 287).

Viennese critic Hermann Bahr [1863-1934] had already announced the failure of Naturalism in 1891, promoting a new symbolic style that he felt should rely more on psychology, as well as a subjective emotional life, with the aims of revealing secret inner workings (Carlson 266). Closely tied with Expressionism a broader symbolist movement spread across Europe and Russia. In France the *Revue wagnérienne* helped to rally the symbolist cause. In 1885 Stéphane Mallarmé [1842-1898] wrote a prose-poem meditation on Wagner's work admiring the sacred

way the stage was spiritualized and inert things enlivened. He maintained however that poetry, instead of music, should remain the unifying art (Carlson 287). He promoted the use of symbols, as opposed to scenery, reasoning that the imagination could serve as a rich source of spiritual material. Wyzewa had already proposed, as did Mallarmé, that reading a drama was more furtive than having it played by actors. Though somewhat more anti-theatrical, with these idealist anti-realist sentiments, symbolists otherwise roundly argued for emphasis upon poetry that could externalize the inner movements of the soul as Wagner intended.

In Paris, Aurelian Lugné-Poe [1869-1940], with the help of Camille Mauclair [1872-1945], opened *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* in 1893, exploring symbolist drama. Mauclair described the creation of conceptual entities that would be superhuman characters. He promoted emotive and sensual décor as well as simple and timeless settings (Carlson 290). Actors were important only in so far as they were symbolic and would "enunciate eternal ideas" through poetry (qtd. Carlson 290). In practice their theatre works were lively, highly artistic, evocative and dreamlike, animating all the attributes of theatrical spectacle (Carlson 291). Actors' characters were the only attribute of production tied to realism but Lugné-Poe expressed a desire to also transform this aspect of their work. He wanted to see "shadow figures, perhaps larger than life marionettes, the English pantomime, the clown pantomime, macabre or funny" (qtd. in Carlson 291). The financing for his proposed "fairy-tale spectacles" never materialized but he and Alfred Jarry [1873-1907] turned to contemplating the bare stage with hopes this might better condition a work to represent inner meaning (qtd. in Carlson 291). Further, Jarry insisted the actors should be abstract in concept, taking up the gestures of marionettes, playing with mask and vocal effects, in order to be most universally evocative (Carlson 292). Jarry's presentation of *Ubu roi*, at *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* in 1896, included a brief *discours* describing his masked performers as life-sized marionettes and, instead of being bare, a stage host to imagery and props reflecting the symbolist's anti-logical stance. Lugné-Poe's theatre became known for working with experimental artists and young actors, welcoming Artaud to his first stage role, in 1921 (Knapp 7).

Another influential theorist figure of the symbolist movement, throughout the twentieth century, was Adolphe Appia [1862-1928]. He also advanced the Wagnerian ideal of a poet-

musician director composing the entire of a production but warned against a formalist approach. Each piece instead must be integrally built to achieve a uniquely organic total artwork. Visual aspects included the use of light, rather than scenery, in order to further animate an abstracted actor (Carlson 294). He discarded conventions of production in order to ensure the actor and settings conformed to the overall symbolic meaning. The actors therein became an instrument of expression, instead of a psychological character, discarding their own emotional and spiritual interpretations. No longer original artists themselves, but more like marionettes, actors would nonetheless remain central to the ensemble production. Their movements, and as bearers of one-word texts, should be conditioned by the staging environment. The latter could include any part of the theatrical space, above or behind the proscenium arch, including the walls and the floor. His unconventional proposals, and particularly a book that included sketches that was published in 1899, were considered revolutionary among designers in Europe and the United States (Carlson 294).

A leading dramatist of the movement, Maurice Maeterlinck [1862-1949], also saw naturalism's play with chance and realism's tedium as stifling the potential for greater expression (Carlson 295). Unlike Appia, however, he wasn't convinced there was a way to resolve the tension between a poetic spiritual vision, on the one hand, and the physical fact of actors, on the other. Therefore he too suggested masks and marionettes, even wax figures or playing shadows, and ultimately stated that only action was an essential exigency of theatre (Carlson 297). He would later adjust his view, acknowledging psychology and morality as influencing internal actions, finding the abstract so facile for poetry was too difficult to achieve dramatically (Carlson 296).

In as early as 1902, Strindberg exemplified a radical shift away from naturalist and realist interests surrounding Sigmund Freud [1856-1939] and Carl G. Jung's [1875-1961] descriptions of an unconscious. His *Dream Play* was a stated attempt to portray the "logic" of a dream, eliminating conventional time and space, and presenting interweaving fragments (qtd. in Carlson 346). His characters are "split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystalize, scatter and converge" under sway of dreaming consciousness (qtd. in Carlson 347). Strindberg represented an ideal to expressionists whose new dramas defied traditional plot constructions. German artist,

Reinhard Sorge [1892-1916], exemplified the expressionist style, imagining drama as a liberation, and a true plot that "cannot be expressed, not in words, for it is silent, not in the actors gestures, for it indeed has gestures but they cannot be imitated, not in figures, for it indeed has image but it is filled by eternal relations, by impulses and a thousand souls that cannot be reproduced" (qtd. in Carlson 347). This too was absorbed into the symbolist movement in Russia, Europe, and was influential theory in the United States.

It had become common for artists to pose the problem of elite-only attractions while contemplating the possibilities of popular forums. Georg Fuchs [1868-1932], the director of the *Munich Art Theatre*, wasn't alone in suggesting literalism was at fault. In his 1904 and 1909 publications, he stated that a divorce from literature in general might remedy this, while also reinstating the actor to a centrally important position (Carlson 319). Some, like Antoine in France, mounted period pieces in public spaces that both suited the work and reached a broader public. Others, like Russian artist Vsevolod Meyerhold [1874-1940], looked to the music halls and circus for inspiration. Meanwhile, like many symbolists at this time, he was compelled to defend theatricality. In a 1913 text, he rebukes criticisms surrounding stylization, puppet and mask, mime, circus arts, the grotesque, improvisation and even farce, all as a part of the appropriate prioritizing of form over content (Carlson 323). Drama could in these ways, it was thought, portray the "vast unfathomable depths" hidden beneath visible reality (qtd. in Carlson 323).

In Berlin, before turning to Marxist theory, Hungarian Georg Lukacs [1885-1971], in a 1911 critical publication, described the relevance of modern alienation. In this environment theatre had been reduced to mindless entertainment, or didactic bourgeois lesson plans, and the loss of a metaphysical centre represented theatre's greatest challenge (Carlson 330). He was concerned that subjectivity, isolation, fragmented and impressionistic themes lack in ethical grounding. Meanwhile individualistic rationalism promoted ideological relativity that had reduced tragedy to the banal and grotesque. While he expressed distain for naturalism, he did not see symbolist trends as providing the answer, for him it was life itself that must be cured in order for theatre to be revived (Carlson 331). André Gide [1869-1951], in France, also complained that society was ill and both life and art suffer (Carlson 332). Perhaps through new innovations, and

new models of heroism, theatre might save them both. Russian artist Andrey Bely [1880-1934], as it was with many symbolists, found that the re-creation of an ancient spiritual sense of community, along with the goal of transcendence, was not achievable in the conditions of a modern era (Carlson 321). With these growing sentiments some artists turned to the classics, joined the increasing interests in social drama, or looked to existential philosophy for inspiration. Freud's [1856-1939] work would, however, continue to influence naturalist and realist producers. He proposed that suffering in theatre, which he felt should be psychological, allowed for both sympathy and masochistic satisfaction to be experienced without risk (Carlson 335). The liberation of otherwise masked and repressed impulses might then be safely achieved the way children experience release while playing (Carlson 335).

Jacques Copeau [1879-1949], who opened the *Vieux Colombier* theatre in Paris in 1913, joined in expressing grievance over the modern condition. Like others he complained about theatre having become commercial, sensational, exhibitionist, debasing, and indifferent (Carlson 338). Though he had announced that his theatre would not promote a certain school, nor profess to mount a revolution, his prescriptions overall were influenced by symbolist concerns (Carlson 338). In his work the poet's text was centrally unifying, the settings starkly simple, and the mounting of past scripts presented with care for contemporary relevance. He stressed a religious need for the communalism of theatre experiences while exploring abstract expressions over that of mimesis (Auslander 19). His preparations for actors included a process of clearing away their individual personality so as to release their underlying physical ability to communicate universal concepts (Auslander 23, 17). Charles Dullin [1885-1949] helped mount the new theatre and worked aside some of Artaud's contemporaries.

In 1922 Dullin established *Théâtre de l'Atelier*, training new actors in the style promoted by Copeau, where Artaud undertook his theatrical studies. Here the young artist was exposed to emphasis upon the physical discipline of breath and rhythmic gymnastics (Knapp 7). For just over a year he also contributed as a costume and décor designer and participated in the research endeavoured for each production. "When listening to Dullin's teachings," Artaud reported, "one has the impression of rediscovering old secrets and a whole forgotten mystique of the *mise en scene*" (qtd. in Knapp 8). Despite the friendship that developed, many of their rehearsals ended in

discord, and ultimately in an agreement that Artaud should move on from the company (Knapp 8). In 1924 he published his first public statement on the theatre, "The Evolution of Décor", expressing favour for attributes of Appia and Copeau's approaches meanwhile critical of his mentors (Carlson 393). At this time, for example, Artaud dismissed the *mise-en-scène* and any focus upon decorum (Sontag 53). He complained of "three-dimensional actors moving around in flat perspectives with painted masks," wanting to do away with illusion altogether, so that audiences can more meaningfully relate to performers (Sontag 55).

Follower Louis Jouvet [1887-1951] shared with Dullin's school a clear distain for theory and systems (Carlson 373). In 1927 he joined with Georges Pitoëff [1884-1939], Dullin [1885-1949], and Gaston Baty [1882-1951], to form the *Cartel des Quatre*.  This company would come to dominate the Parisian theatre scene through the thirties (Carlson 376). While Dullin was interested in inspirational beauty, Pitoëff emphasized his search for deeper significance, and Jouvet asserted the importance of the spiritual over the material. Baty however was distinct in his relegation of the text to merely one part of many in the theatrical world (Carlson 374). From 1926 through 1949, while not rejecting scriptwriting altogether, he would develop his work in order to ensure drama could present an integrally evocative world beyond text. In creating his total artwork all theatrical elements were to be given equal weight. He went on to organize *Les Compagnons de la Chimere*, along with a wide range of designers and performing artists, with whom he had more in common (Carlson 375).

Prior to this, Dadaism and Expressionism in Zurich shared in a movement, their kinship with Futurism extended to a preference for chance and invention and visual evocation. In 1922, Tristan Tzara [1896-1963] clarified his aims for an "illusionist theatre," stipulating that it could "live by its own scenic means" (qtd. in Carlson 343). Actors wouldn't remain caged in a proscenium arch, lighting and other effects would draw in and include their audiences, and a visible grotesqueness would lead the way (Carlson 343). Dadaist insistence upon "artistic autonomy," as opposed to imitation of reality, became a popular French rallying call (Carlson 343). In theatre, Guillaume Apollinaire [1880-1918] first described the new expressionist's creative autonomy as "*surréaliste,*" and pointed to the creations of Jean Cocteau [1889-1963], who had worked in collaboration with Pablo Picasso [1881-1973] and Éric Satie [1866-1925] in

1917 (qtd. in Carlson 343). They had produced what he saw as an integral schematization that at the same time served to harmonize the stage work as a whole. In 1922 Cocteau himself referenced Jarry, while furthering the call for the Wagnerian total artwork, combining "the fantastic, the dance, acrobatics, mime, drama, satire, music, and the spoken word" (qtd. in Carlson 344). The poetry of theatre, however, in this case applied to composition of all the arts involved. He criticized Antoine's realism in particular, asserting that a deeper more true realism is possible, achievable only though by exposing the absurdity of life (Carlson 344).

1924 also marked Artaud's association with Surrealism. The movement's criticism of bourgeois society, the exploration of foreign ritual and Western esotericism, and experimentation with automatism and dreamscapes, highly influenced his work from this period. Artaud briefly managed their Research Center and contributed to two issues of their magazine, *La Révolution surréaliste*, editing and writing most of a third issue as well (Eschleman 6-7). André Breton [1896-1966], a leader of the movement, described his initial impression of Artaud's presence as a "dark magnificence" (Breton and Parinaud 15). In reflection on this time with Artaud he described the memberships' worries that "without quite realizing it, we had been seized by frenzy, and that the air had rarefied around us" (Breton and Parinaud 12). The extreme rhetoric Artaud brought to the movement, and his refusal to adopt a Marxist platform, lent to his (and other artists) official expulsion from the group at the end of 1926 (Eschleman 7). Exposure to this European community of dadaists, expressionists, symbolists, and surrealists had by this time inspired Artaud to start his own theatre.

Along with collaborator Roger Vitrac [1899-1952], he launched the *Théâtre Alfred Jarry* (Alfred Jarry Theatre) in 1927. They produced dadaesque skits and short plays with no sets, stressing the importance of hallucinations, and enacting rude confrontations (Eschleman 8). In 1926 he wrote an introduction to the new company, suggesting that they were searching for an "absolutely pure theatre," but that it would require a trusting audience willingly "joining forces" as believers in an "ephemeral but real world" that would be "tangential to objective reality" (Sontag 155). In order to achieve a hyper-realistic edge, attributes of production such as the *mise-en-scène* would be avoided, or left to chance and invention (Sontag 158). It was in the mounting Stringberg's *Dream Play*, in 1928, that the company's idealist strain of Symbolism took shape.

He wrote that this play represented an ideal with the capacity to reveal "a certain truth that inhabits the deepest strata of the mind" (Sontag 163). Here they clarified that the theatrical reality they wished to present lay halfway between life and dreams as opposed to competing with life (Sontag 163). They relied on real properties, as well as vocal and lighting effects, with the "function of a new spiritual order given to the ordinary objects and things of life" (Sontag 163, 164). In the "Manifesto for a Theatre That Failed" (1926/27), Artaud's opinion on the use of stagecraft had softened, stating that the *mise-en-scène* and actors movements should also be taken as significations, making visible an invisible "secret language" (Sontag 160).

Fig 2. Alfred Jarry Theatre photomontage from Eli Lotar; "Le Theatre Alfred Jarry de l'Hostilite Publique"; *Graphic Arts;* Princeton University Library; 12 April 2017, http://blogs.princeton.edu/graphicarts/2010/07/le_theatre_alfred_jarry_de_lho.html

Reviews for each of the four plays they mounted were mixed and took a financial loss (Eschleman 8). In answering to critics, and hecklers attending performances, Artaud found himself further in direct conflict with the remaining surrealists. A brief review of distinctions in his understanding of Surrealism adds insight upon his then burgeoning creative intentions.

## The Break with Surrealism:

During the *Alfred Jarry Theatre*'s run the dispute between former and remaining surrealists centred most of all on political inclinations. Breton, who would long remain an important figure for Artaud, criticized him for speaking of a revolution that involved "no more than a change in the internal conditions of the soul" (qtd. in Carlson 393). In answer, Artaud referred to the group as "toilet-paper revolutionaries," calling them "filthy scum" for critiquing the theatre as counterrevolutionary (Sontag 161). Their Communist vision of revolution was lazy, he wrote, countering that a shift of power from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat would make no

difference to society (Sontag 162). Alternatively, he stated, a cultural return to Middle Ages would preferably signal the destruction of modern thinking (Sontag 162). While he carried forth anti-bourgeois sentiments, for Artaud a genuine cultural revolution remained far removed from political action, defending instead a view of spiritual change (Sontag xli).

Politics wasn't the only conflicting difference that stood between Artaud and the surrealists. Surrealism had provided for an accepting hub from which the artist could pursuit his interests, at least for a time, while he assumed that other members also "despairs his own mind" (qtd. in Sontag xxv). Surrealists' explorations of stream-of-consciousness writing, dream analysis and experimentation with altered states of mind, were games of liberty and innovation. For Artaud a crisis of consciousness was ongoing, often tormented, detrimentally asocial, and his dependency upon drugs was desperate (Sontag xxv). The movement was buoyed even when transgressive, whereas Artaud's consuming struggle precluded expectations of pleasure, and in time he grew vehement in his distain for sexuality (Sontag xxvii). Finding joy in painful experiences of self-division (*jouissance*) was out of reach for Artaud, just as his condition of health robbed him of potential tranquility, leading him to criticize the surrealists for their idyllic views of the unconscious (Artioli 144).

For Artaud the absurd and the surreal were not merely the exploratory sublimation of repressions but lived experiences. He wrote about feeling alienated and that "surreality is like a contraction of osmosis, a kind of communication turned inside-out" that "blocks contact with commonplace reality" (Hirschman 33). As opposed to arousing a whimsical curiosity Artaud's dreamworlds were rife with terrors. He wrote of a stark and frightening existential struggle "where it seems you are going to die again, you are going to die a second time," and the "anguish seeping into your dreams" is more or less "how I imagine agony seeps into you" (Hirschman 49). Most of his early writing recounts such hardships while expressing deep resentment for a world that was difficult for him feel a part of.

Breton and Artaud did share a view of art as an exercise of consciousness. For Artaud, however, this was also an affirmation of full or partial existence. For example, upon expressing disillusionment over the *Alfred Jarry Theatre's* first season, he explained that their ambition

remained to raise theatre "from the dead," as "an authentic performance of magic," wherein they risked personal exposure, "even if it means destroying ourselves" (Sontag 161). Upcoming presentations would be a "mystical experiment by which an important part of the domain of the mind and consciousness may be definitively saved of lost" (Sontag 161). Artaud often fretted as though his works contained only fragments of consciousness (Sontag xxix). Unlike the surrealists, Susan Sontag notes, his was a consciousness victimized by a perpetual reflecting back upon consciousness, as if it were merely an "empty space in which consciousness takes its perilous leap of transcendence" (xxix). To understand the veritable significance of this statement, and its relation to Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*, we will benefit from an understanding of the artist's experience of schizophrenia.

## Life with Schizophrenia:

Knapp refers to Dr. Otto Rank, a close colleague of Freud whom knew Artaud well, and said that the artist was creative because of and not despite his illness (x). She describes him in youth as a quixotic man who alienated many of his contemporaries and worked toward an art all the while through a mirror (Knapp x). This sentiment is shared in studies of Artaud's life-works and represents an important attribute of Artaud's indivisible marriage of art and life. It's not just that he saw himself in, or projected himself outward into, the world but that he sought to overcome his challenges while doing so: "I am a man who has lost his life and is seeking by every means to reintegrate it in its proper place" (Hirschman 59).

The artist recalls first experiencing psychic aberrations around nineteen years of age, which is statistically typical for men with schizophrenia, as are substance abuse habits common ("*Statistics Canada*", "*Schizophrenia Society*"). The content of Artaud's early writings align with the primary categorizations of delusions, disorganized speech, catatonic behaviour, and especially with negative symptoms (flattened affect, lack of emotions, and extremely low sense of volition or will). The symptoms of this illness are otherwise heterogeneous as diagnosis of subtypes waver. Some patients, like Artaud had in his first decades of life, experience exacerbations in turn with remissions. This means that diagnosis of positive (such as hallucinations) and negative

symptoms can alternate over time. In Artaud's personal writings, these difficult episodes appear to deepen and widen with time, becoming evermore disabling.

While reference to clinical specificities will be implicit throughout this chapter, I primarily defer to Louis A. Sass's phenomenological propositions, which offers the benefit of insight through case studies. The professor of psychology's book is titled, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (1992), and it ties together analogous cultural pursuits with patient reports of their experiences of schizophrenia-spectrum illnesses. This reading encourages an empathetic understanding of individual experiences where, historically, patients have been deemed too incomprehensible to benefit from dynamic engagement (Sass 7).

### --- SCHIZOTHYMIA AND THE POET ---

Sass speaks to the common clinical observance that schizophrenia spectrum disorders are not in life as delineated as they are in medical books. His description of the frequency in which schizoid personality disorder develops into paranoid or autistic forms of schizophrenia suitably explains the graduation we sense taking place in Artaud's early writings. In the case of comorbidity, he goes so far as to call the disorder a pre-psychosis state, preceding full-blown chronic schizophrenia (Sass 76). Schizoid personality disorder is most characterized by negative symptoms, a cold and self-doubting disposition, a rigid cognitive style, as well as an asocial and extremely introverted disposition (Sass 78). Many of these patients are eccentric, or like Artaud they exhibit peculiar or awkward behavioural habits, and are noted for expressions of indifference to others. Even so, while exhibiting outward haughtiness or rebelliousness, patients easily perceive slights and are highly reactive to criticism (Sass 77). In 1921, German psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer classified the evolution from schizoid traits to schizophrenia as schizothymia, describing the characteristically strong swings from insensitivity to hypersensitivity (Sass 79). Most people with this affliction are aware they are too withdrawn from others and worldly concerns, and may even feel detached from themselves, sometimes feeling as though they don't fully exist (Sass 78). Patients are often preoccupied instead with abstract and metaphysical topics, emphasize desire for independence, and are concerned with originality. Stringberg, who

eventually developed schizophrenia, once stated that people like him seek out loneliness so as to "spin themselves into the silk of their own souls" (qtd. in Sass 78).

We can see extreme attitude fluctuations in Artaud's letters and journal entries: at times writing of rage and contempt, stating intolerance for others contradicting him, but at other times expressing feelings of emptiness and apathy. Alongside a desire to manifest his consciousness through creative projects, we see also his drive to establish his uniqueness, shifting from self-assuredness to insecurity as if his very being relied on it. This is evident in his letters to Jacques Rivière [1886-1925], editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, over the course of 1923-24. While Rivière's original rejection letter does not critique the poetry Artaud had submitted, nor speak to the character of the aspiring poet, the latter described feeling threatened by the editor's judgement. He pleaded with Rivière for a reappraisal of his poetry because: "It is very important to me that the few manifestations of spiritual existence which I have been able to give myself not be regarded as nonexistent because of the blemishes and awkward expressions they contain" (Sontag 32). He further explained, "I am in constant pursuit of my intellectual being. Thus as soon as I can grasp a form, however imperfect, I pin it down, for fear of losing the whole thought. I lower myself, I know, and I suffer from it, but I consent to it for fear of dying altogether" (Sontag 31).

Rivière's response was encouraging and advised patience but he did not agree to publication. Artaud wrote again half a year later, this time indignant: "I do not seek to justify myself in your eyes, it is a matter of indifference to me whether I seem to exist in the eyes of anyone at all. I have, to cure me of the judgment of others, the whole of the distance that separates me from myself" (Sontag 34). He had thought he might intrigue the editor by openly discussing his disability, and though described himself as incapable, still he claimed he had brought his poems to "the uttermost point of perfection" (Sontag 34). He did press Rivière again for a re-evaluation but before doing so stated: "I flattered myself that I was bringing you a case, a distinctive mental case, and curious as I thought you were about all mental distortions, about all those obstacles that are destructive of thought, I thought thereby to draw your attention to the real value, the initial value of the my thought, and of the productions of my thought" (Sontag 34). He pleaded with Rivière to reconsider his opinion while reading some new materials: "Restore to my mind the

concentration of its forces, the cohesion that it lacks, the constancy of its tension, the consistency of its own substance" (Sontag 35). When Artaud did not hear back, he wrote another letter, wavering again between defiance and self-derogation: "My letter deserved at least a reply. Return, sir, letters and manuscripts. I would like to have found something intelligent to say to you to indicate clearly what divides us, but it is useless. I am a mind not yet formed, an idiot: think of me what you will" (Sontag 38). In the end their correspondence was published, and garnered Artaud some infamy, but in lieu of his poems.

<div style="text-align:center">--- PROTO-HUMANS AND HYPER-REFLEXIVITY ---</div>

Throughout his book, Sass challenges both the Freudian concept of regressive infantilization, and cultural romanticism surrounding a wildman figure of free desires and debauchery. The latter Nietzschean concept proliferated in anti-psychiatry and avant-garde circles throughout the modernist era and held prominent sway over Artaud's idealism (Sass 4). In each case, there is a presumption that madness represents a kind of proto-human state, whether referring to an un-individuated newborn that has no coherent thought, or to a fantastical and exuberant primitive existence. Sass points out that, instead of a desiring hero, patients are generally hyper-reflexive and frequently complain of a severe lack of desire (Sass 22).

This observation is evident in both the content and the volume of written texts Artaud left behind. In a self-published booklet called *The Nerve Meter* (1925), the artist states: "I study myself microscopically. I put my finger on the exact place of the fault, the unadmitted sliding." He adds, "I am the man who has best charted his inmost self, his most imperceptible slitherings" (Hirschman 37). All the while in another booklet, *The Umbilicus of Limbo* (1925), Artaud described an overwhelming fatigue, splitting pain, and a disembodiment of reality. In general things "have no more smell, no more sex" and "their logical order is also sometimes broken precisely because they do lack this emotional smell" (Hirschman 29).

Sass suggests that this may indicate an exacerbation of conscious awareness, along with the dissociation of senses, which are otherwise dependent upon social and environmental atunement. In *Fragments of a Diary from Hell* (1925) for example, the artist complains that his life was "being denatured" meanwhile he would "linger for hours over the impression some idea or sound

has made on me. My emotion does not develop in time, it has no temporal sequence at all. The ebb and flow of my soul are in perfect accord with the absolute ideality of mind" (Hirschman 41). As Sontag had suggested, Sass's patients also appear to reflect upon reflecting, chasing reflections until they loose sight of the sense in thought at all. Artaud continued to describe a paralysis settling in, he was less and less able to move, all the while his thoughts were spinning: "I am definitely set apart from life. My torment is as subtle and refined as it is harsh. It costs me mad efforts of the imagination, increased tenfold by the grip of this stifling asphyxia, to succeed in *thinking* my ills " (Hirschman 42). The extreme contradiction between his "inner facility" and "external difficulty" lead him again to worry his consciousness may be dying (Hirschman 43). In another text he had already described "an anguish where the mind chokes and cuts itself – and kills itself" (Hirschman 31). In fact, Sass asserts that schizophrenic hyper-self-awareness's represent a limit-case, the "farthest borderland of human existence," where consciousness itself is annihilated (15).

**--- SPEECH AND A PRIVATE LANGUAGE ---**

As indicated by his correspondence with Rivière, extreme inwardness as well as progressive desocialisation influences the patient's relationship to language. The 'impoverishment' of language is an oft-theorized and distinctive characteristic of the illness (Sass 180). Sometimes, for example, patients exhibit 'simple restriction' in their capacity for spontaneous speech or a 'poverty of content' where what they do say doesn't convey meaning. They frequently experience a 'blocking' which halts thought or ceases their communication altogether (Sass 180). At other times, as psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler put it, patients can speak of trivialities "in the most lofty, affected phrases, as if they were dealing the highest of interests of mankind" (qtd. in Sass 180).

Cultural and psychoanalytic theories describe this as part of a 'primitive' or regressive pattern, as the result of a Dionysian 'alogic' of the instincts, or of a child-like egocentricity (Sass 181). Sass instead points to how the many possibilities for meaning, if unhinged from social and environmental relationships, can restrict the emergence of speech. Artaud described this as a "contraction that shuts off my thought from within, (that) makes it rigid as in a spasm; the thought, the expression stops because the flow is too violent, because the brain wants to say too

many things which it thinks of all at once with all its circumstances, and it also sees all the points of view it could take" (qtd. in Sass 201). Because patients are sensitive to the polysemous nature of language they are also prone to playing on words when not overwhelmed (Sass 178). Glossomania is common and may be seen as a yet deeper disengagement, an act of taking liberty, or perhaps even an abdication of responsibility (Sass 178). Friedrich Hölderlin [1770-1843], schizophrenic for the last forty years of his life, would speak to friends in garbled nonsense and yet composed fluid poetry without need for editing (Sass 25). In this way schizophrenics can be interpreted as either "Machiavellian schemers or overwhelmed victims," because of their peculiar relationship to language (Sass 184). In, *The Nerve Meter*, Artaud regretted the loss of words that had already emerged from a "dialogue within thought," as well as furtive games of thought (Hirschman 35). He wrote: "All I need sometimes is a single word, one simple little word, without importance, to be great, to speak in the tone of the prophets: a word-witness, a precise word, a subtle word, a word well-soaked in my marrow, gone out of me and standing at the extreme limit of my being" (Hirschman 35).

Sass defers to Ludwig Wittgenstein's [1889-1951] famous reference to an impossible "private language" (187). As all language is public, we may feel deeply challenged in communicating the ineffable, unless of course we give up on or are not driven to ensure others understand. However, Sass asserts, the result of self-conscious concerns directed inward and the individualistic purposes for expression are not "characteristic of either earlier stages of individual or cultural evolution" (188). Patients are more likely attempting control and insert personal meanings amidst an indiscriminate barrage. Because every "single thing means something," as another of Sass's patients reported, he preferred to understand the world symbolically where there are no coincidences (qtd. in Sass 53).

Out of frustration, having not found recognition for his poetry, the young artist wrote a text devoted to the sentiment that: "All writing is pigshit" (Hirschman 38). Like the patient above, Artaud turned this struggle around for himself, coming to view his experiences as poetic. In *The Theatre and its Double*, and its first manifesto (1932), Artaud arrives at the concept of a "unique language," creating "a kind of alphabet," comprised of the "physiognomies" of symbols and signals, sounds, cries, and onomatopoeia (Artaud 89, 90). This was a language before speech,

premised upon gestural and visual poetry instead of literary words. He argued that: "All powerful feeling produces in us the idea of the void. And the lucid language which obstructs the appearances of this void also obstructs the appearance of poetry in thought" (Artaud 71). The problem of language nonetheless continued to haunt him as an issue of identity. In the coming years he developed suspicion that his thoughts were being stolen or, alternatively, besieged upon him by otherworldly voices. Only a lapse into complete madness could apparently free him from the burden of the aspiration. Five years after succumbing to a sustained state of psychosis he wrote: "Well, I don't want to be poet of my poet, of that self which fancied it'd choose me to be a poet; but rather a poet-creator, in rebellion against the ego and the self" (Hirschman 100). In his late period of works his private language was mostly unintelligible.
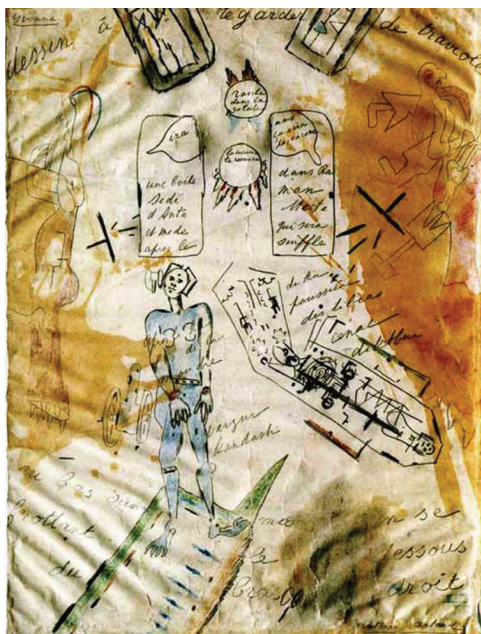
## --- DISEMBODIMENT IN SPACE ---



Fig. 3. "The Machine of Being" from Antonin Artaud; "Quelques dessins de poetes"; *Alina Reyes, le Journal de Jules;* 12 April 2017; http://journal.alinareyes.net/2014/01/04/quelques-dessins-de-poetes/

Of course even if taking liberties with language, Sass is not claiming that patients are willingly sick, but says he has observed the active and imaginative role patients' play in distorting their own perceptions (18). This may be seen in the patient's explanations for physical disturbances. One patient described a loss of the sense of herself as an experience of her personality melting, of her ego disappearing, until she was sure she no longer exists, because there "is no connection between the different parts of my body" (qtd. in Sass 15). Another catatonic patient recounted removing his own head, climbing down through his throat, and observing his inner organs (Sass 14). Artaud complained of experiencing a "cold suffering" that was "without feeling" and an inner "true cutting void" where he sensed himself organless (Hirschman 32). Patients are so often missing a fundamental sense of grounding and, combined with the absence of appropriate emotion and inner desire, some describe their physicality as awkward

machines, slipping in and out of starkly illuminated boundless spaces (Sass 23-24, 47). Artaud's late works, mostly comprising his notebooks, include numerous drawings of machines interspersed with body parts (see fig. 3). Sass suggests that perhaps spatial forms, including experience of one's own body, are also distorted when subject and object loses relationship with its usual meanings (Sass 34).

In his early writings Artaud despaired of feeling abandoned by his body and described ethereal disembodied experiences (Hirschman 42, 44). In *The Umbilicus of Limbo*, for example, he spoke of dramatic shifts in his perception of the environment: "Space was measurable, rasping, but without penetrable form. And the center of it was a mosaic of explosions, a kind of merciless cosmic hammer of a distorted heaviness, which fell again and again into the space like a forehead, but with a noise as if distilled," the noise itself had a "living look," while the space gave out "its full muffle of mind in which no thought rang clear" (Hirschman 27). Space trembled and "something from the beak of an actual dove made a hole in the vague mass of states" until the vegetal mass turned over three times or more (Hirschman 27).

--- A DOUBLING OF REALITIES ---

Self-disturbances like these often include anomalous experiences as well as the feeling of being imposed upon by external forces (Sass 216). As a consequence, or perhaps in parallel to these experiences, patients often encounter others in the same light. While reflecting upon his earlier years, Artaud recalled seeing others as upsettingly abstracted, and said it was one of the reasons that he resorted to opium in the first place, explaining "there are no words to describe it but a violent hieroglyph which designates the impossible encounter of matter with mind" (Sontag 338, 339). Sass references one patient who described the sensation of being a puppet at the command of cosmic forces (Sass 214). Meanwhile another patient saw others like manikins or automations (Sass 48). Another described the behaviour of subway commuters as choreographed, as if they were participating in a conspiratorial performance, mysteriously organised just for him (Sass 218).

The seeming inauthenticity of others, and a sense of some mysterious force at work, generates a doubled quality inherent to all things (Sass 48). For example, patients arrive at explanations for

the frightening experience of hearing unfamiliar or mocking voices, understood as occurring 'out loud' and yet in their head, without either admission contradicting the other. In July of 1937, Artaud revealed part of his 'secret knowledge' to Breton, warning of impending disasters, angry over being commanded by an unknown speaker, while admitting they speak only to those whom chose to separate from this world (Sontag 400, 401). Sass finds that a realm of delusion is kept to some degree separate from the real. The psychologist suggests: "Things may seem unreal to them, and they may conclude that the world before them is really some kind of second world, perhaps only a simulacrum of the true one existing elsewhere" (Sass 48). Sass adds that bizarre or 'world catastrophe' events are commonly dealt with by a creating this kind of "double bookkeeping," which he equates to a suspension of disbelief, where double or even multiple explanations are developed (275). Here a division has occurred, the doubling of realities has resulted from a kind of 'unworlding', in which the inner self is no longer normally entangling with natural and societal environments (Sass 37). He adds that "such phenomena would be expected to be doubly ephemeral" as well as "difficult to locate not only because they have no existence in the objective world independent of the subject's consciousness but also because, like the eyeball that sees, they are unlikely to appear even as immanent objects within their own (subjectivized) field of vision" (Sass 286). Experiences of psychosis become as real as the real seem false (Sass 291).

Perceptual doublets of phenomenon persist in Artaud's writing throughout his life. In *New Revelations of Being* (1937), he claims his own "Double" has "been incessantly turning" for thirty-three centuries, along with the dead who have been "hovering around their corpses" (Hirschman 86). That same year he wrote to his then fiancée, Cecile Schramme, following a particularly all-encompassing break down while travelling Mexico. His letter accused her of being "a Double Being" and insisted she need admit to hiding an inner demon (Sontag 396, 397). She had provoked in him "a state of uneasiness, obsession, and mistrust," though he had always recognized her alternate hidden evil nature, he accused her of misleading him with an image of impossible perfection (Sontag 397, 398). One could argue the entire book, *The Theatre and Its Double*, was devoted to exteriorizing his perception of a dual reality.

As an alternate or double of reality emerges the seemingly artificial quality of our shared reality includes distortion of patients' relationship to people and things. Sass notes that one patient exemplified her experience of "Unreality" by describing how a friend seemed to her as thing-like as a statue (qtd. in Sass 48). Meanwhile, the very fact that things existed at all bewildered her. She described how inanimate things just sprung up, facing her in defiance, "asserting their presence," "tricking" her, "mocking" her, or "emptied of content," filling her with fear "and impotence" (qtd. in Sass 49). In an experience of extreme fragmentation, the world seems highly abstracted, immoveable and crystalized (Sass 60). The psychologist argued that, as opposed to living in an animistic world, patients encounter objects as divorced from usual functions and emotional resonance, and as a result things can seem like "stage accessories" or "pasteboard scenery" (qtd. in Sass 48). These experiences can evoke "the exalting feeling of wonder and mystery," writes Sass, or at times sensations of terror (49). Artaud's concept for a theatre of cruelty also drew upon this experience. The theatre teaches us first of all, he said, about "the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us" (Artaud 79).

This is accompanied by an ontic confusion between experience of Being and being a being in the world. Indeed we see the inter-changeability of these ontic designations is common also in Artaud's writing, where he frequently referred to 'forms', a word that was intended to speak of both people and objects. For example, in *The Theatre and Its Double*, he had argued that theatre ought to "express objectively certain secret truths" revealing what lingers beneath forms in "their encounters with Becoming" (Artaud 70). Further on he explained that the "highest possible idea of the theatre is one that reconciles us philosophically with Becoming," yet this would be achieved by "the passage and transmutation of ideas into things" (Artaud 109). In *The New Revelations of Being*, he wrote about another being within himself whom had previously refused "the Void," but as he wrote it: "I must at last make a clean break with this world which a Being in me, this Being I can no longer name because if he returns I shall fall into the Void," but at the same time he stated "this Being revealed to me all things" (Hirschman 86).

Sass relates these experiences to Martin Heidegger's [1889-1976] criticism of philosophical conceptions where the experiential subject has the same ontological status as objects (292). The psychologist explains that in such case the transcendental subject mistakenly exists prior to, in absence of the world, or as if these are "two objects existing side by side within the world" (Sass 292). This obscures the "essential inseparability of consciousness and its objects" leading to an impression that the mind becomes the generator of the world (Sass 292). Many patients do come to see themselves as the purveyors of a burgeoning alternate reality. As with use of language, it is then also common for patients to, at some other juncture, abdicate from all responsibilities (Sass 293). It is as if, as Heidegger describes, one can grow so close themselves that they become ubiquitous, and impossible to see.

One patient describes how, for example, her inner feelings of cruelty are more true to her than any worldly acts of cruelty, and the two are not reliant upon each other (Sass 101). For her, inner experiences can lend to sensation of exaltation, whereas the tangible world only darkens her days (Sass 101). Another patient preferred a view of things not actually existing in of themselves, believing instead that everyone "created a world after his own fashion" (qtd. in Sass 282). Recoiling from the hollow seeming "social mechanics" of life, patients recede into ideality, absorbed in subjective events (qtd. in Sass 102). The experience deepens apathy toward others and, leading to psychosis, the extreme dissociation evolves into a sense of having no self at all (Sass 275).

Heidegger suggested that a devaluation of worldly contents that become representing objects also incurs such "a loss of Being" (qtd. in Sass 95). Sass notes how common this experience is among schizoid patients and that many schizophrenia patients recount having gone through a similar premorbid state. He adds that these fault lines run "through the self rather than between self and world," where an inner mentalized self observes and is perceived as controlling, but an outer passively depersonalized self associated with the body and public performance is contrived (Sass 97). For example, one patient whom felt he had to act around others, would prefer to spend months alone daydreaming in a room, but eventually he felt he no longer had an identity of his own (Sass 102).

Sass sees the relevance here to two types of an exaggerated subjectivist nihilism of the world proposed by Nietzsche: One that is passive, and that the philosopher considered weak, and another that is wilful and vital (Sass 94). In the first case, for example, Artaud frequently wrote of an inner world labyrinth that was isolated from the outer world. In a text called "Appeal To Youth: Intoxication - Disintoxication" (1934), he describes the parallels of an opium high with his experience "outside of life," and concludes that in such an experience: "Everything is pitiful, and nothing is missing and yet the self is no longer there" (Sontag 339, 340). Exemplifying the second case, however, Artaud also believed in development of "individual cosmogonies" as a way of "rediscovering communication with one's self" (Hirschman 35). While this was often accompanied with expressions of anguish, and at times he expressed shock, other times he apparently revelled in attributes of these experiences (Hirschman 34). In *The Nerve Meter* he stated he was "enlightened by unreality," and took "pleasure in these games," because "there is a phosphorescent point where all reality is rediscovered, but changed, metamorphosed…. a point open for the *magic* usage of things" (Hirschman 35). This active role in managing, and to some degree creatively harnessing, aberrantly estranging and unworlding events serves to enliven and inspire instead (Artaud 35).

In 1925 he wrote to his future collaborator, Roger Vitrac, that "I destroy because for me everything that proceeds from reason is untrustworthy" (Sontag 108). He further explained that his flesh was irrigated by nerves, that which furnished him with images, and these images offered intellectual knowledge of the highest form (Sontag 108). Finding new "Meaning" amidst chaos was the victory of the mind over itself, it is "the logic of Illogic," he insisted, "I surrender to the fever of dreams, but only in order to derive from them new laws" (Sontag 108-9). This exalted realm of images was irreducible by reason, Artaud wrote, and that which belongs to it must remain so or be annihilated (Sontag 109). Insensible "*thinking"* was organised by its own laws, because images were clearer in the "world of image-filled vitality," and Artaud wanted this knowledge and new found meaning to "descend into the reality of life" (Sontag 109). He stated that a self-generated vitality, and the "nervous irradiation of existence" which included "all consciousness", would repair the life he had felt deprived of (Sontag 110). Throughout the artist's writings we find him cycling through vulnerabilities and grasping for resolve. He was forever

divining new meanings and cutting his own pathways through harrowing experiences so as to exert control.

As patients' inner world extend to encompass externalizations, awareness of their role in generating imaginative constructions dissipates. Sass notes that, in this same way, patients may be resistant to reality testing because of the "certitude of a person attending to his own mental state" as they move from a suspension of disbelief toward a belief stance (293).

<div align="center">--- A HALLUCINATIVE PERFORMANCE ---</div>

We get a sense of a fragmented, spatially distorted, ontologically confusing, experience of multiple realities while reading Artaud's recounting of a Balinese performance. In "On the Balinese Theatre" (1931), while taken with phantoms in the storyline, it was the degree to which Artaud saw all upon the stage objectified that culminated in a "perspective of hallucination" (Artaud 53). It was as if the content of the performance was so alien to Artaud that it could only be otherworldly. Instead of a dance theatre performance from another tradition he described the drama as imagery emulating ancient ceremony; instead of emotions there were conflicting spiritual states, but even these were ossified into gestures that were instead diagrams (Artaud 53). He interpreted these as powerful spiritual signs that had precise meaning but, at the same time, could only be known intuitively (Artaud 53, 54). According to Artaud this was a secular theatre that nonetheless contained perpetual allusions to secret attitudes and a spiritual architecture that enabled "physical fear and the means of unleashing it" (Artaud 59, 54, 56). A plethora of sights and sounds, as well as detached hieroglyphic geometries, composed a violent enough language to defy discursive communication (Artaud 64, 54). For Artaud the sound of heels striking the ground followed "the very automatism of the liberated unconscious" (Artaud 54). He noted body parts and isolated gestures resonating with echoes in a density of space, which consumed all dimensions and planes, plunging him into a state of winding uncertainty and chaos (Artaud 61, 63).

On the whole Artaud was bedazzled, he had been assailed with "a superabundance of impressions," and accosted by a visual language "foreign to every *spoken tongue*" (Artaud 59, 57). The explosive secret streams of "both external and internal perception," within which he

discovered the "metaphysical identity of the concrete and the abstract," thanks to "suddenly dispersed signs," was for him "*matter as revelation*" (Artaud 59). Upon this magical identification, he proclaimed, "WE KNOW IT IS WE WHO WERE SPEAKING" (Artaud 67). The result was akin to the opening of a portal, making "our demons FLOW," so that he felt he had been exposed to "some unknown, fabulous, and obscure reality" (Artaud 60, 61). This reality had not abolished the other, however, as he remarked upon costumes which "gives each actor a double body and a double set of limbs" as if to act as the dancers' own effigy (Artaud 8). We cannot quite tell if it was the performers or himself who was thrown into a metaphysical anguish, "stiffened by the cosmic forces which besiege it," but suddenly his mind began to "plummet downwards" (Artaud 65). Even though he was at some point seized by terror, and at other times described the experience as excruciating, still for Artaud this theatrical engagement was a tranformative ritual process: "As if waves of matter were tumbling over each other, dashing their crests into the deep and flying from all sides of the horizon to be enclosed in one minute portion of tremor and trance – to cover over the void of fear" (Artaud 67, 65). It is clearer though that the performers were "mechanized beings, whose joys and griefs seem not their own but at the service of age-old rites, as if they were dictated by superior intelligences," and a superior "Life," with the "solemnity of a sacred rite" (Artaud 58). The work, he speculated, must have been conceived by way of "a virtuality whose double has produced this intense stage poetry" (Artaud 63). In this case the director surely took the place of an author, he wrote, and by doing so became the manager of magic (Artaud 60).

This text seems to unfold from reportage to an imaginative encounter to an entirely interiorized experience. Sass reminds us that inner world escapes can become confusing, creating "a turbulence of purely subjectivized states," where everything is both real and unreal (282, 283). For example, one patient told his therapist that as they spoke he couldn't tell "whether I'm having an hallucination, or a fantasy about a memory, or memory about a fantasy" (qtd. in Sass 282). Sass describes this as resulting from a kind of transcendental idealism, where the world is pure idea, or an "emanation of consciousness itself" (Sass 284).

**--- EMERGENCE OF A NEW REALITY ---**

In Artaud's early period of writing we are witness to the progressive shift toward belief in multiple realities. In, *Art and Death* (1924-27), Artaud described being riddled with anxieties and he compared the process to living a dream. He stated that dreams never lie and were always true. In the death of sensations, spells of drowsiness, and desolation he asked "the feeling that one of the faces of a new reality is perpetually looking over our shoulder?" (Sontag 122, Hirschman 49). In the same timeframe, he wrote another text contemplating "evidence" in context with the "reality of the brain," in contrast with a commonplace reality that does not reach him while he "fixes on the start of a new reality" (Hirschman 54). In letters dated from 1927-30, he described an apathetic emptiness, exclaiming "I have no life!" and that even mental images, upon which he relied to preserve his personality, had now lost value (Sontag 168-69). "It is a question," he wrote, "of fulgurating *vitality*, of truth, of reality" (Sontag 169). While in Mexico, in 1936, he described a mystical, heaven-like primitive civilization, which he expected to visit so as to draw upon that unique reality (Hirschman 66). In 1937, in *New Revelations of Being,* he exclaimed he was now dead to the world of others, finally having left reality, and was focussed upon revealing an alternate reality (Hirschman 86). That same year, in a letter to Dr. René Allendy, Artaud was more succinct about how his perceptions had transformed, stating "I *no longer* know what is normal or supranormal. I know what is: that is all." (Sontag 399). He added that "distinctions between what one can discuss socially and in front of everyone and what one discusses among *one's selves*, as they say, no longer concern me" (Sontag 399). The aforementioned booklet detailed a newly forming identity through astrological charts, which also predicted the coming apocalypse, and that he signed "THE REVEALED" (Hirschman 98,99). It followed that he wrote Breton that same summer: "But one need only look at the world around one to realize that Reality has already almost exceeded the Dream and that very shortly all the force of the Dream will be swept away by astonishing Realities" (Sontag 402).

**--- A FREEDOM FROM AND TO ---**

Though, due to 'intrapsychic ataxia' (the separation of cognition and emotion), patients are generally cut off from normal emotional responsiveness, schizophrenic delusional moods are intense, whether in context with nihilistic despair or with blissful revelation (Sass 109, 296).

Patients will often prefer to loose themselves in passing fancies, in an unconstrained imaginary realm, where strange transformations can defy natural laws (Sass 285). The uncoupling from ones identity is sometimes interpreted as freeing, as patients no longer feel obliged to the social order, and may then cultivate a resentment of limitations (Sass 104). Sass recalls a patient, whom was always rebellious and contrary, but in time developed an ironic and sarcastic habit of humour, behaving as scandalously as possible (Sass 107). Taboo and transgression, for example, may be understood as tantalizing subversions of otherwise limited and bounded bodies. A propensity for difficult unconventionality, perversity, facetiousness, adversarialism, grossly accentuated affectation or expressive absurdity, are often presented as if declarations of freedom (Sass 109, 110, 112, 115).

This is observable in Artaud's 1934 semi-biographical recounting of Heliogabalus's life, a much-despised Roman emperor, who lived in the third century A.D. The young ruler is mostly remembered for maniacal indulgence, autocratic brutality, sexual exhibitionism, shocking and appalling the population. Artaud, however, defended him "not as a madman but as a rebel" (Sontag 323). In a letter to Jean Paulhan (June of 1934), Artaud admitted that this work was partly autobiographical, and that through the manuscript he had "realized myself with my faults, my excesses" (Sontag 337). He wrote that what mattered more was that there was a "highest Truth" his portrayal aimed for, which was a hidden truth that "obstinately eludes any boundary, any limit, any localization, and even in the end what is called the Real" (Sontag 337). For Artaud truth was in the chronicling of his inner dominion, tied to the annihilation of cultural strictures upholding an alienating exterior world, in pursuit of a boundless freedom that could not be matched by civil liberties.

In 1927, Artaud appealed to Abel Gance for a part in an Edgar Allan Poe film, attesting to his person and the lead cinematic character being one and the same. He argued that his life experience cannot be captured by mere acting, which surely some other performer could offer, whereas in his case: "I have the plague in the marrow of my nerves and I suffer from it" (Sontag 168). By the time he writes "The Theatre and The Plague" (1931-36), he equates a dark psychic plague with a uniquely heroic, grandiose, absolute freedom (Artaud 29, 30). Having penetrated and inhabited bodies, scourging civilization and releasing humanity from customs and mores,

causing murderous discord and gratuitous perversities, this superior and vengeful disease was to be the harbinger of "a total crisis after which nothing remains except death or an extreme purification" (Artaud 24, 30, 31).

This taste for the absolute or even salacious liberties may also be seen in context with Nietzsche's equation between personal will and a sense of vitality. One of Sass's patients stated as much explicitly, describing mental infirmity as a freedom, saying that he felt like a prince because "In my world I am omnipotent; in yours I practice diplomacy" (qtd. in Sass 296).

### --- ANNIHILATION OF BOUNDARIES ---

Sass describes schizophrenic psychosis as an "impossible experience" where the self and world distinction completely disappears (311). In experiences of division and derealisation an annihilation of boundaries may also be seen as an escape from terror or defensive act (Sass 312). Sensation seeking, or finding opportunities to absorb oneself in intense physical sensation, are common among patients whom otherwise complain of fragmentation and emotional deadness. By loosing themselves in undifferentiated and dissociated sensation, the maddening spiral of self-reflection is essentially obliterated, and holds the promise of a more euphoric experience. Mind altering drug use, a magical alternate reality, the waking dream transformation of reality, a grandiosely conceived and boundless sensational state - like that of a body without mortal organs - may be taken for a feeling of unity or wholeness. These incredible possibilities, as well as governing over the power of a plague epidemic, became preferable cures for what Artaud otherwise referred to as a "living death" (qtd. in Sass 317).

Interpretation of a loss of self as 'the delights of self-scattering', for which Artaud and other famous artists are often referred to as examples, overlooks the paradox of hyper-reflexivity, where acute self-consciousness leads to self-effacement (Sass 219, 220). This is when phenomena usually identified with the self are experienced as separate, external, and concrete (Sass 228). The psychologist provides examples of patients' subjective body seemingly turned inside out, filling the universe, "reified by the intensity of a self-directed gaze" (Sass 227). Patients report a sense of dispersal, where body parts act on their own, or their whole person break into bits, feeling as if they have suddenly become more than one person. In finding words

to explain these ineffable experiences, and in the formation of a systemized delusion for example, patients may again be alleviating themselves of the frightening chaos of disintegration (Sass 229). In *Art and Death*, Artaud described an anguish filling him until the body itself "reached the limit of its distension," which was like the "reverse image of a contraction," occupying the mind "*over the whole extent of the living body*" (Sontag 121). "The fear that swoops down on you tears you apart to the very limit of the impossible," he continued, feeling he must "cross over" like a bad dream "where you are outside the situation of your body" (Sontag 121). He described feeling desperate and terrified, dying again and again, while wishing to "regain a state that is at last complete and permeable, in which everything would not be shock," or the "delirious confusion that ratiocinates endlessly upon itself" (Sontag 124).

The booklet included a letter he wrote Breton, pertaining to his meeting with a clairvoyant, whose prophesizing readings apparently assuaged his fear of death. Now he felt safe, liberated, so that rather than violence in his "fibres" they now "registered only a great mass of uniform sweetness" (Sontag 126). He sensed a "uniformity of all things," "a magnificent absolute," and even "the most cruel" now appeared him as an "equilibrium" that allowed him to feel both indifferent to meaning and optimistic (Sontag 126 -27). Prior to her seductive presence, Artaud already believed that one "cannot accept Life unless one is *large*, unless one feels at the source of phenomena," without "the power of expansion, without a certain dominion over things, life is indefensible" (Sontag 127). Whereas life now became a "blessed landscape in which our shifting dreams turn toward us with the face of our self," absolute knowledge "merged with the idea of an absolute similarity of life and of my own consciousness" (Sontag 129). He decided therefore that the clairvoyant was otherworldly and that she too is "without limits or boundaries" (Sontag 129).

It stands to reason then that Sass warns us of mistaking hyper-reflexivity for anti-rationalism. Throughout his life, Artaud would look to the occult, as much due to fascination as to a process of procuring answers and cures.

### --- CREATION OF A SYSTEM ---

Through Artaud's writings we are privy to the difficult chronic ebbs and flows of his experience of schizophrenia, aside development of a belief system shaped by his symptomology,

as well as the progressively encapsulating alternate reality he melds along the way. Whereas in the 1920's, he spoke of how opium provided possibility of recovering his soul, and how ideas alone allowed him to confront "the metaphysics which I have created for myself as a result of this emptiness I carry within," in the 1930's he interprets a collapse of the mind as a metaphysical event in of itself (Sontag 70, 91,189). Through this early period of work the artist moves from feeling inferior to reality, except when "recognizing" himself in revelations, to believing himself a messenger of Christ who was heralding a world-destroying spiritual war (Sontag 189, 406-9). From 1937-48 his days were spent acting out performative rituals, casting spells and curses, obsessively fighting off demonic doubles, mainly through creation of 'writing-drawings' in his notebooks. The metaphysical system he devised years earlier now both tortured him and promised salvation to the end. In conceiving of mental aberrations as bodily trappings, and thus his boundless body in the exteriorized mind, his later aspirations were to be an eternally purified creature, reborn as a body without ailing organs.

We get a sense of how important this spiritual system was to his sense of self during spells of immobilizing lethargy. In February of 1932, he wrote George Soulié de Morant, describing the horrible and cruel condition that he felt was tearing apart his consciousness (Sontag 288). He wrote that this profound state was robbing him of his "private symbols" and depriving him an otherwise beneficial "intellectual system" that he had developed (Sontag 289). In a second letter, he spoke of a secondary manifestation of consciousness that prevented him from "keeping present in the mind a number archetypical images corresponding to my personal sensations and representations," which then incapacitated his ability to stay aware of himself (Sontag 292). He explained that he felt helpless to sooth an overwhelming anxiety, which transmitted into a kind of physical pain, because he was "incapable of summoning up any image, any representation" and could not access his own "intellectual memories" (Sontag 294).

His expectations of these private symbols were most coherently expressed in *The Theatre and Its Double*, written between 1931-36, which envisioned materialization of his metaphysical system in space (Jamieson 29). The publication itself acts as an extension of his striving to surmount all kinds of barriers, most of all those erected by illness because, in any case for Artaud, "all mankind resembles me" (Hirschman 58). In this way the project fulfilled a wish,

which he initially considered in 1925, writing that he could "imagine a system in which all of man would participate, man with his physical flesh and the heights, the intellectual projection of his mind" (Sontag 110). This system would double first as his nihilistic plague so as to make way for the double of his sensational experience of the Balinese performance. Therein his fragmented existence itself was as much doubled as rebelled against as he rebuilt the world in images that met with his metaphysical interpretations (Jamieson 15). In this more expansive doublet of reality, the artist would become a "demiurge," affectively transgressing bodily boundaries to instigate for spectators their own inner transfiguration (Artaud 114)(Jamieson 29). If life "exceeds all bounds and is exercised in the torture and trampling down of everything," producing a "consciousness *in* torment," so then must this "inner" theatre immerse others in an "implacable" cruelty to achieve these higher aims (Artaud 114).

Just as solipsism looses sight of the thinking subject, Lee Jamieson justifiably claims Artaud's projects were personal triumphs, wherein the "boundary between his life and work becomes impossible to locate" (55). Sass interprets Artaud's theatre ideal as an intended antidote to experiences of disembodiment and alienation (Sass 312). His vision then represents a pursuit of relief, from what the artist called "dispossession of my vital substance," and a yearning for escape into a mostly elusive ecstatic 'Dionysian flood tide' (qtd. in Sass 312). One can see in the artist's modelling for his new theatre attributes of his own distressing experiences, a sense of respite in states of revelation, and a craving for not simply redemption but a kind of restitution.

## The Theatre and Its Double:

In answer to poor reviews of the *Alfred Jarry Theatre*, Artaud stated he could no longer believe in a reality where the theatre exists, because no one else believed in the theatrical worlds they constructed (Sontag 160). In *The Theatre and Its Double* (1958), Artaud's confounding realities and altered experiences of consciousness collide, culminating in stunning anecdotes within which a fuller theatrical vision amalgamates. The book is a compilation of essays, lectures, manifestos, and letters that were first published individually by Gide at the *Nouvelle*

*Revue Française* (Baker 14). The French originals were compiled together in 1938. In it are spirited, if poetic, arguments for future creation of a theatre of cruelty.

**--- A NEW REALITY IN THE WAKE OF THE PLAGUE ---**

His first argument, comprising the book's preface, is both a cultural critique and intended as an explanation for his ideal prescriptions. Artaud therein asserted that there was social confusion due to a general "rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representation" (Artaud 7). He explained that modern life lacked magic because "we lose ourselves in contemplation of imagined forms," but nothing "any longer adheres to life," and this exemplified a "cleavage which is responsible for the revenge of *things*" (Artaud 8-9). This cultivated a sense of powerlessness "to take complete possession of life," he argued, but could be countered by further directing "life's intensity" (Artaud 9). Artaud's experience of his illness, which we are more honestly privy to in his other writings, are now roundly positioned as societal problems. It is no longer the performance of magic that the he speaks of but the evocation of a "true culture" which was itself defined by magic (Artaud 9). Likewise, it was not just the theatre that was dead, but also the entirety of an artificial culture his readers had thus far lived within. Instead of existing under these superficial influences one could achieve a more "refined means of understanding and *exercising*" life, he argued, whereby a form of any kind is just matter that "operates by exaltation and force" (Artaud 9, 10-12). In a true culture "without space or time, restrained only by the capacity of our own nerves," forms that otherwise "fall into oblivion" could then "reappear with all the more energy" (Artaud 10). By rediscovering those forces we too would rediscover life, and this was the value of experiencing "cataclysms", which he viewed as a kind of "return to nature" (Artaud 10). A true culture, he qualified, relied upon nature.

For Artaud nature's mysteries and power could be invoked through objects, such as the totem, which "might determine, disclose, and direct the secret forces of the universe" (10). Artaud believed that this possibility was exploited by 'primitive' cultures that were closer to nature. The latter characterized an authentic culture that could then also be reflected in an equally "true theatre," as the vehicle that would hasten communications, within which forms could be enlivened "by magic identification" (Artaud 11, 12). Unlike the *Alfred Jarry Theatre*, however,

the artist wasn't proposing a mystic exploration anymore. He stated that his theatre presentations should not be set apart the way sacred acts were (Artaud 13). Instead, he saw his new prescriptions as a rejection of worldly restraints that "infinitely extends the frontiers of what is called reality" (Artaud 13).

Artaud explains how, as it was with the Balinese performance, his new theatre could manifest as both a mirror of and portal to this bewitching cultural frontier. For him, real appearances in life were perishable but couriered shadows, and as it was with the hieroglyphs of magic cultures, so would the true theatre release these forceful shadows, at the same time shattering life's limitations (Artaud 12). Whereas with "our petrified idea of a culture without shadows," he wrote, our mind "encounters only emptiness" (Artaud 12). His theatre would avoid this with the animation of objects, and through the discipline of "living instruments," which would stir a shadowy potency that then could "break through language in order to touch life" (Artaud 12, 13). In aspiring to heal a felt split between language and body he would meanwhile elude the barrier between 'inner' and 'outer' experiences (Sontag xxxv). For Artaud this involved the projection and choreography of forms, a dramaturgy that was but "a question of naming and directing shadows," while also destroying those that were false so as to pave the way "for a new generation of shadows" (12). Instead of emerging from Plato's Cave his audiences would be exposed to this assemblage of powerful shadows comprising, what he considered to be, a truer spectacle of life (Sontag xxxv). In this and other ways he argued that his proposal was more profound than a mere "artistic dallying with forms," for which he disparaged other artists, calling upon them to act more "like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames" (Artaud 13).

Predicated on his belief that there was a deeper and more esoteric double of reality lurking beneath the veil of common consciousness, Artaud's shadows permeate and disintegrate, and act as catalysts. Attributing to society his experiences of self-alienation for him necessitated a culturally nihilistic project, just as he had felt his self annihilated again and again, meanwhile destroying all that he took for pretension in an untrustworthy world. To facilitate this process his ideal theatre would, like the plague he felt himself stricken with, be so powerful as to disrupt the moral and spiritual integrity of both an indolent civilization and complacent audiences. Just as

Sass's patients experienced a kind of unworlding, that made other realities possible, so would Artaud's afflicted masses.

Artaud aimed to convince readers of the communicable psychic powers of this intelligent contagion that is both fatal and induces gratuitous delusions (18, 23). Here he also described fatigue and a sense of division but added that this "sombre and absolute action of a spectacle" then disclosed a spiritual freedom (Artaud 19, 23). The plague, Artaud explained, draws from dormant images, belonging to "a latent disorder," that recovers combative symbols and archetypes (27). This affliction, he stated, could just as well be spread by the inversion of an asylum lunatic's "feelings and images" (Artaud 25). An essential theatre was then like the plague, he concluded, because it is a revelation that ushers forth an "exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty" through which all "perverse possibilities of the mind" are localized (Artaud 30). No act would be too illicit for those whom saw no end in death, as this was the liberation of a plagued victim that dies without materially perishing, for whom "life has reacted to the paroxysm" (Artaud 24). This represented an evil triumph, for "all true freedom is dark," and theatre was afterall "created to drain abscesses collectively" (Artaud 31). In this way his theatre would be a poison, "injected into the social body," disintegrating it as both "an avenging scourge" and "redeeming epidemic" (Artaud 31). As Artaud imagined it, amidst the pestilent destruction and societal mayhem lie dark truths in action, emulated through a theatrical vassal his presentations could also act "on the level of a veritable epidemic" (24-25).

Artaud was no longer concerned with how success might save his mind, the artist no longer feared exposure, and potential failure was now a universally shared existential matter. Indeed he wrote, "the action and effect of a feeling in the theatre appears infinitely more valid than that of a feeling fulfilled in life" (25). He explained that this is because when one is in a "powerful state of disorganization," the plague's images were a "spiritual force" exhausting itself, whereas in his theatre "images of poetry" would transfuse this energy through the senses, doing "without reality altogether" (Artaud 25).

Though Artaud was mistaken in his view of the Balinese performance as ancient and ritualistic, when in actuality it was a modernist presentation, his interpretation of this work

remained his primary inspiration (Jamieson 18). Artaud claimed that only a master of sacred ceremonies fashioning the materials of gods could have created a work so at the "very heart of matter, life, and reality" (60). This was an obscure, mysterious reality, revealing secret psychic impulses and demonstrating "mystic solutions" (Artaud 63, 60). This also finally met his idea of a pure theatre, which he argued was "merely theoretical in the Occident," whereas his dramaturgy of shadows would unleash this "completely repressed" "fabulous" reality (Artaud 61). Like the plague victim this reality would be liberated, in an exertion of imaginative will power, as a result of Artaud's proposed staging of "*metaphysics-in-action*" (44).

### --- FROM AESTHETICS TO A METAPHYSICAL SYSTEM ---

The notion of a theatre that acts with the destructive force of a plague would first free Artaud from the tedious professional conventions his contemporaries upheld. In "No More Masterpieces," the artist wrote that "even the most revolutionary among us" had respected an art history that only contributed to the "asphyxiating atmosphere in which we live without possible escape or remedy" (Artaud 74). In the art world, he stated, by now all expression had been exhausted. He claimed therefore that they were "at a point where things must break apart if they are to start anew and begin fresh" (Artaud 74). Before turning to practical descriptions of his ideal stages, he borrows from and takes sides on aesthetic arguments made by his contemporaries, at the same time demarcating the metaphysical uniqueness of his choices. For example, Artaud often distinguishes his concept from that of the symbolists by differentiating between a devitalized mutual reality, in which he assumed they all participated, and the vital more true realm he aimed to channel. Conceptually, his critiques were a matter of carving out a space for his own vision for a popular attraction, preparing the ground for emergence of his mystical reformulation, meanwhile hypostizing his defiance. In the interim Artaud is always telling two stories; that of his theatrical ambitions on the surface and that of a subtext which reflects his own experiential perceptions of unworldly strife (Jamieson 13).

Like Lukacs and Gide, Artaud refers to the conditions of life as the fundamental problem, proclaiming that "there are too many signs that everything that used to sustain our lives no longer does so, that we are all mad, desperate, and sick. I call for *us* to react" (77). His theatre of

cruelty would be an answer to Gide's call for new approaches in art to address this ailment. As it was with Fuchs, he disavowed masterpieces formulated around the exclusive taste of the bourgeoisie, that he saw as too rigidly literary to meet with the appetites of the masses (Artaud 74, 75). In this regard he would avoid "a purely descriptive and narrative theatre," as well as "storytelling psychology," where the public is shown nothing "but the mirror of itself" (Artaud 76). Like many practitioners throughout Europe he criticized the naturalists for empiricism, randomness, individualism, debasement, and anarchy (Artaud 79, 77). Furthermore, favourable expressionist and dadaist innovations aside, the theatre mustn't be art for art's sake (Artaud 77). Ironically he added: "Once and for all, enough of this closed, egoistic, and personal art" (Artaud 78).

He shared with the romantics the aim of satisfying desires for mystery, concerns around destiny and divine secrets, with an emphasis upon poetry (Artaud 75). Artaud agreed that theatre must break with actuality, and with the charge to resolve social conditions, but extended this attitude also to psychological conflicts as well as moral passions (70). He too sought to reveal and "express objectively certain secret truths" (Artaud 70). However, while defending the emulation of dreamscapes, he criticized their productions for peddling in illusion and falsehoods (Artaud 76). His theatre would instead create "true illusion" by "furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams" (Artaud 92). Rather than an explicit moral problem, the poetry of dreams would carry forward at "root within us the idea of a perpetual conflict," that would provide a basis for drama (Artaud 92). As it was for himself, true dreams "projected with the necessary violence" would forge this as a "believable reality" (Artaud 86, 85). Indubitable dreams were also terrifying and cruel, bloody and inhuman, just like fabled atrocities, he wrote (Artaud 86, 92, 93). As if to meet with de Wyzewa's ideal, he argues that such a confrontation "probes our entire vitality," so that audiences would be exposed to storylines that no less "extract the forces which struggle within them" (Artaud 86, 87).

In "The Theatre and Cruelty," Artaud sided with the symbolists like Meyerhold in defending the value of the theatrical (86). Some of these artists, whose works had so influenced the artist's creative aspirations and insight upon theatre craft, were nonetheless subject to criticism here as well. Their use of puppets, for example, was still in service to the creation of "intimate scenes," so its any wonder audiences looked to the movies, music hall, or circus for

"violent satisfaction" (Artaud 84). Worldly events, he wrote, should not exceed the staged spectacle (Artaud 86). Therefore he would create a popular spectacle, intended to agitate the masses, a little like the "poetry of festivals" (Artaud 85). Countering dramatists like Bahr he insisted that the adoption of psychology in effect only reduced the unknown to the known and besides, like de Wyzewa, Artaud believed "the public thinks first of all with their senses" (77, 85). His work would not only mark a "departure from the sphere of analyzable passions," but also close the gap between analytic and plastic worlds, situating humankind "between dream and events," meanwhile liberating the public as Jarry had envisioned (Artaud 86, 93). For Artaud even admirable performances by the Russians were, like the visual arts, lacking "genuine consciousness of the forces they could arouse" (79). In general he was critical of current cultural trends, he wrote, because the resultant works didn't transcend the realm of art (Artaud 78).

His project would avoid the mere appearance of art, by not only addressing "all aspects of the objective and descriptive external world," but also "the internal world," which Artaud argued was metaphysical (spiritual) rather than individualistic (92). This, he wrote, was not "a matter of boring the public to death with transcendent cosmic preoccupations" (Artaud 93). He would instead rescue theatre from "human interest" through spiritual inclinations that aroused "unhabitual ideas" premised upon Creation, Becoming, and Chaos (Artaud 90). By tapping into this cosmic order his theatre would generate a passionate equation between Man, Society, Nature, and Objects (Artaud 90). To this end he would enlist extraordinary natural conflicts, and the exceptional power of other unnamed forces, complimented with a destructively anarchic humour (Artaud 83, 90-91). Propagated through poetic symbolism, these would bring about metaphysical conditions, as opposed to directly staging mystical storylines (Artaud 90).

Just as Appia had championed Wagner's musical poetics as an integral system of symbolism so did Artaud praise the Balinese performance for, what he argued was, a masterful reinstatement of ancient theatrical conventions emulating "the evocative power of a system" (55). As Artaud understood it, Oriental languages provided for a "whole system of natural analogies," that he wished emulate through his own system (108). This was an objectification of storyline situations that, from his experience, converted things into ideas (Artaud 109). He ascribed a methodological precision to this achievement, ruling out the possibility of any spontaneous

improvisations, and claimed that their work was calculatingly composed with an "enchanting mathematical meticulousness" (Artaud 55, 57). Likewise, his own system would codify forms into a vocabulary of signs, and be reproducible at will (Artaud 94). In his prioritization of form, however, objects and every performable gesture would be categorized and held in reserve for use in his symbolic strategy (Artaud 94). Artaud distinguished his proposed concept of theatre as a "total creation" from the Wagnerian 'total artwork' by specifying that his dramatic apparatus would be 'active', which for him means 'magic' (93).

Echoing Wagner himself, he too insisted that all but the spoken word is a dead language (Artaud 75). In Artaud's case, this was all the more personal a position, reflecting his tense and distraught relationship with the written word. Therefore, he sided with artists like Baty in demoting the importance of the literary script so that it was only one part of many elements in his system. In fact, Artaud devotes significant attention throughout this book to discrediting the pertinence of the literary arts, while justifying his emphasis upon sensory impact. He referred to the anti-theatricality of some of his colleagues and criticized them for equating written dialogue to the spoken word (Artaud 119, 117). He charged that theatre wasn't actually concerned with literary language and besides, along with visual and aural signification, a gestural and spatial language can both obscure or be more precise (Artaud 71). The composition of a stage vocabulary would not only arise without use of psychology, but would rely upon imagery and allegory, which he saw as both more revealing and significant for the spirit (Artaud 94, 71-72). For example, he felt a non-literary language could appropriately dissimulate and amplify feeling in particular, because all "true feeling is in reality untranslatable," and to express it directly is to betray it (Artaud 71). As noted previously, for Artaud, lucid language obstructs poetry in thought. Through his arguments against the idolization of authors he, at the same time, salvaged the hard-fought-for title of poet.

Rejecting the work of artists whom once inspired him, as they represented a detached and neutral spiritual activity, Artaud now announced that "dead poets" must make way for the new (78). Further, poets with no sense of direct and concerted action, efficacy, or danger had ruined theatre: "We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and *written* poetry" (Artaud 78). What he was proposing was a difficult and complex "true poetry," appealing more to the senses

than the mind, which could be composed independent of speech (Artaud 44, 38, 37). This was a purely theatrical language, everything that could not be expressed in words, and would be constituted through the *mise en scène* (Artaud 37). Akin to Cocteau and the surrealist's harmonizing expectations of stagecraft, for Artaud, costumes, lighting, properties, music, dance, visual art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, vocal intonation, and architecture all fell under this umbrella designation (Artaud 39). Among several Nietzschean concepts he adapted, Artaud speculated that the language of words might have to give way to this language of signs, "whose objective aspect is the one that has the most immediate impact upon us" (107). The artist conceded, however, that a director who takes pains with his set to the detriment of the text was wrong-minded (Artaud 106). Word play and speeches were not excluded from his ideal theatre. His emphasis upon the *mise-en-scène* provided an escape from the inculcation of literary structure was not a new concept and was hardly incidental. He nonetheless proposed that, through a system of physical symbols, the passive language of literature could be reconstituted and revivified (Artaud 119).

Not just anyone, Artaud stressed, could create and impose this "superior notion of the theatre" (13, 32). He proposed the roles of author and director would be replaced with that of a "unique Creator" whom would in turn "devolve" with the "double responsibility" of spectacle and plot (Artaud 94). The metaphysical content of the *mise en scène* therefore also had "a double sense" which disclosed messages and revealed mysteries or terrible aspects of nature and the mind alike (Artaud 121). As if to meet with Mallarmé's approval, his vision promised to both animate and spiritualize a "concrete physical space," through magical qualities incited by a system composed of a "concrete language" (Artaud 86, 37). Instead of subjugating the theatrical to text, he believed he could 'recover' a unique ancient method of communicating, while physicalizing ideas upon the stage (Artaud 89). He therein promoted discovery of an inchoate language that he expected would, with the exertion of poetic control, transcend the customary limits of feelings and words (Artaud 51, 41). In "Oriental and Occidental Theatre," he concluded with the statement "the author who uses written words only has nothing to do with the theater and must give way to specialists in its objective and animated sorcery" (Artaud 73).

## Theatre of Cruelty Practices:

As noted earlier, a particularly influential attribute of Artaud's proposal would be his desire to compose this "*expression in space*" directly from the stage (Artaud 89, 114). His proposed poetry was "anarchic," in an apparently preferable way, creating relationships between objects and signs as "the consequence of a disorder that draws us closer to chaos," allowing the unforeseen to foment danger, and producing a mysterious fear (Artaud 43-44). As sorcery, Artaud explained, this meant replacing "fixed forms" with magical "intimidating forms," activating the impressionistic signification of both performers and objects (Artaud 39, 36, 43). Here every form was to be presented the way things had 'exercised against' Artaud. His intent was to generate an endless multiplicity of meanings in visual imagery that would dominate and prevail despite the existence of narrative. In practical terms, the artist wanted audiences' relationship to things to fluctuate, and remain unstable, as opposed to being concerned with clarity of communication.

This "intense poetry" would include use of objects of unusual proportion that he considered the equivalent of as "verbal images," and like many of his contemporaries, he now promoted utilization of puppets, manikins, and masks (Artaud 97). Uniquely, he imagined laser-like lighting innovations that could, along with both ancient and invented musical instruments, "act directly and profoundly upon the sensibility through the organs" (Artaud 95). He also referred to audiences' sensations of heat, cold, anger, and fear as the possible affects of light (Artaud 95). Artaud believed that because theatre "identifies itself with the forces of ancient magic," involving the "whole of nature," his theatre should also push all acts to the extreme (86, 85). This meant that an "intensive mobilization" of objects and gestures would be accompanied by a plethora of "thundering" images, "crammed" sounds, and "unbearably piercing" noises (Artaud 87, 95).

In order to "attack the spectator's sensibilities," and on a grand scale, this unfettered spectacle would revolve around the audience (Artaud 86). While he at some point claimed to abolish the

stage, replacing it with a single site without a barrier of any kind, Artaud was not encouraging audience members' individual agency (Artaud 96). As described by both Appia and Tzara, his spectators would be immersed, but in this case surrounded with action by the four cardinal points in a room (Artaud 96). He suggested constructing the architecture of a church or other holy place but also, like Antoine, Artaud proposed alternate sites as performance venues. He thought a hangar or barn would serve his purpose, even if without any ornament, where engulfed spectators could sit on mobile chairs in order to facilitate observance (Artaud 96). He imagined whitewashed wall-backgrounds designed to absorb light, and overhead galleries running the periphery of the hall, that would help actors relay cries or other sounds around the four walls (Artaud 96, 97). He described potential scenes swarming with characters that endure onslaughts of situations and external assaults of "pure forces" and "of the tempestuous elements," like that of thunder and wind (Artaud 97, 82). In general, "violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theatre as by a whirlwind of higher forces," in order to induce a trance (Artaud 83).

Instead of expression of Wagner's total being, Artaud expected the visceral impact of magical forces, eliciting a transformation of their whole spiritual being. Spellbound, and encircled by a "total spectacle," Artaud intended to leave neither room nor respite in the spectator's mind or sensibilities (86). This immediacy and constancy would, as if fulfilling a romantic imperative, eradicate the division between life and the theatre (Sontag xxviii, Artaud 126). In creation of this ideal theatrical language the artist wrote that all "gropings, researches, and shocks will culminate nevertheless in a work *written down*, fixed in its least details, and recorded by new means of notation" (Artaud 111).

Artaud was by now explicit in rejecting the potential of collaborative creation, especially in context with processes of experimentation, but generations of artists have seen his vision for development of an immersive *mise-en-scène* as a launch pad for both (Sontag 343, 297). While his emphasis on a theatrical language very nearly re-situated the writer in the place of the designer of the *mise en scène,* redefining authorship, the artist hadn't yet conceived of a work without a script. However inaccurate, the collective devising of theatrical content guided by one or more auteurs, along with absorption of audiences in scenario-driven circumstances,

nonetheless reflect especially fruitful interpretations of the artist's objectives among early postmodern innovators.

Performing artists generally do understand that audience members are not entirely passive, but are always interpreting participants, whether sitting or physically involved in the action. While Artaud briefly acknowledged this fundamentally inter-relational engagement is necessary, it is something that he elsewhere rejected, he didn't want spectators to identify the performer both as a person and a character (140). Each, being subject to a psychology, could be too flatly and finitely interpreted (Artaud 118). His actors instead, doubling as athletes of the heart, would have commanded the forces of nature released by ritualistic acts (Artaud 135). His audiences would not have been provided much space to identify with, to empathize or react, to access memory or emotions of their own, but would instead be coercively inflicted by these energetic forces. Despite popular interpretation (as is the case in Carlson's book, page 457), within his ideally immersive theatrical event, spectators are only participants insofar as Artaud expected they would be internally transformed. This distinguishes the works of *The Living Theatre,* in the United States, whom have identified Artaud as their most influential theoretician, as considerably more experimental in their participatory approach.

Founded by Julian Beck [1925-1985] and Judith Malina [1926-2015]*,* by the sixties the company was comprised of dozens of collaborators, most of whom lived and worked together. Whereas Artaud provided contradicting understandings of the meaning of anarchy, expressly renouncing the efficacy of political practice, and did not share in a liberal or even sociable understanding of freedom, *The Living Theatre* evolved as host to committed pacifist revolutionaries (Sontag xli, xlviii)(Penner, "On Aggro" 88). So did their work evolve to be rooted in utopian ideals surrounding self-autonomy through demonstration of anarchic organisational principles and audience participation (Penner, "On Aggro" 88). Where Artaud relied upon opioids for relief from immobilizing misery, this troupe experimented with psychedelic drugs during the creation process, believing that LSD reversed contemporary socialization while expanding consciousness (Sontag 99-102)(Penner, "On Aggro" 77, 80). These working conditions alongside improvised encounters within their participatory framework represented the company's efforts to marry art and life (Penner, "On Aggro" 86-87). In their first production of

this kind, the 1968-69 tour of *Paradise Now* was intended to free audience from all forms of repression, setting the groundwork for an anarchist revolution (Penner 23).

The documentary-scripting style for this collectivist theatrical 'happening' arose from reference to mystical texts, physical and breathing exercises, as well as excerpted texts from R.D. Laing and Wilhelm Reich (Penner 23, 26). The latter, Viennese psychologist, had promoted the concept that acts of violence were the result of repressed sexual energies (Penner 20). For this production the religious, the secular, and psychological theory was employed in the creation of sacred rites and social rituals that theatricalized the unblocking these energies. Inspired by Artaud they presented repetitive chanting and while undergoing self-induced trances, portrayed madness as a psychic breakthrough rather than a breakdown, and attempted to regress into a more 'primitive' state (Penner 24, 25). In turn, audience member were expected to replicate, somatically, the actors' journeys of dissipating aggressive impulses (Penner 20-21). Like Artaud this was to be achieved by eroding the veneer of civility, prioritizing direct action over indirect enactment, as well as producing an antagonistic environment for audiences (Penner 29) (Penner, "On Aggro" 87). Contrary to Artaud's expectations, these events were infamous for confrontational altercations as performers invaded audience members' personal space, assaulted them with didactic speeches, and cajoled them to join in an act (Penner, "On Aggro" 82). Polarizing shock tactics were intended to push audiences into reacting, which was mostly successful, but left many feeling alienated (Penner, "On Aggro" 90, 77).

Al Pacino attended the event and described sensations of danger, while amidst the performers and audience in the lobby of the venue, immersed in a frightening explosion of riotous emotion (Penner, "On Aggro" 87). Scholar Erika Munk reported feeling ensnared in chaos, fury, mindlessness, and bullied to participate (Penner 30). Unlike the theatre of cruelty this theatre of somatic affect drew on both positive and negative forces and, as they saw it, this was a means of attaining a transcendent energy (Penner, "On Aggro" 79)(Penner 25). Pacino added that, after removing himself from the commotion, he returned to an exciting sense of collective renewal that was life-changing (Penner, "On Aggro" 87).

Artaud had called for "integral spectacles," with maximum visual impact, that would be

delivered with a determined force (98). In 1993, I co-founded a company called *Virtual Insanity*, which generally pushed the boundaries between experimental work and popular entertainment. Within a year and half the troupe was banned by the provincial liquor board for what it considered bizarre, lascivious, and grotesque acts. The troupe was comprised of circus sideshow and performing artists (spanning music, dance, acting, directing). Performances were devised to suit diverse venues, often resulting in a nouveau vaudevillian format, as well as scenarios intended to intensify suspense and seemingly painful human feats. Instead of marionettes we experimented with media projections, live-feed vignettes, and the creation of absurd low-tech creatures. These, and the direct engagement we encouraged throughout the shows, cultivated a playful environment, while relying upon symbolism to carry multiple meanings. However, stunts performed, such as the pounding of a nail into the tongue of a strongman, the choreographic walking on glass or fire-eating acts, the burlesque-like appearance of a sword swallower, and the use of a seemingly operational electric chair, were among offenses cited by the liquor board patrol. For them, as it was for some among our audiences, the more exhibitionist attributes of these events overshadowed cultural and political statements.

While the sensationalism had gained our troupe a fast reputation, stoked by media coverage, it also provoked an attitude of consumption that could not quite be satiated. Shock tactics and transgressions had indeed stimulated an affective audience responsiveness by which the entire venue was often enlivened. The rowdy thrills of spectacle, however, risked drowning out or eclipsing audiences' perceptual openness to nuanced interpretations. In short, our raw and rough theatrical objectives, and the generative needs of spectators, grew misaligned. The pressure to produce evermore sensationalism divided the troupe and, with it, our creative intentions for more meaningful engagement.

### --- FROM A NEW LANGUAGE TO LIVING INSTRUMENTS ---

Following the creation of new schools of technical acting across Europe, Artaud indicated that his own style of performance training would be necessary, though not offering a succinct methodology, he contested to the breadth and scope of discipline his actors would live up to. For example, his pure *mise en scène* extended performer's practice to "gestures, facial expressions and mobile attitudes" that would emulate "everything that speech contains and has speech at its

disposal as well" (Artaud 121). Similarly, he stated that choreography of gestures "consisting of the mass of all the impulsive gestures," as well as "all abortive attitudes," would reveal, "what might be called the impotences of speech" (Artaud 95). In fact, he added, concrete gestures must "make us forget the very necessity of speech." He explained that use of spoken language then could exist as a response while the cement of gesture achieves the value of a "true abstraction" (Artaud 108). It wasn't a matter of suppressing spoken language, he clarified, but rather an issue of giving words the importance they have in dreams (Artaud 89). He still saw a place for scripts as source material for his future theatre. For example, Artaud extolled the virtues of mythical stories, as a "superior idea of poetry," which carried within them "awareness and a possession of certain dominant forces" that he sought to recover in present day (Artaud 80).

In the essay, "Oriental and Occidental Theatre," Artaud described a metaphysical use of the spoken word that was at the same time "a dissociative force exerted upon physical appearances" and "all states of mind" (70). As part of a dynamic extension of speech he would make use "of the actor's lyric qualities to manifest" these external forces (Artaud 89, 86). In turn, as if performers would be enacting incantations, their speech acts would generate a "dissociative and vibratory action upon the sensibility" of audience members (Artaud 89). Just as vibrations move a snake so would his spectators be moved affectively (Artaud 81). In practice he pointed to vacillating intonations, the repetition of syllables, modulations of voice, onomatopoeia, as well as a precise use of words (Artaud 94, 90, 121). This way, he thought speech would operate on a universal level while still retaining the advantage of verbal communication (Artaud 70). The artist believed this "magical means of art and speech," along with verbal innovations, would contribute to a "hallucinatory state," exerted "organically and altogether like renewed exorcisms" (Artaud 89, 122).

While Jullien had punctuated movement, and Lugné-Poe expressed a desire to test superhuman symbolic characters, Jarry's productions comprised of abstract and marionette-like gestures, as well as his exploration of actors vocal effects, more closely aligns with Artaud's vision for performers difficult role in his system. He conformed them to his own experience of perceptual distortions of living hieroglyphics. This, he argued, would provide the same abstracted "ideographic value" as performers in the Balinese production while raising the entire human body

to the "dignity" of signs (Artaud 39, 94). On one hand, as Appia had envisioned, performers would be equal among many enlivened symbolic objects. On the other hand the actor remained central, because "through the hieroglyph of breath I am able to recover an idea of the sacred theatre" (Artaud 141). Artaud's performers would therefore also serve as "precise instruments," but in this case for dispensing the immediate magic powers he attributed to sign language (83, 119). The artist described this as return to an "active, plastic, respiratory sources of language," where words were joined "to the physical motions that gave them birth" (Artaud 119). This, he explained, was where the discursive and logical aspect of speech disappears beneath physical affectivity (Artaud 119).

In a letter, dated September of 1932, Artaud acknowledged similarities between his proposal and Copeau's work, but argued that the latter artist leaves actors to "the caprice of the wild and thoughtless inspiration" (109). The theatre of cruelty's actors would not be left to arrive at chance discoveries. Instead, he asserted, his uniquely mystical approach would be dictated by a rigorous performance technique (Artaud 110). Like Dullin and others, this was a physical approach to actor training, but Artaud expected a second dynamism in his performers actions (133). He explained that performers must see the human being as a "Double," "like the Ka of the Egyptian mummies," and believe in "the fluid materiality of the soul" (Artaud 134, 135). Being joined with these passionate forces, he wrote, "confers a mastery upon the actor" (Artaud 135). Artaud believed performers would benefit from his study of the occult 'sciences', such as exercises provided in the Cabala (134). For example, he expected to chart every feeling and mental action, corresponding to a manner of breathing that originates in the organs (Artaud 134). Rhythmic movement would also be articulated through reference to, what he referred to as, the sciences of astrology and acupuncture (Artaud 136, 110, 140).

Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski [1933-1999], whose more collaborative works were originally touted as the nearest fulfillment of Artaud's vision, was among the first of a handful of artists to investigate Artaud's writing on the theatre (Carlson 454). Following artists like Appia, Grotowski had already set out to investigate possibilities for a new aesthetic, while severing his theatre's dependency upon literature, and seeking to recover lost religious inclinations (Carlson 455). In 1968 he wrote that the essence of theatre, however, was between the actor and spectator

without need of the additive attributes of a total artwork (Carlson 456). His 'poor theatre' workshops developed a method of actor training that enabled sacrificial acts of self-penetration, self-discovery, and self-revelation (Roach 224). Instead of a vested faith in the mysterious powers of the cosmos, his archetypal performers executed techniques intended to clear away any inner resistance meanwhile arousing imagery drawn from within themselves, recognizing performers as participants in the collective unconscious (Carlson 456). Grotowski's performers were, in their processes of preparedness, divinary artists in their own right.

While the manipulation of breath for performance affect was well known, Grotowski noted that Artaud misinterpreted the original Oriental texts. He had referred to a practice of masculine-feminine-neuter breathing styles that Grotowski stated were too imperceptible to achieve practical aims (Roach 224)(Grotowski 62). He concurred with the full commitment expected of Artaud's actors, which he referred to as the 'total act', but insisted this excluded any unnecessary 'gibberish' or 'delirious' behaviour (Grotowski 64). Instead of a proclivity for mastery, Grotowski criticizes Artaud's proposal for promoting the chaos of everything and nothing at once, adding further that another culture's signs aren't uniformly translatable (Grotowski 62, 64). Alternatively, he warned that the theatre of cruelty's 'athletes of feeling' would too readily transmit stereotyped gestures, which Artaud had expressly wished to avoid (Grotowski 63). Instead of the imposition of conceptual codes, where the inner psychology of the actors is irrelevant, Grotowski argued that signals must be adequately articulated within context of both spontaneity and discipline (64). As with Artaud, Grotowski expected audiences to be impacted by the actor's exigency, but in his view this depended upon their openness to critical introspection. In fact Grotowski emphasized exploration of the potential universality of transferred experiences from performer to spectator. He later renounced this endeavour, however, having found that their division could not be overcome (Zarrili et al 457).

English director Peter Brook [1925], considered among the most innovative theatre artists of the twentieth century, looked to Artaud's writings as a means of launching a wide array of experimentations (Zarrilli et al 457). He, and collaborator Charles Marowitz, presented a Theatre of Cruelty Season in 1964. Despite the name, Brook wrote that they were not trying to reconstruct a theatre of cruelty, but that they were openly inspired by Artaud's ideas (Brook 49).

With aims of testing Artaud's vision for actors, they carried out workshops with the traditionally trained actors at the Royal Shakespeare Company, followed by small public presentations ("Myth" 127). Their explorations emphasized the development of symbolic body language without conventional use of speech and characterization ("Myth" 127). Instead of implementing a predetermined system, as it was with Grotowski's approach, they embarked upon an organic process of physical exercises and improvisational self-discovery (Roach 223)(Brook 52). Brook observed that gesture was in every case sharing the experience of 'signalling through the flames' and that ritualistic or repetitive patterns helped actors disclose private as well as public sentiments (51, 52).

Along with other sketches they staged two versions of Artaud's short play titled "Spurt of Blood" (1925), one with distorted use of speech and one without verbal language, but both of the performances were poorly received ("Myth" 129). As Artaud had experienced in some of his own performances, audiences laughed at inappropriate moments, but then took seriously what was intended as jovial (Brook 129). Grotowski's warning about the effects of either the too-obscure or too-typical gesture remains relevant here. The workshops nonetheless marked a significant turning point in Brook's creative objectives. All his subsequent research was centered on exploring the actor-audience dynamic, particularly on alternate methods of communication, producing unique and often sensational interpretations of conventional dramas ("Myth" 127, 131).

Like Artaud, Brook also felt that a myth could restore theatre to its primal roots, but with the performers' body as the working source, and as the unifying element of communal experiences ("Myth" 126, 134). For this reason the company looked to other cultures as well, and to tribal pre-language cues, for inspiration ("Myth" 132, 136). He ran into the many challenges inherent to Artaud's vision, when ritualizing the stage in a secular context, where such symbolic acts may not resonate with the public ("Myth" 133). Brook wrote that to apply Artaud's prescriptions was to betray his vision, in part because it was easier to apply rules to a small group of actors than to an audience's mode of thinking, he therefore warned that a 'holy theatre' must be host to conditions that makes its perception possible (54, 56). While Artaud's concept of a physicalized language provided for rewarding experimentation, his desire was to produce

multiplying interpretations of meaning, which can undermine the performer-audience relationship. Brook emphasized the important role of audiences in the communicative relationship instead, framing their active "assistance" as necessary (140). A reviewer for the *Avant Garde Theatre* (1993) looked back at Brook's Artaudian projects and noted that he had struggled with occasions where 'pre-rational' scripts were met with incomprehension ("Myth" 140). Complimenting Grotowski's view, the reviewer stated that rejection of common signifiers, along with the assumption that forceful archetypes will be collectively accessible, risks presentation of a purely private language ("Myth" 134).

Artaud's actors wouldn't be empowered collaborators or resources and his description of a codified system of signs was intentionally all encompassing. What we understand is that his vision confers most of all with his own private experience of an outer world dissociated from the willing of a more vital, wondrous, and mysterious inner world of malicious shadows. In objectifying these experiences he prioritized expressiveness over intellectual meaning, which can in itself resurrect a barrier, as communication is effective only to the extent that symbols are familiar to artists and audiences alike ("Myth" 134).

### --- FROM A RIGOROUS TO A BRUTAL CRUELTY ---

Of all the criticisms in response to *The Theatre and Its Double*'s publications, in the artist's own lifetime, Artaud found himself most often answering for his call for cruelty. Lee Jamieson discerns four ways in which the artist employs the term 'cruelty': I) as essence; II) as discipline; III) cosmic cruelty and; IV) as a theatrical presentation (21). While Artaud insisted upon reclaiming the meaning of the word in these broad and ambiguous ways, and he argued that there are more callous circumstances than that of bloodshed, he didn't exclude depiction of violent acts for his witnesses. These are but images in Artaud's theatre and an image is true only in so far as it violent (Sontag xxxv). Whether speaking to the force with which an actor commits to their movement, or to a disinterested portrayal of depravity, or the volatility within which audiences would be immersed, in every case Artaud championed an intensely distressing experience for his audiences. "Everything that acts is a cruelty" he stated and so it "is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theater must be rebuilt" (Artaud 103).

A reader of Artaud's larger body of writing can safely conclude that life, as he's lived it, is itself the cruelty he wishes to emulate. He explained that existence "through effort is a cruelty," therefore the "*theatre of cruelty* means a theatre difficult and cruel for myself first of all" (Artaud 85, 79). Further, there could be "no cruelty without consciousness," which for him is tormenting and gives life its cruel nuance, since life is always in contrast with death (Artaud 102). "It is cruelty that cements matter together," he wrote adding that it was, "cruelty that moulds the features of the created world" (Artaud 104). While Artaud's experience of cruelty was unique, his descriptions of cruelty do not contradict what it is commonly taken to mean. He was fascinated, for example, with the dark matters of an indifferent heart.

In 1968, Brook probed the boundaries of cruelty with the mounting of Lucius Annaeus Seneca's *Oedipus*, a play Artaud had stated interest in as well. The production presented images of extreme violence, in contrast with depersonalized expressions, at times emulating hypnotic rhythms ("Myth" 133). The effect was so successfully visceral that the players themselves felt morally unsettled about their performances ("Myth" 133). During a speech where a slave describes Oedipus tearing his own eyes out, audience members often fell physically ill, and were carried away by medics standing at the ready ("Myth" 133).

Rather than the surreal, emphasis upon the abhorrent ugliness of humanity also sets stage for 'the real', in non-mythical context. The *Badac Theatre Company* (London, U.K.), which was founded in 1999 by Steve Lambert and Dan Robb, cites Artaud's *Theatre and its Double* as a leading inspiration (Bayes). *Badac* mounted "The Factory" in 2008, to mixed reviews, and complaints about the brutality of its immersive environment (*www.badactheatre.com*). The premise of the work was to simulate experience of the gas chambers, so that most of the audience joined the cast as inmates of Auschwitz, while others were allocated the role of controlling guards. The participatory roles assigned to audience members exposed them to an oppressive regiment of cruelty. While some reviewers emphasized the impact as worthy reminders of an atrocity, reviewer Brian Logan regarded the experience as abuse, describing the sensory overload as alienating and the engagement as "thuggish" (Logan). Reviewer Angie Brown described a harrowing experience that left her terrified, counting herself among those who were "broken

down to blubbering, weeping wrecks," experiencing "relentless fear" until she finally fled the scene altogether (Brown).

The use of blunt trauma as an informing vehicle can be affective but may represent lost opportunities for collectively healing experiences. In some ways the theatre of cruelty was meant to meet such a demand but, again, we arrive a crossroads where theory and practice part.

**--- FROM DARKNESS TO THERAPY ---**

For Artaud a triumphant salvation was only possible through malevolence and suffering, led in the theatre by dark myths, instantiated by dark magic, and an inhuman emancipation because all true freedom was dark (Sontag xlvii, xlviii). Far from evading the use of existing scripts, he had intended to stage grim and deviant scenes, themes of incest and murder, portrayals of dismemberment and debauchery. Invoking Aristotle's metaphor for experience of catharsis, as the outcome of an art engagement that acts akin to a medical treatment, Artaud suggested his audiences would undergo a therapy (Auslander 14)(Sontag 348). He explained, for example, that staged brutality and bloodshed discharged violence of thought: "I defy that spectator to give himself up, once outside the theatre, to ideas of war, riot, and blatant murder" (Artaud 81). In this deference to Freud's concept of a safe and secure release Artaud softened his more fervent and consistent argument that a true theatre would ruthlessly ensure experience of precarity.

The concession was intended to bolster Artaud's vision for the theatre of cruelty as a popular new movement leading to a spiritualized cultural revolution (Sontag 368). In a Nietzschean sense, his desire to actuate a schism between civil society and immoral indulgences was to be the site of this radical societal change, propelling the audience-masses beyond the realm of good and evil (Sontag xlvi). Instead of envisioning an Apollonian dramatic counter-balance Artaud envisioned himself as a kind of shaman capable of reconnecting with and re-establishing, what he considered to be, the values of a 'primitive' past (Sontag xxxix). In this context, as both maestro and plague victim, Artaud positioned himself as both physician and society's foremost-persecuted patient (Sontag xxxix). As we've already seen, the theatre of cruelty can be understood as a homeopathic technique to transcend the symptoms of his illness (Sontag xxxvi). His struggle to unify a consciousness divided by sensations and language, the

body and the mind, should itself be sublimated by the affectual and moral transgressions he prescribed (Sontag xxxv, xxxvi). His audiences were expected to be infected with this calamity as well. According to Artaud, this curative operation involved repeated shocks to spectators' sensibilities, necessitating cruelty (Sontag xxxvi).

Artaud's pessimistic worldview and homogeneous perception of the 'other', which his performers and audiences would have stood-in for, is contrary to Brook's optimism surrounding the value of catharsis in context with experiences of communion (Auslander 19). He questions both Artaud's claim to truth and the context within which the prospect of therapeutic engagement would take hold (Brook 54). As critic Franco Tonnelli pointed out, Artaud's theatre does not offer to reconcile his shadowy and hostile forces, representing instead a kind of "anti-purgation" (qtd. in Carlson 395). The trouble with a frenzy of violent shocks, Brook advises, is that through it a willing audience can be assaulted into apathy (55). He concludes that Artaud's peculiar presumptions surrounding the synchronous state and activity of both actor and spectator, "driven by the same desperate need", may remain an aspiration never met (Brook 54).

Therapeutic potential was so important to Grotowski that he moved his experiments off-stage, forgoing the performer-audience dynamic altogether, extending exploration to paratheatrical events and creation of a mini-society (Roach 226). In recognition that Artaud had objectified his own experiences of chaos and self-division, Grotowski remarked upon the benefits of his authenticity, inspiring and thus enabling others to attain self-knowledge (Grotowski 63). Contrary to expectation, he stated, a cleansing by violence and cruelty or a great liberating release will not protect us from dark influences in life (Grotowski 63). He didn't believe that transgressive portrayals would collectively calm or sublimate sinful impulses either (Grotowski 64). While the theatre of cruelty concept more provided a diagnosis in the eyes of others, he stated, the artist's martyrdom was "shining proof of the theatre as therapy" for the creator (Grotowski 63, 64).

As if to demonstrate reasons for Grotowski's scepticism, reports of gaiety and a generosity of spirit within *The Living Theatre*'s performance spaces misrepresented the diversity of participants' experiences, at times with grave consequences  (Penner 27). In reflection of Artaud's brief reference to catharsis, they believed that the witnessing of brutality would produce

a moral transformation among spectators, in this case invoking altruistic compassion (Penner, "On Aggro" 79). *Paradise Now* particularly emphasized the necessity of a sexual revolution, and the transgressing of taboo, to social change (Penner 28). In one scandalous scenario audiences were encouraged to contribute to a conciliatory pile of nearly naked bodies, caressing, swelling, and generally encouraging touch between performers and participants (Penner, "On Aggro" 83). Previously aggressive and provocative acts had already, however, created a hostile environment for women at the venue (Penner 27). Some attendees and reviewers reported sexual harassment, molestation, and assault (Penner 27-28). Malina herself was raped onstage by a group of male audience members. The pretext of liberation had become a justification for sexual violence (Penner 28). As if to dreadfully underscore Brook's warning, pertaining to the importance of empathy, she described her assailants as having lost "all sense of my existence" (qtd. in Penner, "On Aggro" 88). Perhaps confusing an internalized victimization with professional responsibility, the actor expressed regret, she remained convinced she could have elicited loving sentiment from these individuals instead (Penner, "On Aggro" 89).

The assumption that expressions of taboo and transgression necessarily result in benevolent attitudes and benign social release has long been hotly debated (Penner 28). What seems most relevant in these cases is deeper consideration given to the existent cultural conditions that will continue to have significant influence over audiences' perceptions and interpretations.

### --- FROM SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY TO PURIFICATION ---

Just as Artaud was intent upon exceeding the matter of aesthetics so was he seeking release from the repressive prison of corporeality in a defiled world ruled by demonic powers (Sontag xlvii). Emulating Gnostic philosophical underpinnings, his theatre would enact communalized rites because good "is always upon the outer face, but the face within is evil" (Artaud 104). The theatre of cruelty was addressed "to total man" whom would undergo a potent spiritual alchemy (qtd. in Sontag xlvii). For Artaud the body could be reborn in the mind and thought reborn in the flesh (Sontag xxxvi). Instead of reconciliation, or reassurances, his audiences would therefore be swept up in the sensory violence of a transmogrifying ordeal (Sontag xxxii). Their mythic journeys were to transgress beyond art patronage and partake in the sacred, beyond the flesh into the spiritual, from delirium to euphoria (Jamieson 29, 34). Because

the world of demons can exist as matter, however, this mysterious alchemy would ever-perpetuate the required material metamorphosis: "Hell is of this world and there are men who are unhappy escapees from hell, escapees destined ETERNALLY to re-enact their escape" (Sontag 100).

Indeed, Artaud insisted that the only real value of theatre was this excruciating "magical relation to reality and danger" (89). His emphasis upon forceful imagery, the attack upon audience's nervous sensibilities, and the "mass and extent" of his spectacles would penetrate their "entire organism" (Artaud 86-87). Therein a theatre of assaults would perform a unique metonymy of action, doubly working upon an audience's senses as much as their spiritual being, so as to be awoken 'twice reborn' (Sontag xlii, xxxviii). Within this very "serious theatre," an actor would become a "soul-specter," and act as a "true healer" (Artaud 84, 135). With a "fiery magnetism," Artaud explained, the theatre of cruelty would act "upon us like a spiritual therapeutics whose touch can never be forgotten" (84-85).

Though not concerned with purification, Grotowski was also interested in generating a symbolic but "secular holiness," to the extent that he too was criticized for indifference to socio-political situations (qtd. in Carlson 456). Rather than a magically cataclysmic process, he believed that audiences needed to reach a self-understanding, and that this led to the unification of their body and soul (Carlson 469). He stated that because Artaud explained the unknown by the unknown, magic with magic, and cosmic trance as cosmic trance, one could interpret the spiritual attributes of his theatre of cruelty in any number of preferable ways (Grotowski 60, 62).

In reference to Artaud's mythic sorcery Grotowski wrote that a forward use of myth transgresses, combats, and confronts today's traditions and values (Grotowski 62). He felt that myth, in this way, could expose the underbelly of our problems while situating individuals in relation to the collective (Auslander 24). Myth could no longer act as an exaltation of the past, or in this case mystical, values. He saw its pertinence as reliant upon the experience of generations, and even if creating a contemporary myth, he warned the work then may too greatly depend on conventions (Grotowski 62). As with transmission of Brook's sacred acts, the question of originality and familiarity is one of conflicting and sometimes undermining predicament.

Grotowski came to recognize what Bely had already and other artists would later lament, that a shared belief was necessary, and only a small number among an audience might be eager for a spiritual experience (Carlson 457).

In order for Artaud's plague to transmit identically among audiences, even if facilitated by magical spectacles, mythical allegories best emphasize contemporary relevance over violent affects (Baker 17). As with the condition of psychosis for patients, the success of performative instantiations requires a 'toward-belief' disposition from spectators, thereby exceeding a 'suspension of disbelief'. In each case this a difficult collective experience to encapsulate in plural societies. That Artaud's imaginings are primarily spirit world encounters present conditions under which a popular theatre for Western masses remains, to-date, implausible.

**--- FROM POLEMIC TO THE IMPOSSIBLE THEATRE ---**

The first and only opportunity the artist had to attempt his theatre of cruelty was in the mounting of *Le Cenci*, in 1935, a script he adapted about an evil 16th Count intent on defying the social order of his day (see fig. 4)(Jamieson 45). While the presentation was crafted to bombard and disorientate audiences' senses, it was otherwise a traditional production, and was castigated by critics and spectators alike (Jamieson 48-50). Roger Blin, who worked closely on the project, explained they had intended only to lay the groundwork for future productions (Jamieson 50). When questioned about the reasons he did not realize his intentions, Artaud wrote that he encountered financial and applicability issues, having deviated from his ideal framework while also feeling overwhelmed by the work (Sontag 343). With the advent of poor reviews the artist had felt creatively humiliated, was now financially destitute, and never attempted another theatre project (Jamieson 50). Artaud's very great influence after his death would, ironically, originate with his written arguments rather than his practice.

Fig. 4. Antonin Artaud in "Les Cenci", 1935; "Artaud ce Mômo"; *VEF Blog*; 12 April 2017, http://artaud.vefblog.net/10.html

Though taken to extremes, all of the most practical aspects of the artist's proposal can be traced back to the symbolist movement, but had been reconditioned to adhere to his own belief system. Likewise, it was more Artaud's symptomatic experiences of surreality than Surrealism's decrees which is evident in his envisioning of a theatre of cruelty. Perhaps it is for these reasons the most problematic contradictions Artaud's writing presents us with are exemplified by his inspired theoretical explications – representing what was most unique about his proposal - and a lack of pragmatism where application of practice was concerned. Where the prior pushed beyond all limits the latter could not hope to succeed.

Jacques Derrida [1930-2004] located this problem at the juncture in which Artaud argues for a pure theatre but expects pure presence (43). Upon reviewing the artist's wider body of writing Derrida uncovers a fundamental premise upon which the artist's life-long vision relied: His theatre of cruelty "would be the art of difference and of expenditure without economy, without reserve, without return, without history," which is in fact impossible by the very nature of performance artworks (43).

This statement at first appears to contradict Artaud's intent to prepare actors with rigorous techniques in an already-codified system. The promise of repetition was described as ensuring the ability to reproduce at will distortions of speech and expressions, gestures and movement affects instantaneously. He also seemingly defended the role of repetition, against the discursive qualities of literature, when acknowledging that the spoken word and gesture can never be delivered the same way twice (Artaud 78). As live performance practitioners, we recognize this as an issue of temporality, which ensures the impossibility of pure repetition. We are also reticent to describe the performing body as merely a representational object, understanding the energetic and metonymic dynamic between audience and performer, and that the issue of control of interpretation actually lay with the former. Artaud did not recognize the bodily boundaries of individualized actors or participants, treating them as an undefined collective looking glass instead. In this context his contradictory intentions for a timeless theatrical insurrection then appears to us as an absorptive but closed system. No mutual worldliness would be reference-able there and no image could survive its delivery. This is, of course, undermined by the degree to which audiences determine what is representational, metaphoric, allegorical, or standing in for

some attribute of their reality. It is in this same light that Derrida points to the re-presentational fact of separation between the artist and their work while engaged with by another.

Derrida also notes that Artaud's art was not so much a work as an energy, and as the theatre of cruelty was to objectify the contents of his subjective experiences, one cannot hope to generate in audiences a double of his hunger for intensity (Gorelick 271, 266). The artist was motivated to arouse from the stage a Dionysian state of consciousness that is, beyond concretizing sensory referents, essentially unrepresentable (Baker 10). Further, in support of Derrida's analysis, Artaud only expected to enlist re-presentational aesthetic processes in service to his greater goal, the live and instantiating invocation of dark powers, unleashed from a spiritual reality concealed beneath our own. Writing of the work of an artist he admired Artaud paid a high compliment, for example, in attributing authenticity to the director's attainment of the sacred. His criticism of the beautifully staged gestures, however, was that the illusionary symbols were actually defining reality - as opposed to conjuring souls to intervene (Artaud 146).

While Artaud's *Theatre and its Double* has inspired countless performers and ensembles to devise their own works, emphasize corporeality, investigate the sacred, explore transgression, and immerse audiences in a sensory orchestration, it is the strictly mystical conceptions behind his theatre of cruelty that has made it unmaterializable. The success of his legacy lay in the hands of practitioners, like those above, who necessarily demystified his theatre of cruelty. Even those aspiring to re-spiritualize theatre, in accordance with their own time and place, selected sparingly from his writings what most inspired innovation. Valuable as this approach has been, ultimately we've all come to agree, the artist's imagination exceeded what has been achievable for the stage. Even Artaud had proudly proclaimed that his theatre ideal was predisposed to exist, and could only be possible if, within another form of civilization altogether (Artaud 117).

## Twenty-first Century Cruelties:

In conclusion I ask we shift our gaze, if but briefly, to what of Artaud's theatrical objectives have become more practically attainable. In the same vein that artists of his generation deviated

from convention, so as to reinvigorate their artforms, so do artists today explore innovative ways of engaging the public. Just as they had debated the benefits of reflecting or challenging the societies they lived in, so are we today situated in a broader cultural milieu, to which we must answer or conform. The advent of new communication technologies, however, has changed the frontiers at which artists of every discipline now establish a presence. The solipsistic character of our involvement with the Internet has equally transformed our conceptions of interactivity, socialization, and immersion. The desire to create more immersive environments, furthering the ways in which an audience participates, is particularly significant in context with broader cultural concerns. Technologically mediated immersion reframes our notions of spectacle, and reintroduces the potential for magical materializations, in ways Artaud could not have dreamt of.

While the extent to which personal agency is promoted far surpasses his vision, the experience of being absorbed into another reality, executed by way of its own peculiar system of signifiers, has become opportune. In an article on the parallels between Artaud's theatre of cruelty and advances in popular new media, Michail Kouratoras states, "it is the digital that seems to embody the essential characteristic of Artaudian drama" (112). He discusses the immersive transference players' experience while navigating avatars in 'survival terror' video games where non-didactic thematic role-playing propels the performance instance (Kouratoras 114). Evolving gamer-computer systems increasingly provide for real world kinetics, in causal relationship with the progression of digital narratives, even while moving away from representational storylines toward the "emergent situation of a playground" (Kouratoras 112). As opposed to spectatorship, here participants can themselves instantiate gestural acts and share in an inner-world journey along with the archetypal characters they handle or encounter, meanwhile also uninhibited by the norms and mores of society. In fact, the most popular games have aroused ethical debates surrounding shocking and violent graphics, designed specifically to excite players (Kouratoras 108).

The advent of virtual reality (VR) presents unique opportunities for immersion in an alternate version of the real. Virginia Heffernan reports on a lasting physical disorientation, and immediately vomiting, after donning a D.I.Y headset at the New Frontier program at the Sundance Film Festival in 2012 (1). She relates this experience to Artaud's desire to engulf

spectators "in a tumultuous vortex that would leave them powerless and unable to escape" (Heffernan 5). While developers work toward stabilizing the affect of virtual forays, and some argue these adventures may illuminate otherwise obscured attributes of reality, the future of VR is as much tied to the future of gaming (Cogburn & Silox 564). With the "establishment of technology-driven kinaesthetics," Kouratoras adds, the physical gamer-computer relationship is evolving to blur distinctions "between real and virtual space" (111-112). Transmediated theatre, in the conceivable future, is also likely to succeed in provoking immediate sensate engagement between the participant and the digital performance situation (Kouratoras 113). This directly embodied experience might be seen as transferable the way Artaud's plague was, with the vested interest of the players, immersed in frightening hallucinations (Kouratoras 113). The future of such technology promises to accommodate our plot to escape. The potential of illusory omnipotence, where by our will we reorganize the meaning of forms, will be born with computational ubiquity.

Technological experimentation with spatially immersive environments also extends the degree to which participants can experience concrete bodily sensation. While I was a student under the supervision of Chris Salter, at Concordia University in Montreal, I visited the artist's installation of "Atmosphere" (2011). The work was intended as a "a series of ephemeral, sensorial-architectural environments combining RGB LED light, barely perceivable sound, infrared heat and haze" (*chrissalter.com*). It represents just one of many contemporary scenographically premised works that aim to disrupt our embodied habits of occupying space. At junctures the combination of mist, flickering lighting, a vibratory soundscape was disconcerting. The impacts of being absorbed within the drama of sensory signals prompted destabilization. While attendees shared in this experience together the degree to which we were disturbed by the enlivened environment was entirely subjective. This individualized context within which participants become performative agents marks a trend where artists are concerned more with the solitary body than the mind. In such cases the relationship between subject and object either collapses or conflates, as visitors become the locus of affectual experimentation, and a transformation of corporeal states faintly echoes Artaud's fantasy of transmutation.

What these examples have in common is a desire to more fully impact the whole of one's 'organism' - like that of Artaud's snake charmer. While on one hand such aims seem to arise naturally from our progressively sedentary way of life in the West, on the other hand it appears we are moving toward threat of affective embattlement, in ways that are analogous to the artist's descriptions of darkly conceived spectacles. While generating disruptions often reflects intent to encourage new perspectives, on the other hand, many of these environments prompt psycho-sensual discontinuities and fissures. In an attempt to employ habit disruption as a strategy that is antithetical to the latter, for example, some of my own tests with interactive technologies were designed to explore ways in which visitors might feel more stable and complete.

As with the creation of a successful symbolic language for the stage, creation of experiences of disruption is contingent upon recognition of convention, place-centric normative ritual, and cultural expectations in general. Therefore I plotted installation scenarios that would at first seem familiar to visitors. For example, I interpreted a symbolic relationship between mirrors and our political emphasis upon personal image and discursive societal identities, so began technical trials for a potential installation of mirrors lining a hallway. Through use of an object orientated programming system and video projections upon two-way mirrors, the reflected image of a visitor would include insertion of their own facial expressions from the recent past. Instead of disorientation this movement-triggered disruption was intended to encourage a sense of physical difference and corporeal selfhood. At other times reflections of pedestrians would be joined with seeming-reflections of past visitors, drawing attention to our situatedness as social actors. In related experiments ambient lighting would make the mirrors transparent, revealing the presence of multiple visitors to one another, in the place of their own image. These potentials are only a few examples of alternate ways in which we might imagine interactive immersions constituting fresh experiential understandings of ourselves and in relation to others.

Of course, not all art and technology producers are intent on overwhelming participants but there are predominate cultural trends which, taken together, suggest that we are already immersed in vicarious theatres of cruelty.

Matthew Causey, for example, counts the common act of television binge watching as a "techno-performative immersion" which has also influenced approaches to mediated performance artworks (13). The popularity of high-production value serials with contents that are hyperreal, violent and transgressive, now represents the new norm. As a frightening nonfictional example, Jeffrey Stern analyses the theatrics of terrorism, referring to the attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 (3). He notes the congruencies in Artaud's desire "to deconstruct the logos at the heart of the social order itself" by way of a violence that is rooted in "the idea of perpetual conflict" (Stern 4). Our habitual involvement with social media, and our ability to instantly document, exposes to us more directly to brutality and other distressing situations taking place in the world. From visceral terrorist assassinations, to the horror of those caught in wars overseas, to the shocking injustice of police shootings at home. Providing also for immediate (and arguably too often theatrical) responses from political leadership, competing pundits and commentators, and highly reactive materials produced by citizenry online.

We can see in the recent U.S. election, for example, the remarkable and insatiable demand for spectacle circularly generated by media coverage of Donald Trump's campaign and presidency. Reportage of his showmanship easily paralleled the episodic sensationalism of a reality TV show and somehow recast an ostentatious multi-millionaire as the voice of a disenfranchised population. This coverage also stoked circulation of white supremacy, xenophobic, and sexist materials online. Arguments that such acts liberated their originators from taboo policed by 'political correctness' generated emotional virtual confrontations and fear-fuelled real-world unrest. Joel Whitebook, director of the Psychoanalytic Studies Program at Columbia University, wrote for the New York Times that Trump's dystopic world of alternate facts has generated psychotic-like phenomena (Whitebook). It seems that affectively bewildering spectacle, acting directly upon the sensibility of spectators, has become a defining cultural attribute of our age.

Artaud's claim to cruelty reflects his judgment of the unfeeling world within which he suffered, the violent plague with which he was inflicted, a cosmos of menacing shadows, and his general state of indifference to others. Beyond arguing the purpose of the theatre, as both malediction and panacea, he was not sensitive to sociological circumstances. His terrible experience of alienation prevented him from acknowledging the thoroughly nonsensical and

massively violent phenomena of two world wars and several civil clashes, all of which featured prominently as conditions of his broader cultural circumstance, and was reflected in the aims of many of his contemporaries. His inability to empathize with the struggles and traumas of others was, as even he confessed, another barrier to his sharing in mutual causes. That this is evident in his prescriptions for a theatre of cruelty, for artists like Brook and Grotowski, attenuated the desirability of his darker predilections. Accordingly, we would benefit from acknowledging the dark underbelly of our contemporary reality is adequately exposed, that we know perpetual shocks leave little room for experience of catharsis, and that the forces of antipathy now prevail in our awareness.

While still at Concordia University I had the opportunity to work with a small group of students interested in exploring new environments as physical theatre artists. A project in development at the time, spear-headed by Michael Montanaro and Sha Xin Wei, provided a technologically



Fig. 5. "Einstein's Dream" 2010-2013; *Topological Media Lab*; Concordia University Montreal; 12 April 2017. http://topologicalmedialab.net/research/movement-and-gesture/media-choreography/einsteins-dream/

responsive apparatus within which we worked. At this stage "Einstein's Dream" was an immersive experience of subtly interactive "fields of video, light, and spatialized sound, in a set of tableaus" (see fig. 5) (*Topological Media Lab*). Our unmet challenge was to understand how theatrical performers might compliment or, better, integrate as part of the broader poesis visitors would encounter. While we could conclude that further trials would be necessary, commencing at the most rudimentary level of performative presence, the brief experiment raised more questions than answers. Digital theatre and mediated live performance preserves degrees of theatrical convention these new environments do not afford. The performing arts carries within its realm valuable strategies to engage, which differ in character from other creative media, but how will we go about relearning our relationship to visitors? The experiential drama of immersion in a responsive environment offers an embodied journeying, that does not require professional performers, but how can this lend to the collective stories we want to tell? Why would we hope to bridge this divide? The desire to engage persons as whole corporeal entities, undermining the

Cartesian dualism that still prevails as an attitude in our societies, remains as fervent as Artaud's aims to overcome inner divisions of consciousness.

Sass contends that the schizoid personality epitomizes what was distinctive about cultural movements in Modernism. If we consider the trajectory of its Postmodernism offspring as upon that continuum, where an intense hyper-reflexive focus upon the self is both subject and the object of experience, is the symptomology of schizophrenia also emblematic of our times (Sass 29, 90)? In fact, in as early as 1968 Grotowski declared: "Civilisation is sick with schizophrenia, which is a rupture between intelligence and feeling, body and soul" (Grotowski 63). Franco Berardi revisits Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 1972 mapping of "the formation of the schizo-psychosphere" adding that as an analogy today "psychosis is taking the central place of neurosis as prevailing clinical condition" (114). He writes that, forty years after Deleuze and Guattari's treatise on capitalism, "we have to abandon the emphasis on the liberating potential of desire and of schizoid expressivity, and replace the assumption of infinite energy of desire with a new consciousness of exhaustion, a consciousness of the limits of living organisms" (Berardi 115). Indeed, while Artaud grew only more to resent the limitations of corporeality, his liberating experiences of psychosis also made him vulnerable to subsequent psychotic episodes. Completely detached from reality he would, from 1937 until his death in 1948, reside in medical asylums.

Fig. 6. Antonin Artaud at the Rodez asylum; "Antonin Artaud: The asylums and after"; *Jacket 2*; 12 April 2017, http://jacket2.org/commentary/antonin-artaud-asylums-and-after

The twenty-first century world in which we live is hyper-individualistic and increasingly alienating, even while we more frequently extend fragments of our own consciousness into timeless digital dreamscapes, consuming captivating ethereal audio-visual objects, bombarded with the clashing forces of extremist-cum-ideologues, and thanks to automation working faster than humanly possible, each of us is swept up in the frenzy of capitalist delusions of excess. In such a cultural landscape emphasis upon finite energies, interdependent needs, and bodily integrity may today be considered a political act. Above all, in his first decades of life, Artaud

longed for an opportunity to feel whole. Though the theatrical has permeated so much of the rest of our lives, and the theatre challenges itself to revitalizing in this new century, I continue to believe live performance encounters hold this kind of promise.

While new technologies provide for a plethora of event styles, as well as yet to be developed novelties, live performers are still uniquely positioned to provide for the social potentials of bodily presence. Whereas Artaud's prescriptions turn a blind eye to plurality in the context of presenting alternate realities - one of the enduring strengths of live performance is in its temporal bringing together a plurality of bodies, histories, mindsets, and beliefs, to share in a communal reality. The opportunity for metonymic engagement, between participants and performers, can emphasize for example the function of empathy and offer insight upon difference. Emotion and sensation, in response to performers and the environment, contextualize shared experiences that together we can be accountable for. This is not to say that we should refrain from challenging the public or habits of convention. Quite the contrary. As an artist investigating technological potentials in cross-disciplinary practices, I'm concerned with how we can posit alternatives, or defy the cultural ambiance within which we create experiences for others.

These are but considerations intended as open questions regarding the ethos behind our creative experiments, in a world that readily exceeds in its promotion of cruelty, and that is couched within sensational spectacle. In stark contrast, and as if to provide a summary explanation for his parting ways with Artaud, Breton stated that one could too easily forget that: "Surrealism has had an enormous capacity for love, and that what it violently condemned were precisely the things that impaired love" (Breton & Parinaud 13).

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