Artaud's Holy Theater: A Case for Questioning the Relations between Ritual and Stage Performance*

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Artaud's Afterlife and Life

Today, the name of Antonin Artaud, who died in 1948 at the age of 51 after years in asylums and psychiatric clinics, is a landmark in both the practical and theoretical fields of theater aesthetics. The now famous leading figures of post-war neo-avantgarde revolt against the theater as a place for the routine worshipping of the classics—Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, Richard Schechner, Julian Beck, Eugenio Barba, and Ariane Mnouchkine—all pointed to the landmark Artaud as if to say: behold the Holy Icon of the new order that we are going to establish on the ruins of an outworn bourgeois convention. This testifies to Artaud's influence on stage practice. In aesthetic theory, as far as this thinking to the second degree is concerned with critically investigating the boundaries between philosophy and the arts, the French author's writings are going through a process of canonization, especially since he was made famous by the homage paid to him in the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Susan Sontag.

Let us also not forget the copyright for the neo-avantgarde Happenings bestowed on the playwright by Jean-Paul Sartre, who argued that the Happening should follow Artaud's belief that only theatrical actions are apt to release the violence latent within the spectators (see Hayman 1977, 158). Surprisingly, Sartre's speculation is backed up by some strange evidence. In 1952, at Black Mountain College in the United States, a so-called 'Untitled Event' was put on, which fulfilled all the—to use a paradox—'anarchic rules' we expect when attending a Happening. The composer John Cage, the poet Charles Olson, the painter Robert Rauschenberg, and the dancer Merce Cunningham were the protagonists in this peculiar mixed-media event, the thorough description of which would perhaps give some clues to the dialec-

* I am very grateful to Jonathan Long for his kind help in improving my English.

tics of ritual and anti-ritual. The performance of the Event entailed a radical destruction of the conventions we are accustomed to when attending the opening of an exhibition, a musical premiere or a performance by a modern ballet troupe. Admittedly, it might be the retrospective canonizing view of the historian which gives the anti-ritualistic Event the meaning of a new ritual called the Happening, whose intention was to set free the energies kept under anesthesia by the sublimating force of conventional cultural performances and artistic forms. But precisely this intention can be detected as one of Artaud's most powerful inclinations.

One part of the Black Mountain Event consisted in reading aloud passages from the first English translation of Artaud's *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté* while Robert Rauschenberg simultaneously fixed his *White Paintings* to the ceiling and the musician David Tudor rigorously 'played' a prepared piano. While this was going on, the initiator of the Untitled Event, John Cage, who had been prompted to read Artaud by Pierre Boulez, shocked the audience with one of his famous compositions with a radio. To sum up: the 1952 Untitled Event did not present a given plot or world vision, nor did it tell a story furnished with dramatic adventures and individual characters, it just happened in order to demonstrate nothing but the very act of performing, and it left—quite literally, and fully in accordance with one of Artaud's central claims—a void at the center, signifying the absence of the work of art. It is, I think, quite appropriate in this context to quote a relevant remark by Michel Foucault, which might give the void a little bit of a shape: "Madness," he writes in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, "is precisely the absence of the work of art, the reiterated presence of that absence, its central void experienced and measured in all its endless dimensions. ... The world," Foucault continues, in his defense of the subversive powers of artistic madness, "the world that thought to measure and justify madness through psychology must justify itself before madness, since in its struggles and agonies it measures itself by the excess of works like those of Nietzsche, of van Gogh, of Artaud" (Foucault 1973, 287, 289). Before we follow Foucault, let us look once more at the Untitled Event from the angle of a theater historian. From this angle—I oversimplify—the whole thing looks very much like a parody of Artaud's blueprint, because a parody—as we may recall—is something that is *meant* to be that thing which it actually *is not*. Moreover, the technique of outperforming the performance reminds us of the carnivalesque actions propagated and made manifest by the Italian Futurists—see Federico Tommaso Marinetti's *Teatro di Varietà* (1913)—and of the ugly performances of the German Dadaists.

If, then, we follow Foucault, we have to state a paradox, since no 'art works' by Artaud exist, at least not in the traditional sense of the word. Instead there is absence and—if we take a close look at his writings—there is a wild longing for a new art, or better, for what he himself calls "renouveler la culture" (Artaud 1978, 218). Artaud is convinced that there is a gap between art and culture, which cannot be closed by art alone because art is not mimetic, hence does not imitate life—in his own words: "L'Art n'est pas l'imitation de la vie," yet, he continues, art—that is, the art of performance—could reestablish the lost links with the transcendent principle of life: "principe transcendant avec lequel l'art nous remet en communication" (Artaud 1978, 242). My point is that Artaud, who apparently knew Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* (1923) very well and hated like him the modern "éclatement des valeurs" (the shattering of values) (Artaud 1971, 69) sought the foundations of a new beginning by diving deep into the sacred ocean of an imagined pre-modern communal culture, at the very heart of which ritual gestures and totemic signs speak for themselves. And yet he did not trust his own intentions and in one of his late writings even talked about ritual as a fraudulent trick (see Artaud 1979, 63).

To find out if this can be called a contradiction and, if so, how it could be made comprehensible, I first will recapitulate very quickly a few biographical facts and then go explore some theoretical arguments, without wishing to get swamped by detail. Finally, my last step will lead to Artaud's peculiar view of the Balinese theater. This will provide a platform for addressing, on a more general level, some of the specific problems concerning the explanation of repetition and change, of similarities and differences between theater and ritual, and so on.

All of Artaud's ideas and convictions that I have mentioned so far are deeply rooted in a subjective state of mind with a strong affinity to what the author himself liked to call Alchemy: the art of transition, transmutation or metamorphosis. And if we take this seriously, which I have decided to do, we should not expect a standardized or evenly balanced discourse. The fascination of Artaud's writings has its own poetic logic, and this logic to some degree echoes the author's personal experience. This is particularly the case if one considers all those circumstances which have to do with the pain and anguish an author has to endure when he is pushed by a creative urge to go beyond all known linguistic expressions. Artaud's poetic beginnings as a member of André Breton's surrealist group seemed to be a failure, but in a very characteristic way eventually turned out to be a success: Jacques Rivière, in the early 1920s editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* rejected the poems of the young writer. The very same Jacques Rivière, however,

subsequently published his correspondence with the newcomer in which Artaud explained the difficulties he had to go through while trying to transform his vivid visions into written language: "As a poet," he later wrote when experimenting with something like a private language, "I hear voices which are no longer part of the world of ideas" (Artaud 1983, 9, my translation, D.H.). This seems to me an adequate expression for what he experienced when feeling that he could not close the gap between an exploding imagination and the impoverished tool of traditional language; an experience to which, in the opening essay of *Le théâtre et son double*, he gave the weight of a programmatic sentence: "Briser le langage pour toucher la vie" (Shatter language in order to get in touch with life) (Artaud 1978, 14).

I will leave the meaning of 'life' to further comments and for the moment assert that to get in touch with life apparently meant: to get in touch with the stage. In 1927 Artaud, together with Robert Aron and the playwright Roger Vitrac, opened his own theater, the Théâtre Alfred Jarry. In the years before this—having lost his surrealist membership—Artaud acted in several Paris productions staged by Charles Dullin (1885–1949) and by Georges Pitoëff (1884–1939), both directors with a remarkable sense for the new and—we may recall—for meta-theatrical actions including the study of Japanese stage productions. Artaud did not make a real career as a successful and notable actor-director either on the stage or screen where he could be seen from time to time during subsequent years as a bit-part actor. Neither did he gain the sympathy of the audience with his own theater productions. If we want to find out why there is so much magic and charisma in Artaud's name, we therefore have to consult his writings, notwithstanding the fact that he himself often enough blamed literacy for the deplorable *éclatement des valeurs* that he, along with so many contemporaries, considered the stigma of modern culture.

The Attraction of Fragmentary and Double Thinking

To get a better grasp of Artaud's writings, let me briefly address the genesis, the scope, and the particular tone of Artaud's writings. The bulk of the texts printed in the 16 volumes of the Paris edition of his complete works were published posthumously. Artaud himself was—as we have seen—a critic of literate culture and preferred oral articulation and direct communication of thought. A lot of his texts meant for publication were not written down by himself, but dictated. And as a—probably intended—outcome of this procedure the reader is confronted again and again with a lively, often fickle, or

rather porous text-surface and with a fragmentary deep structure of discourse. A striking example is *Le théâtre et son double*, a small book he published in 1938 in a print-run of four hundred copies in the Gallimard collection *Métamorphoses* without any public resonance worth mentioning. Today this book is regarded as Artaud's masterpiece, despite or because of the fact that its structure and contents are far removed from the expectations of a reader who looks for unity, for coherence, and neatly composed terminology. *Le théâtre et son double* contains a diversity of reports, notes, aphoristic fragments, extracts, letters, essays, lectures and manifestos, the first draft written down in 1932, the last one revised in 1936 during the author's stay in Mexico. But the particular attraction of the author's scattered thoughts for the neo-avantgarde theater practitioners obviously lies in his sometimes descriptive, sometimes confused, and quite often normative discourse about the organic structure of his new theater and the impact of its attraction on the sensibility of both actors and spectators. Dealing with the techniques of acting, staging, stage design (especially lighting) and with particular forms of verbal and nonverbal expression, Artaud's writings still offer a neat, easy-to-handle building kit for the devotee of an alternative theater culture.

Perhaps one can say that there is a double orientation, or even better, double thinking in Artaud's claim to give French and European theater, or Western culture in general, a powerful and formative place in social life. This double orientation is very clearly alluded to by the title of his book *Le théâtre et son double*, though this title was recommended to him by a close friend (Jean Paulhan). It says that there is a specific form of institutionalized performance art with all its technical accoutrements built around a something, which, although it cannot be represented, cries out for representation. This mysterious something—called *le double*—is none other than life itself. So it is not by chance that Artaud uses the notion 'energy' when speaking about the effecting power his theater, which—as we will see later—is both new and old at the same time, should exert on the spectator. "Le théâtre lieu de la magie, de l'appel des notions et des energies" (Artaud 1978, 245), reads a note in *Dossier du théâtre et son double*, and Artaud continues that it is time (my translation, D.H.): "to rediscover those energies within ourselves which create order and give rise again to the stock of life (*et font remonter le taux de la vie*)." This energy, being the tension, which is, built up trough the antagonistic motion of two opposing forces—Eugenio Barba's formula is 'balance in action' (see Barba 1995, 16ff.)—this energy in Artaud's conception has its offspring in the thrilling and never ending interchange between chaos and order. If I am not mistaken, this is the meaning of what the author himself sometimes calls 'metaphysics'; and 'cruelty' seems to be nothing

else but the organic, the life-centered substance of the abstract philosophical term.

To show the mind-boggling and challenging *Sprachspiel* (linguistic play) the interpreter of Artaud's writings has to cope with, let me quote a central passage from the author's *Second Letter on Cruelty*, first published in 1932:

> La cruauté n'est pas surajoutée à ma pensée; elle y a toujours vécu: mais il me fait en prendre conscience. J'emploie le mot de cruauté dans le sens d'appétit de vie, de rigueur cosmique et de nécessité implacable, dans le sens gnostique de tourbillon de vie qui dévore les ténèbres, dans le sens de cette douleur hors de la nécessité inéluctable de laquelle la vie ne saurait s'exercer; le bien est voulu, il est le résultat d'un acte, le mal est permanent. Le dieu caché quand il crée obéit à la nécessité cruelle de la création qui lui est imposée à lui—même, et il ne peut pas ne pas créer, donc ne pas admettre au centre du tourbillon volontaire du bien un noyau de mal de plus en plus réduit, de plus en plus mangé. Et le théâtre dans le sens de création continue, d'action magique entière obéit à cette nécessité. Une pièce où il n'y aurait pas cette volonté, cet appétit de vie aveugle, et capable de passer sur tout, visible dans chaque geste et dans chaque acte, et dans le côté transcendant de l'action, serait une pièce inutile et manquée. (Artaud 1978, 98)

The English translation by Victor Corti reads as follows:

> Cruelty is not an adjunct to my thoughts, it has always been there, but I had to become conscious of it. I use the word cruelty in the sense of hungering after life, cosmic strictness, relentless necessity, in the Gnostic sense of a living vortex engulfing darkness, in the sense of the inescapably necessary pain without which life could not continue. Good has to be desired, it is the result of an act of willpower, while evil is continuous. When the hidden god creates, he obeys a cruel need for creation imposed on him, yet he cannot avoid creating, thus permitting an ever more condensed, ever more consumed nucleus of evil to enter the eye of the willed vortex of good. Theatre in the sense of constant creation, a wholly magic act, obeys this necessity. A play without this desire, this blind zest for life, capable of surpassing everything seen in every gesture or every act, in the transcendent aspect of the plot, would be useless and a failure as theatre. (Artaud 1995, 80)

This passage, I think, reveals some of the basic aspects of Artaud's conception. I will try to give a very condensed account of my own, rather idiosyncratic reading: the text tells us something about a Gnostic, that is, a dualistic view of life. It is a view which attempts to think Good and Evil, Life and Death at the same time, like a pair of absolute powers chained to each other and dancing in a whirl (this is the meaning of the French *tourbillon*): on the one hand life is creation, is *appétit de vie* or *tourbillon de vie*—I prefer the German *Lebenstrieb* and *Lebensstrudel* to Victor Corti's slightly incorrect translation—on the other hand it is *Todestrieb* (the death-drive),

consummation, devouring or—to quote another of Artaud's difficult combinations— "un massacre qui est une transfiguration" (both massacre and transfiguration) (Artaud 1978, 100). To make this invisible whirl of antagonistic powers not only visible, but also perceptible to all senses, is the idea behind all of Artaud's endeavors. There is, however, one powerful handicap he is challenged to cope with, and this is the predominance of the written text and of the dramatic author, contemporary French theater being highly dependant upon literature and a type of performance which, in Artaud's eyes, is dominated by an old fashioned style quaintly affiliated with a corrupt moralistic and psychological world view.

In a letter to André Gide (August 7, 1932) Artaud applied the aesthetic idea of constant creation to his personal vocation as a future theater director, calling himself a "creator or inventor of a theatrical reality which is absolute and self-sufficient" (Hayman 1977, 83). The absolute or, as he sometimes called it, the virtual reality of the theatrical performance is not dependant upon a traditional stage, though the space where it should unfold its energetic powers and the relevant technical support are a central object of Artaud's ruminations. This has a lot to do with his claim to do away with the written dramatic text, in order to develop 'another language': "langage dans l'espace," "langage visuel des objets, des mouvements, des attitudes, des gestes," "langage de sons, de cris, de lumières, d'onomatopées" (spatial language—the visual language of things, of movements, attitudes, gestures—the language of sounds, cries, of lights and onomatopoeia) (Artaud 1978, 86). The other language or language of otherness described here is not just confined to what we usually call body-language. Artaud gives it a mediating place between body and mind: "à mi-chemin entre le geste et la penseé" (Artaud 1978, 86), and frequently alludes to a ritual background. "Le théâtre," he notes in the *First Manifesto* for the *Theatre of Cruelty*, "n'est qu'un reflet ... de la magie et des rites" (Artaud 1978, 88). It is, therefore, not surprising to find out that Artaud uses terms such as *théâtre alchimique* and *théâtre sacré* in order to express his zest for cultural change which is not content with criticizing the status quo. Rather, he wanted to overthrow long-term traditions in order to establish a type of performance, which can be acted and understood by all humans, regardless of their origin and background, because the expressive means of this performance are timeless, universal and yet energetic in the sense of a transforming power. The pragmatic performativity of a coinage like 'holy theater' is no mystery: it is thought to keep the issue safe from outside critical interventions.

Experiencing the Orient in Paris

Speaking of another language, which—in my view—has to be understood as a language of otherness, is justified if we take seriously Artaud's view of the cultural difference between the Orient and the Occident. Our author here is quite in accord with those eurocentric prejudices Edward Said has detected as the driving force behind an imagined Orient and the resultant Orientalism (see Said 1979). In several texts, Artaud confronts the literary culture of the Occident with a culture of magical gestures and rhythms, which—he claims—is the genuine oriental language, a language of signs that could only be perceived on the stage of the Oriental, that is, the Asian theater.

During the 1922 Colonial Exhibition at Marseille he had seen a Cambodian dance group. In 1931 he saw in Paris—there was again a Colonial Exhibition—the performance of a Balinese group and immediately wrote down what he had seen and which aspects had made the deepest impression on him. It was a most remarkable occasion: the Balinese group from Peliatan performed a collage of classical religious and secular dances conducted by its German-born curator Walter Spies. Artaud was not the only admirer of the Balinese performance in Paris. Beryl de Zoete, a British theater critic, and Miguel Covarrubias, an anthropologist and painter, who, in 1937, was to put Bali on the map with a popular book, joined in (see Covarrubias 1973). De Zoete and Spies had studied Eurythmics in Hellerau (near Dresden) with Jacques Dalcroze, an important theater reformer. After extensive research in the late 1930s, they published the still useful classic *Dance and Drama in Bali* (see De Zoete and Spies 1982). Spies was also a painter who had attended the classes of the Berlin-based poet-painter Oskar Kokoschka, another famous representative of a progressive modern art and theater culture. The influence of Spies on Balinese dance and painting during the years before the Paris exhibition is a well-known and well-documented fact. All this I mention here because it makes evident that Artaud did not see what he believed to be pure Oriental theater. He witnessed, as it were, the drama of the rapid cultural change that took place in Bali under the rule of the Dutch colonial power, the cultural change being forced upon the islanders as 'Balisering,' a Dutch slogan, the correct reading of which is *Balinisation of the Balinese* (see Hitchcock & Norris 1995). I'm not sure if Artaud had the right intuition when he said, in a lecture he delivered in 1936 to an audience in Mexico: "Les extraordinaires représentations du Théâtre Balinais à l'Exposition coloniale ... font, pour moi, partie du mouvement théâtral en France" (Artaud 1971, 68).

Artaud's descriptions of the sign-language he perceived in Balinese dance and drama are striking because of their imaginative and fascinating verbal inspirations. He himself admitted that he could not decipher the signs but frequently made comparisons with ritual gestures. The most striking features for Artaud, however, were the bodily distortions and asymmetrical robes of the dancers, which he liked to compare with the pictographic, in this case strangely animated, characters of Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese ideograms. If you ever have seen a Hip Hop or Rave show with its entire vibes, its energetic and technical seductions, you probably will be able to follow Artaud's descriptions of the animated images he hallucinated immediately after his visit to the Exposition Coloniale:

> syncopated modulations at the back of the throat, brutal jerks, angular postures, rustling branches, the musical angle formed by arm and forearm, a rarefied aviary where the actors themselves are the fluttering, machines creaking, animated puppets, musical phrases cut short, hollow sounds, insect flights, etc. (Hayman 1977, 77)

This is not a descriptive report; it is the *invention* of an event.

In Artaud's comparison with animated hieroglyphs and ideograms I see an important clue to the double coding he projected into the Oriental theater by observing the figures in motion from a point of view, which encompasses both the pictorial or aesthetic appearance and a hidden semiotic energy. The fact that Artaud could not decipher the message, increased, so it seems, his enthusiasm and intense delight. In the stylized amalgamations of gestures, rhythms, music and voice, the depersonalized human body appeared to him as a symbol in which physical and metaphysical aspects fused into something that was beyond all social or psychological actuality and beyond the narrative contents of classical Western drama. So it is, on the one hand, surprising that in some passages of his book Artaud advocates, "le retour aux vieux Mythes primitifs" (Artaud 1978, 119). On the other hand, however, this is perhaps nothing but another example of his love for ambiguities and double thinking.

Re-Enchanting Modern Theater

Artaud summarizes his aesthetic experience thus: the enchanting 'revelations' of the Balinese theater travel via 'physical' rather than 'verbal' ideas or imaginations (Artaud 1978, 66). He saw more than an exotic play, he saw what he reported to be "une alchemie mentale" (Artaud 1978, 64) and declared:

> *Dans les réalisations du Théâtre Balinais l'esprit a bien le sentiment que la conception s'est d'abord heurtée à des gestes, a pris pied au milieu de toute une fermentation d'images visuelles ou sonores, pensées comme à l'état pure.* (In the Balinese theater productions the mind certainly has the feeling that the capability of conception met with gestures first and that this capability has taken place right in the middle of a fermentation of visual or acoustic images, imagined as it were in a pure state.) (Artaud 1978, 60, my translation, D.H.)

And yet one cannot deny that Artaud's conception of a modernized *théâtre sacré* was inspired by some sort of abstract religious idea which—at least in his writings about the Theater of Cruelty—had nothing to do with orthodoxy or a confessional creed. But Artaud's frequent use of notions like 'metaphysics' and 'transcendence' obviously points to something behind all phenomena, even if we call this something 'life itself' and interpret it in a rather distancing way as the transcendental condition of all being. I prefer to read those transcendental traces as signs, which point to a hidden but unifying meaning beyond the monotonous and uniform logic of a picture of reality that is both conceptually petrified and weird at the same time. Artaud's dream is the dream of a poet who wants to break up the immobility he himself fears and wants to fill the void left by the scientific disenchantment of life with a principle whose very substance is deeply immersed in and permanently transformed by that particular plasma floating between creation and decay. The key to communicating with this poetic pulsation—'poetic' in the sense of a creative energy—the key is hidden in that nonverbal 'language' that exists between bodily gesture and mind and that Artaud compares with the 'language' of ritual. This sign-language is thought to stimulate the sensibility of both the actors as well as the spectators in order to enhance their ability to approximate by *analogy* the ever-changing order of life. In fact, this does not conform to Aristotle's *Poetics,* since for the Greek the spoken and written word was the master-key to culture and to knowledge. We must not forget that in Aristotle's view the paradigm for all literary genres, tragedy, was a case for *philosophical* and not for religious or theological speculations (see *Poetics* 1453b, 1451b). But I think Artaud's Theater of Cruelty is not so far from this view as it is often represented as being. There is no question that Artaud has to be seen as belonging to a series of anti-Aristotelian dramatists, many of them his precursors in the business of enthusiastically liberating the scope of theatricality from traditions, habits and rusty dogmas: the Swiss stage-designer Adolphe Appia, the English director Edward Gordon Craig, the Italian supra-modernist Federico Tommaso Marinetti, the Russian playwrights and actor-directors Vyacheslav Ivanov and Vsevolod Meyerhold, the German Bauhaus-artist Oskar Schlemmer, etc.—

There is also, of course, no question that Artaud was against the authority of the text and against its dull recitation on stage, which showed nothing but the features of an extravagant but inanimate style.

All this taken for granted, I still insist that Artaud—not unlike Aristotle—saw in theater a means to gain knowledge through a free interplay between sensibility and reason or, to borrow the title of Jon Elster's recent study about rationality and emotions, knowledge through the 'alchemy of the mind' (Elster 1999). Perhaps this can explain Artaud's seemingly ambiguous description of the Balinese theater performance as *architecture spirituelle* (spiritual architecture) and as *pouvoir évocateur* (evocative power) (Artaud 1978, 53), the latter referring to rhythm and physical movement. There is no evidence that Artaud was familiar with Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of the evocative power of speech (Saussure's term is *pouvoir evocatrice*). The affinity, however, is striking. Knowledge—Artaud is convinced—can be obtained while being involved in a play melding the spiritual with the evocative. And this kind of knowledge obviously means self-knowledge, an immediate awareness of one's own existence. As Artaud himself puts it in an aphoristic sentence in his famous *Théâtre de Séraphin*: "Quand je vis je ne me sens pas vivre. Mais quand je joue c'est là que me sens exister" (Artaud 1978, 145).

But that is not all. In his *First Manifesto* on the Theater of Cruelty, the author presents in a rather systematic way an inventory of the techniques, methods, and strategies that the directors, actors, and spectators of the new theater are obliged to follow. Of special interest is what Artaud says about the use of the so-called 'concrete stage-language.' This 'language' comprises verbal as well as musical signs and—last but not least—the transformations of physiognomic expression. And here he discusses the methods, which could be of use for a registration and labeling of all these signs, including even the 'thousand and one' changes of the actor's face (Artaud 1978, 91). So it seems that Artaud not only aims for a new, a concrete, objective and immediately understandable 'language,' but that—like any ethnographer—he is seeking a sound and effective method of description and registration which make it easy to teach the new 'language' in drama school.

We thus see that there is not only a wild rebellion against the old gods, but that there is also a rationale behind Artaud's practical endeavors and challenging writings which should make us wary of classifying his holy theater as an attempt to revive on the modern stage the ritualistic obligations of a religious community. Irritation, of course, is a feeling one cannot avoid when reading Artaud's sometimes programmatic, sometimes ambiguous and sometimes paradoxical writings. But whatever the results of such irritated rea-

dings might be, there is no doubt that Artaud consciously wanted to energize his texts with a *pouvoir evocateur* similar to that evocative power he believed to be the soul of the so called 'oriental language.'

Indefinite Conclusions

Keeping all this in mind, it will not be easy to come to definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, the attempt may be made:

To look at an event and call it a *ritual* or a *theatrical* performance is a question of attitude and of expediency, that is, there is no essential opposition between the two. One and the same performance, be it secular or religious, can be experienced either as ritual or as theater.

Formal features alone are inadequate as explanation; repetitions, to mention this much-debated example, may occur on stage as well as on temple-grounds, but they are not even useful as a measurement of change because there is no repetition without change. And so the intense and ambitious search for change in human actions—customs and habits and rituals—will be entangled in self-contradictions if it does not take into account historicity or at least a theory of temporal dynamics.

Therefore, if we—the disengaged students of different, distant, or even long-extinct cultures—ask for certainty, we tacitly make decisions on the basis of a rationality which not only belongs to our cultural background but is *the* powerful energy dominating and shaping all those operations that we associate with ideas of control and self-control in research.

Artaud, being an artist, had no reason to follow the rationality code of the researcher. And yet his attempt to rejuvenate something like a holy theater, which speaks to the masses with an emotionally stirring but not destructive 'language' of peculiar gestures, movements, rhythms, vibrations, etc., does not in the least preclude the search for a third way by reconciling rationality with sensation. And what is equally important, this search once again made use of the old, stereotyped Orient-Occident comparison, imagining the East as a holistic cosmos with the features of vital ritualism rather than estranged religiosity, and an authentic unity of artistic performance and supernatural communication.

Rituals and liturgies, like all other patterns of religious cult can, of course, form part of those actions we perceive as theater performances even if all the ingredients that we consider specific for the performance of a drama are lacking. Theatricality signifies a specific way of looking at actions comprising the need to interpret not only these actions but also the sensa-

tions and intellectual impressions they cause in the spectator's mind. This need to interpret sets free the impulse to gain knowledge or self-knowledge. In my view, it is bound to that type of aesthetically mediated rationality that I have tried to demonstrate by unraveling Artaud's double thinking.

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