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INTRODUCTION

This essay is an attempt to place Antonin Artaud in the context of modern performance. Up to this point in the history of performance art, with its many variations, little or nothing has been mentioned about Antonin Artaud, without whom none of what we accept today as performance art would be possible. I hope in this essay to acknowledge Artaud's achievements in the formation of a theory of theatre/performance which is as radical today as it was when it was first written. The first two chapters in this essay therefore deal specifically with Artaud and the formation of his theories, while the last chapter concentrates on contemporary performance, in an attempt to identify the strong influences and links that Artaud's work still has with the work produced in the last twenty years.

In chapter one I have dealt in detail with the influences on Artaud which led him to formulate his theories on the theatre. This is important since just as contemporary performance has its roots in Artaud, so did Artaud find much inspiration in diverse areas during his lifetime, therefore just as this first chapter hopes to identify Artaud's influences, it is also an attempt to link performance today to earlier influences through Artaud.

Chapter two deals directly with Artaud's work, his theories for a new theatre and also its implementation. Artaud's influence on modern performance can be seen to stem almost entirely from his writings since his own work in the theatre did not live up to what one might expect from reading Artaud's theories. The first three sections of chapter two deal with the writings of Artaud and concentrate mostly on his theories as published in The Theatre and Its Double, the most important book produced by Artaud which contains almost all of his major theories. These theories

have been divided in the chapter into the three areas where Artaud has been most influential as regards modern performance; stage language, his ideas on cruelty and 'the double', and his recognition of the director (metter-en-scene) as the creative force in the theatre. The last part of chapter two deals with Artaud's implementation of his ideas. However unsuccessful some of them were, these works give a good insight into Artaud, and some works, in particular the solo impromptu performances, are linked very closely to the modern day art performances which are dealt with in chapter three.

The third and final chapter deals with three aspects of performance where Artaud's ideas can still be seen to be forcefully represented. The first is body art very much in the realm of art performance, where there has been much confusion about Artaud. In this section I try to clear up some misconceptions which have developed concerning Artaud, through an ignorance of the essence of his writings among some performers of body art. This section goes on to analyse some performers in body art who closely follow the ideals of Artaud. The second section deals with non-narrative theatre, where Artaud has been most influential to date. Following a general look at some people within this movement who are indebted to Artaud, I look more closely at the work of the most important figure in this movement today, Robert Wilson. Finally there is a section on social/political performance, which is where I feel Artaud's writings have been and can still be, most effective. Despite some differences between social/political theatre and Artaud's writings, there still is, I think, the strongest and most forceful representations of Artaud's ideas to be found in this type of theatre. To illustrate this point I have discussed the work of Peter Schumann and The Bread and Puppet Theatre.

NOTE: Wherever it has been necessary to introduce points which are particular to one chapter, I have done this at the beginning of that chapter for clarity.

CHAPTER I

ARTAUD'S INFLUENCES

In discussing the work of Antonin Artaud it will be helpful to first deal with four vitally important influences which steered Artaud to form the radical views on theatre which he held, the effects of which can still be felt today. The first is Alfred Jarry, theatrical innovator, whose work is the base on which Artaud formed his theories. The second, is the effect that the Surrealist movement had on Artaud. The third, and often regarded as the most critical influence, is that of the Balinese dancers whom Artaud saw perform in Paris in 1931. Finally there is Artaud's mission to Mexico to seek out a pure culture, from which he hoped to gain much inspiration. The four are dealt with chronologically to try to give some sense of the formation of Artaud's theories, but it is important to realise that he was developing these throughout his life and these four factors are milestones in this development of ideas rather than the foundation on which Artaud then built his unique theatre.

ALFRED JARRY

In 1926 Artaud founded his first theatre company with Roger Vitrac and Robert Aron. He named it after the man who more than any other influenced Artaud's work. It was called the Theatre Alfred Jarry. It is not known for certain when Artaud first came into contact with the work of Jarry, but it was probably between 1921-24 as a young actor working with Charles Dullin and Jean Cocteau. Jarry's influence can be seen to stem from two works. The first was the notorious production of Ubu Roi which Jarry presented at the Theatre de l'Oeuvre in 1896 (the year of Artaud's birth). The second and more important influence of the two was Jarry's series of articles on the theatre which Artaud would have read himself, whereas he could only know of Ubu Roi through passed-on accounts of it.

Ubu Roi, produced in 1896 caused a riot on its opening night and established Jarry overnight as the 'enfant terrible' of the theatrical world. The play, a symbolic face, was a loose parody of Oedipus Rex mixed with King Lear which attacked bourgeois complacency and portrayed a cruel violent world as reflected in the activities of the tyrant Ubu, the bourgeois who makes himself King. At the time of the production the play was almost unanimously rejected as a foolish prank. One of the few who realised it's significance was W B Yeats, who attended the opening night, and who foresaw King Ubu would be the heralding of a totally new theatre, "After Us (meaning his generations theatre) The Savage God". Jarry however remained virtually ignored until Artaud became interested in his ideas, mainly through Jarry's writings so that "together they led to the synthesis of the twentieth-century avant-garde drama." (1)

Three articles from what can be called Jarry's manifesto as they contain all of his ideas and arguments for the beginning of a new theatre are: "On the uselessness of drama in theatre." (2), "Questions of Theatre." (3) and "Twelve Arguments on Theatre." (4). The points in these articles deal with Jarry's main premise for his theatre, which was the destruction of the old language of the theatre and to replace (or renew) it's vocabulary by that of essentially theatrical elements such as decor, acting, lighting and sound.

As regards the decor Jarry insisted on the total discarding of what he called trompe-l'oeil decor. This was the typical illusionistic naturalistic decor of western theatre. Jarry would replace this with a simple decor of perhaps just one colour throughout, which might act as a symbol, or simpler still would use as a constant backdrop raw canvas

with signs and prop changes to denote scene changes. Jarry was equally unimpressed with the acting of his day. He saw that because of dialogue the actor concentrated solely on the face instead of acting with the entire body. To counteract this he advocated the use of masks, which he did in practice in his production of Ubu Roi. The masks would also depict the character, leaving the actor to act not merely deliver lines. Jarry had very specific ideas regarding the lighting of his productions. Light was, at that time, still in it's infancy as a theatrical tool and Jarry foresaw it would become one of the most important. He proposed lighting only the stage (still a new concept at the time), and using this focus on the actor as a way to manipulate shadows particularly on the masks that the actors would wear. With reference to sound, Jarry specified that the actor have a special voice, the voice of the role, the voice of his mask. The actor must only emit what the mask would emit if it could. Jarry proclaimed that in his theatre voice, or more specifically dialogue would be of minor rather than of major importance, as it was then.

Jarry offered more general points in his articles also. His main point is that, similar to Artaud, a new language must be found which means moving away from literary based theatre towards what would be a true dramatic theatre. Jarry sees the difference as follows: the literary dramatist is concerned with what happened in the text while the new dramatist (metter-en-scene) will be concerned with what is happening on stage. Jarry saw the tradition of translating a novel into a play as being perverse. He believed that the true dramatist must create for the stage and think first in terms of dramatic form (interestingly he thought it quite possible to create a novel from a play, as one can always tell the story of an action but not the reverse). Jarry believed that with this new language the audience is given a far more creative role instead of their usual passive one for, as he says

"The theatre which animates impersonal masks is only accessible to one who considers himself virile enough to create life: a conflict of passions more subtle than known conflicts on a character which is a new being. Everyone admits that Hamlet, for example, is more alive than the man in the street, for he is more complex, with greater synthesis, and even self-sufficient, for he is a walking abstraction." (5)

Jarry would create a theatre that would hold a mirror up to a man showing him how he is, not how he would like to be.

"Once the curtain went up, I wanted the stage before the public to become like that mirror in the stories of Mme. Leprince de Beaumont in which the vicious see themselves with bull's horns and a dragon's body, depending on the exaggeration of their vices; and it is not amazing that the public should be stunned by the sight of its ignoble double, which they had never been totally confronted with before; and which is made up, as Catulle Mender has so well expressed it 'of eternal human imbecility, eternal lust, eternal gluttony, baseness of instinct which takes over completely; of decorum, virtue, patriotism, and the ideal of people who have dined well'. Really there is no point in expecting a funny play, and the masks make it clear that the comic element must at the most be the macabre comedy of an English clown or a dance of the dead." (6)

This statement by Jarry is without doubt the basis of two important concepts which Artaud pursued in his own work, the first being the idea of theatre as 'the double' of life and second the use of macabre or what Artaud calls destructive humour as an element of his Theatre of Cruelty. It does not lessen Artaud's achievements to discover his use of the work of another innovator of the theatre as a starting point. No one can work totally isolated from what has already been achieved but can work from this to push further, to break totally new ground. Jarry could never have brought his initial ideas to the far-reaching conclusions that Artaud, with his single-mindedness and purpose, was able to do. Artaud was convinced far more than Jarry about the absolute necessity of a new theatre as well

as being the more intellectual of the two, better able to provide the thesis for the new theatre, the manifesto in the form of "The Theatre and its Double" which has meant that these ideas (instead of ending with Jarry's work) have changed forever the nature of theatre.

SURREALISM

Although Artaud spent only two years as a member of the Surrealist movement he is often identified first and foremost as a surrealist. This is not a false assertion, however, since although he spent little time as part of the movement he was, in his thinking essentially surrealist. It is therefore important to review his actual involvement in the movement to identify the elements of surrealist philosophy which Artaud gained from being part of the movement, as opposed to those which are Artaud's own.

Artaud was introduced to the surrealists by Andre Masson. Becoming a member in October 1924, he was very active while part of the movement, contributing articles to various surrealist publications. In January 1925 he was appointed director of the surrealist Bureau de Recherches. This was a forum for debate about surrealist ideology as well as being the official collector of material like automatic writing, accounts of dreams etc. The aim of the bureau was to set down a criteria by which authentic surrealist thought could be recognised. As editor of the third issue of the surrealist magazine La Revolution Surrealiste Artaud took complete charge, writing the issue almost entirely himself. The cover declared that 1925 would be "the end of the christian era". The issue contained open letters to the Pope and Chancellors of Europe's universities which rejected both christianity and western logic, these were followed by letters to the Dalai Lama and Buddhist schools, begging them to assist in

the elimination of western ways (7). All this was very much in keeping with surrealist view that western culture must look to other cultures to restore itself to true culture.

It was through the movement that Artaud met Roger Vitrac who had a common interest not only in surrealism but in formulating a new theatre based strongly on surrealist ideals. This would be a theatre of the fantastic and grotesque, of dreams and obsessions, to be called the "Theatre Alfred Jarry". Preparations for the first production of the company brought Artaud into conflict with the movement. This began because of Artaud's collaboration with Vitrac who had been expelled from the movement in December 1924. The movement (particularly Breton) criticised what it considered to be Artaud's commercialism in continuing to appear as a film actor (8), and in trying to launch a theatrical enterprise on his own. The final straw came when the leaders of what had been a surrealist literary revolution decided to become part of a political revolution by announcing the collective adherence of the movement to the Communist Party. Artaud's break with the surrealist movement was then inevitable. In November 1926 Artaud was formally expelled from the movement. In an official document regarding the expulsion Artaud was criticised strongly:

"He wanted to see in the revolution no more than a change in the internal conditions of the soul, an attitude which belongs to the feeble-minded, the important and the cowardly. Never, in whatever field, did his activity (he was also a film actor) constitute anything but concessions to nullify ... Let us leave him to his disgusting mixture of dreams, vague assertions, pointless insolence and manias."
(9)

Whatever one feels about Artaud's belief that a cultural revolution could occur independent of a social/political one (dealt with further in chapter 3) it is obvious in retrospect that it was the surrealist movement that

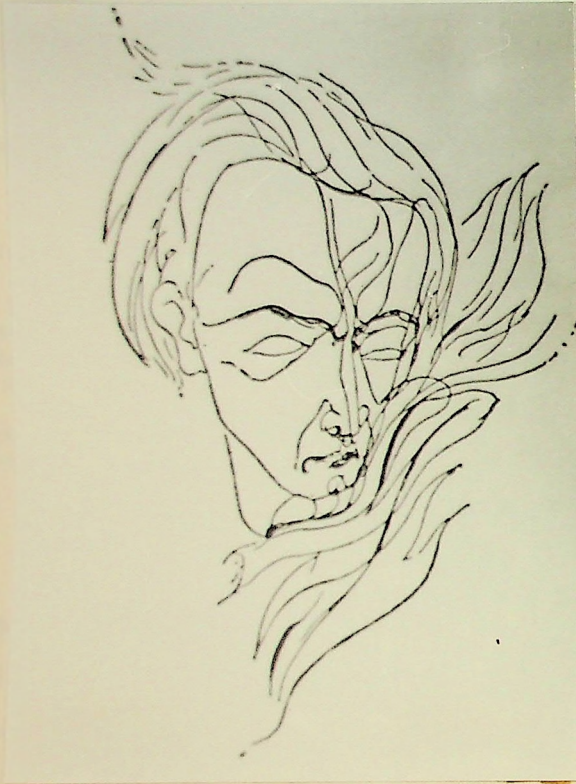
moved away from essential surrealism, not Artaud. Artaud was all his life in essence a surrealist, as pointed out by Andre Breton, years after the bitterness had passed; "Antonin Artaud was, in our day, the one who went ahead most vigorously in that vein (surrealism)." (10). Although the scathing original document was not published at the time of the split, Breton did mention it and similar criticisms of Artaud in an article entitled, "In Broad Daylight", which was issued to announce the affiliation to the Communist Party. Artaud published immediately his own article to counter this called "In the Dark or the Surrealist Bluff"

"'Did not surrealism die' he wrote 'the day Breton and his adepts thought they had to join communism and to seek, in the realm of fact and matter, the fulfilment of an endeavour which could not normally develop anywhere but in the inner recesses of the brain'". (11).

The fact that Artaud left the movement due to a disagreement about joining a political movement illustrates the totally different conceptions Artaud had of surrealism to those of the rest of the movement. If he had not left on this point, he would surely not have remained for much longer within the group, for the basic surrealist temperament within the movement was at odds with Artaud's. In 1925 in explaining the programme of the Surrealist Research Bureau he favourably describes surrealism as "a certain order of repulsions". But Artaud misunderstood what the basis of the surrealist argument was. Artaud joined the movement identifying with the surrealist wish to crush the limits reason sets upon the consciousness. The surrealists hoped that by extending their consciousness (with dreams, drugs and asocial behaviour) they could increase their pleasure both mentally and physically. Marcel Duchamp said regarding Breton and the movement that "the greatest source of surrealist inspiration is love".

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ILLUSTRATION I
PORTRAIT OF ARTAUD BY ANDRE MASSON



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This is of course totally the opposite of Artaud's interpretation of what surrealism was to him. He brought to the movement a very personal interpretation coloured by his pessimistic outlook which was the result of chronically poor mental and physical health. In 1952 Breton suggested that it was primarily because of his destructive negativism that Artaud was expelled from the movement. Indeed Artaud himself said, "what cuts me off from the surrealists is that they love life as much as I scorn it" (12). Artaud did not expect pleasure from his freeing from consciousness, and said he regarded a surrealist as someone who despairs of attaining his own mind, while he saw physical pleasure as being demonic.

"The surrealists are connoisseurs of joy, freedom, pleasure, Artaud is a connoisseur of despair and moral struggle. While the surrealists explicitly refused to accord art an autonomous value, they perceived no conflict between moral longings and aesthetic ones, and in that sense Artaud is quite right in saying that their programme is 'aesthetic' - merely aesthetic he means. Artaud does perceive such a conflict, and demands that art justify itself by the standards of moral seriousness." (13).

Susan Sontag.

It would be wrong to consider Artaud's liaison with the surrealist movement as a totally fruitless adventure. Artaud may not have followed strictly the line being taken by the rest of the movement but his mental outlook, as has been stated, was surrealist. In fact the reason for the split was that Artaud made no adjustment in his outlook to become a surrealist, the basic philosophy of the movement was already part of his make-up. Artaud left the movement still convinced of many of its claims and general stance, even if he continually refined and altered these to suit his own needs. Artaud had always understood surrealism as above all a state of mind with the potential to act as a critique of the mind and as a technique to improve the quality and range of the mind. Artaud brought a unique sense

of moral seriousness to this idea since it affected him on a far deeper and more personal level than others in the movement. This relates directly to another point which was the sense of mission which the surrealists and Artaud brought to their work (even if their goals were not similar). Artaud always regarded surrealism as a revolution which would be applicable to all states of mind, and to all types of human activity. He saw its status within the arts as being merely a consequence of a broader and more important revolution. This is the final theory that Artaud shared with the movement, the closing of the gap between art and life. Artaud and the surrealists regarded art as merely a function of consciousness and that, for this reason any work would only be a fraction of the whole of an artist's consciousness. While this led the surrealists towards the breaking of consciousness into the arbitrary fractions of exquisite corpse writing etc., Artaud meanwhile maintained that this sub-division of consciousness was totally futile. He rejected totally the process of a detached viewing of works of art as objects (which he regarded only as metaphors for art or consciousness). This led Artaud towards the belief that all true art was action or art as a dramatic performance. For these reasons Artaud turned to theatre to experiment with his goal of creating a 'total' or 'true' art and by that to recreate a 'total' or 'true' culture.

BALINESE DANCERS AND ORIENTAL THEATRE

Oriental theatre had a great influence on Artaud's conception of a new theatre and references to Eastern theatre are to be found throughout his writings. By far the most profound influence came when Artaud saw Balinese dancers perform in 1931, but he had, prior to that exposure, quite some knowledge of the theatre and culture of the orient. As a young actor Artaud came into contact with Charles Dullin, who gave him his first

important acting roles. Dullin was very interested in the style of the oriental theatre and it may have been an influence on his work. As a director Dullin gave the young actor Artaud a free hand (as much as was possible) to experiment with masks and make-up and movement, much of it inspired by oriental theatre. This interest in the form of oriental theatre coincides exactly with Artaud's first actual exposure first-hand with oriental theatre. In July 1922 Artaud saw a troupe of Cambodian dancers performing in a replica of the temple of Angkor at the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition. This initially gave Artaud the idea that something of what he was trying to achieve was to be found in oriental theatre. As a surrealist, Artaud would have come into contact with much oriental culture as it was a common interest of the movement to look to the East for inspiration in the formation of a new culture, as a new way of approaching artistic fulfilment. When setting up the Theatre Alfred Jarry Artaud acknowledged the influence of oriental drama on his work:

"The Theatre Alfred Jarry refuses to list all the fragmentary influences it might have been subjected to and will only mention the indisputable examples furnished by Chinese, Negro-American and Soviet Theatre." (14).

It is clear that the greatest single event which influenced Artaud's writings (being the inspiration to begin them in fact) was when he saw the Balinese dance performance at the Colonial Exposition in Paris 1931. Artaud describes the performance, as "the finest demonstration of pure theatre we have ever been privileged to see here" (15). Directly after seeing the Balinese dancers Artaud was inspired to begin his theoretical writing on the theatre which culminated in The Theatre and its Double. Many of the essays in that book deal with aspects of oriental theatre, the three most important are: 'On the Balinese Theatre', 'Oriental Theatre and Western Theatre', and 'The 1st Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty'.

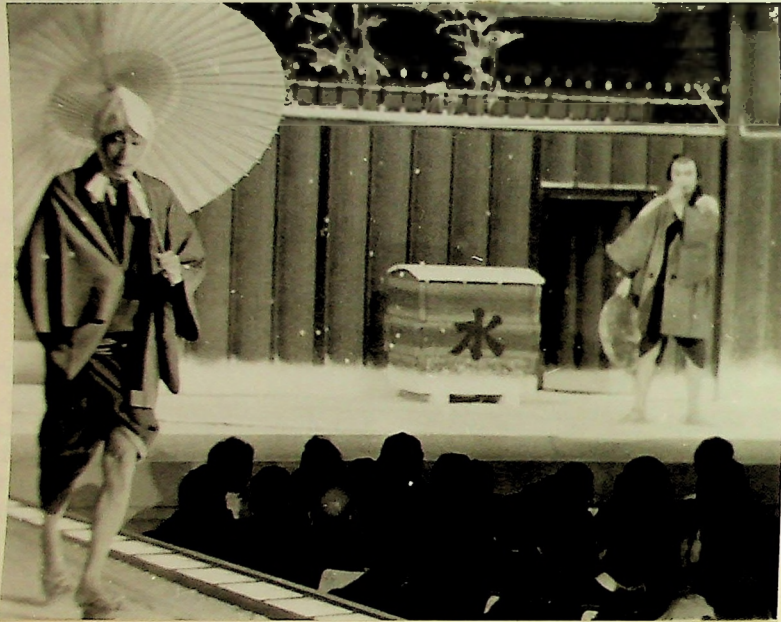
There are also two articles in the book concerning the training of the actor which owe a great deal to oriental theatre, they are; 'An Affective Athleticism' and 'Seraphims Theatre'. Through these writings we see that Artaud was influenced on two levels by the Balinese Dancers in particular and the oriental theatre in general. First there are the more practical elements of oriental theatre which Artaud adapted for his own use, and secondly there is the spirit and philosophy in which oriental theatre is conceived and performed.

Some of the practical elements of oriental theatre which Artaud wished to adapt to suit his theatre are listed in the 1st Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud suggests that the action will take place in concrete shells of buildings like aeroplane hangers to allow the action to be performed all around the audience against white-washed walls.

"High galleries will run along the entire hall, these galleries will permit the actors ... to move from one point to another in the hall and the action to unfold on all levels, and in all directions of perspective, both in height and in depth." (16).

This has many similarities to the stage in Kabuki and Noh theatre which Artaud studied. Another physical influence from the oriental stage was the use of two to ten metre high mannequins which Artaud also advocated (although never used) that are a hallmark of Kabuki and Noh. The movement and gestures of the Balinese and other oriental theatres greatly influenced Artaud's ideas on these matters. Artaud believed the oriental theatre had succeeded in dealing with metaphysics through the body (in which he was greatly interested). "A metaphysics coined from a new usage of gesture and speech" (17) is how Artaud described this "mental alchemy creating a gesture out of a state of mind, the dry, naked, linear gestures our acts might have if they sought the absolute." (18).

ILLUSTRATION II
KABUKI THEATRE



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There are three main points from the oriental concept of what theatre actually is (their philosophy), for which Artaud in his theories is most indebted to the Balinese dancers. The first is the idea of conceiving a work which exists only as a dramatic event not having come originally from a text where everything in the drama is subservient to dialogue. This identified for Artaud the major problem with Western theatre which he then attacked throughout his writings, while heralding the oriental theatre which "is valued and only exists through the degree of its objectification on stage" (19). This leads directly to the second point, which is that Artaud saw that since the Balinese dancers did not rely on a text, the author of the piece was the produce/director of the piece, which Artaud also wanted to adopt into his Theatre of Cruelty. But the importance of the role of producer/director increases:

"This (oriental) theatre does away with the playwright to the advantage of what in western jargon we call the producer. But the latter becomes a sort of organiser of magic, a master of holy ceremonies. And the material on which he works ... stems from primal unions in nature promoted by a double spirit ... a kind of ancient Natural Philosophy, from which the mind has never been separated." (20).

This is the foundation of Artaud's notion of this new author/director of theatre, a kind of possessed figure in society who has a function to feed the people with the elements of the theatrical which have up to this been lacking in western theatre; the spiritual, the magical, the cruel, and ultimately the true. For Artaud also saw that for the Balinese their theatre was not just entertainment as it had become in the west, in fact it was not entertainment at all but a necessity, an integral part of the culture and lives of the Balinese people. Artaud regarded the function of the true theatre as becoming what the Balinese dancers represented; "the

daily bread of these peoples artistic feelings" (21). It is important to point out at this stage that Artaud never sought to bring oriental theatre or culture to the west. It was merely a model of what another culture had achieved. Artaud realised that the western world could only in the end look to itself to re-find its true language of theatre and more broadly to renew its culture to essential culture, away from what Artaud regarded as the corruption of civilisation.

MEXICAN CULTURE

"Perhaps it is a baroque idea for a European to go to Mexico in search of the living foundations of a culture the notion of which seems to be coming away here; but I admit that the idea obsesses me; in Mexico there is to be found, linked to the earth, lost in the outflows of volcanic lava, vibrant in the indian blood, the magic reality of a culture, and little would be needed, no doubt, for its fires to be materially revived." (22).

In 1936 Artaud went to Mexico. He had for some time been interested in the culture of ancient Mexico and had written in 1933, an outline of a production he wished to do entitled "The Conquest of Mexico" (which was to have been the initial production of the Theatre of Cruelty, before Artaud was forced to change this plan). Artaud wished to visit in Mexico some of the ancient tribes who still existed unchanged, performing rituals seeped in a culture dating back hundreds of years. By this stage in his career Artaud had already begun to formulate many of his theories on theatre and hoped that he might develop his theories on primitive essential theatre by studying the tribes in Mexico.

On arriving in Mexico Artaud found that the pure culture he was in search of was in decline, but not gone. Artaud found that there was an effort by the government to westernise the ancient tribes.

"They (the government) consider the Indian masses to be uncultured, and the predominant movement in Mexico is 'to raise the uncultured Indians up to the 'advantages' of civilisation'." (23).

The most specific influence on Artaud while in Mexico was a visit he made to a tribe called the Tarahumaras in Sierra Madre who, although their culture was "in tatters, but it subsists". (24). Artaud calls them "the heirs of an era when the world still possessed a culture, a culture which was one with life." (25)

Artaud believed that both theatre and culture have qualities which cannot be written down, and that true culture can only be understood in terms of space, hence his belief in theatre as the total art form.

"Culture is a movement of the mind which goes from the void towards forms, and from the forms returns into the void ..."
(26).

For this reason Artaud's main interest in the Tarahumaras was in the rituals which they performed. He took part in two of these rituals and they were to have a profound effect on not only his work, with regard to the progression of his theories on total art, but also personally, affecting him mentally for the remainder of his life. The two rituals were known as: "Tutuquri : The Rite of the Black Sun" and "Ciquri : The peyote dance - a sacrificial rite". The latter was of particular interest to Artaud as it centred around the consumption of peyote (an hallucinogen) and "relates to death and th phantasmagorical, to have as its aim oblivion, but the ritual ... is active ... positive and not negative." (27) Both rituals are described in many areas of Artaud's writings, and show the Indians to have a very sophisticated awareness of divinity and to have a

highly developed philosophy with an awareness in a duality in the Universe (something which obsessed Artaud), but also an awareness of the tension and vitality in the balance of opposites, all of which was primarily expressed in their rituals through, costume and movement, and in their paintings and sculptures. Artaud attributes, correctly, the strength of the culture of the Tarahumaras to the fact that they possess no phonetic writing, this makes way for a culture rich in symbolic signs and images. Artaud stated frequently that he wished his actors, and all stage action, to consist of 'animated hieroglyphics'. This is a direct result of the influence of Mexican culture. Unlike either Chinese or Egyptian hieroglyphics which are both inaccessible to the initiated, Mexican hieroglyphics are accessible to the eye. Obviously there is greater relevance in the work for those from whose culture it comes, but much of the works meaning is quite universal. In this way the use of stage space, the movement and sounds of the Tarahumaras rituals had a great effect on Artaud. Again it was for developing metaphysical theatre that Artaud realised the importance of the Mexican rituals.

"Theatre is an art of space and it is by emphasising the cardinal points of space that it has a change of touching life itself. It is in the space haunted by the theatre that things find their countenances, and under these countenances the sound of life." (28).

Although Artaud found much of interest in Mexico, as regards expanding his theories on theatre, the participation in the rituals, while being of immense importance to him, had a disastrous affect on his mental health and was a direct cause of his committal, soon after, to a series of mental institutions for nine years. This effectively ended his career apart from a brief reprise on release before his death. To participate in the peyote ritual he had to stop taking the heroin to which he had become addicted since early manhood. Although while taking the peyote and participating

in the rituals he was extremely content and well, afterwards the drug and the experience of the rituals unbalanced Artaud completely.

"(I) think then that I was living through the happiest three days of my existence. I ceased to seek a reason for my existence and I ceased to have to carry my body. I understood that I invented life and that that was my function and my raison d'être and I was bored when I no longer had my imagination." (29).

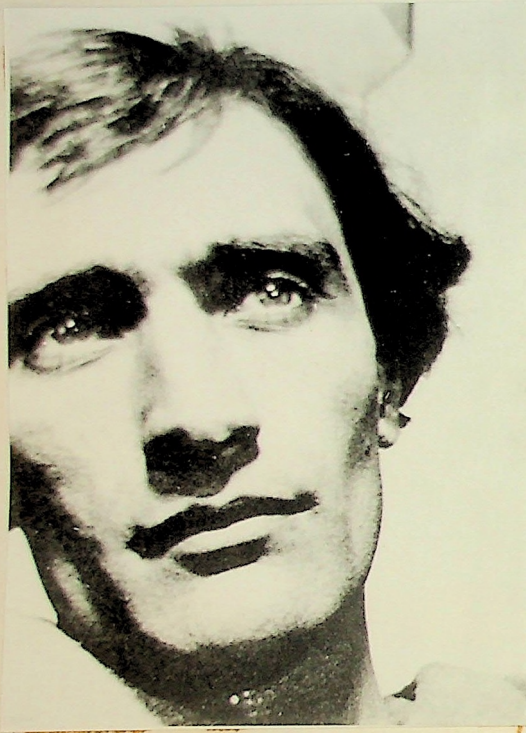
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

- 1 George E Wellworth 'Antonin Artaud : prophet of the avant-garde'.
Drama Survey.
- 2 Alfred Jarry 'On the uselessness of theatre'. Reprinted in
Maurice Saillet 'Tout Ubu' p. 134 - 45.
- 3 Alfred Jarry 'Questions of Theatre'. Reprinted in Maurice
Saillet 'Tout Ubu' p. 152 - 55.
- 4 Alfred Jarry 'Twelve Arguments on Theatre'. Reprinted in Maurice
Saillet 'Tout Ubu' p. 146 - 51.
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Alfred Jarry 'Questions of Theatre'.
- 7 Artaud was at several stages of his life a devout catholic, while
other times he renounced the pope as the devil. His mental
condition led him at times to think he was Christ.
- 8 Because his father had just died, Artaud had no choice but to
continue acting, there is nothing to suggest he disliked this job.
- 9 Antonin Artaud 'Oeuvres Completes vol. I p. 445.
- 10 Andre Breton 'Hommage a Antonin Artaud' p. 84.
- 11 Antonin Artaud 'Oeuvres Completes vol I p. 364.
- 12 Ibid p. 284.
- 13 Susan Sontag 'Under the sign of Saturn, p. 28.
- 14 Artaud. 'Oeuvres Completes' vol. II p. 45 - 46. No reference is
made again by Artaud to the influence of Negro-American theatre in
his work. The Soviet influence was one which affected all of
Europe at the time with the revolutionary work of Meyerhold and
the constructivists.
- 15 Antonin Artaud 'On Balinese Theatre' printed in The Theatre and
Its Double p. 39.
- 16 Antonin Artaud 'Oeuvres Completes vol. IV, p. 96.
- 17 Artaud 'On Balinese Theatre' p. 37.

- 18 Ibid p. 48.
- 19 Ibid p. 37.
- 20 Ibid p. 42.
- 21 Ibid p. 41.
- 22 Antonin Artaud 'Mexico and Civilisation' p. 47.
- 23 Artaud 'Oeuvres Completes' vol V p. 274.
- 24 Ibid p. 281.
- 25 Ibid
- 26 Artaud 'Les Tarahumaras' p. 202 - 4.
- 27 Eirc Sellin 'The Dramatic Concepts of Antonin Artaud' p. 18.
- 28 Antonin Artaud 'Les Tarahumaras' p. 204.
- 29 Artaud 'Oeuvres Complete' vol. IX p. 117.

ILLUSTRATION III
ARTAUD AS A YOUNG ACTOR



A THEATRE OF THE FUTURE

one of the major factors in promoting Artaud to begin to formulate his own theory of the theatre was the complete rejection of the theatre of his time. Artaud was part of a reaction against popular theatre which began in the mid-nineteenth century. Along with people such as Wagner, Stravinsky, Debussy, Schoenberg and others, Artaud believed that theatre had degenerated into cheap melodrama and vulgar entertainment (represented in France by the *Grandes Fêtes*). It needed to once again be restored as a serious art. Artaud rejected totally the idea that theatre was merely entertainment, because he felt that it could have a more profound importance and be of more significant use to the audience.

CHAPTER II

ARTAUD'S THEATRE

Artaud's theory was based on a total rejection of the theatre of his time, but basically the theatre was actually based on ritualized and essentially acted as being merely the representations of events in the stage or stage dialogues.

Artaud realized that a major reason for the decline of theatre was the fact that dialogues had been given for the sake of performance. Over time theatre had 'developed' away from its original function as ritual, speech had taken over from the more essentially ceremonial elements.

"The aim of Artaud's theory was to return to the theatre, as I have shown, as we know it in Greece, or better still, in the West, everything that is essentially ceremonial, everything that does not fall under the distance of expression of the word or of words, or of any other thing that is not contained in dialogue itself, is left to the background" (1).

Speech (as used in dramatic theatre) is non-essential and therefore may become a minor role if not in the theatre. It is essential only if

A NEW LANGUAGE OF THE THEATRE

One of the major factors in prompting Artaud to begin to formulate his own theory of the theatre was his complete rejection of the theatre of his time. Artaud was part of a reaction against popular theatre which began in the mid-nineteenth century. Along with people such as Wagner, Stanislavsky, Ibsen, Stinberg and Shaw, Artaud believed that theatre had degenerated into cheap melodrama and coarse entertainment (represented in France by the Comedie Francaise), it needed to once again be restored as a serious art. Artaud rejected totally the idea that theatre was merely entertainment, because he saw that it could have a more profound importance and be of more significant use to people, as it once had been. There had of course been some innovation in the later nineteenth early twentieth century, but basically the theatre was solidly based on naturalism and inevitably ended up being merely the representations of novels on the stage or staged dialogue.

Artaud realised that a major reason for the decline of theatre was the fact that dialogue had been given far too much prominence. Ever since theatre had 'developed' away from its original function as ritual, speech had taken over from the more essentially theatrical elements.

"'Why is it' Artaud argued 'that in the theatre, at least theatre as we know it in Europe, or better still, in the West, everything that is specifically theatrical, namely, everything that does not fall under the dictates of expression by the word or by words, or if you will, everything that is not contained in dialogue ... is left in the background'". (1)

Speech (as used in Naturalistic Theatre) is non-theatrical and therefore only deserves a minor role if any in the theatre. Since Ancient Greece it

had been taken for granted that theatre's function was basically communication through speech, but if theatre only functioned as speech then it deserves to be treated only as a branch of literature. Artaud went further, why bother putting on this type of play at all since it might just as efficiently be understood through reading?

Artaud's basic argument is that theatre must be theatrical, and since speech or dialogue is literary it can only play a minimal part in a theatrical work, and even then it must be changed so that it too takes on a theatrical function. To re-establish theatre Artaud felt it was essential to concentrate on those elements of theatre which are peculiar to it alone. "I say that the stage is a physical and concrete place that demands to be filled and demands that one make it speak its own concrete language" (2). In developing a new theatre, Artaud recognised that it was necessary to identify a whole new language for the theatre, or perhaps it would be truer to say he aimed to rediscover the original language of theatre which had been lost for so long. This language, he said

"consists of all that which occupies the stage, of all that which can manifest and express itself materially on a stage and which is addressed first to all the senses rather than to the mind as in the case of the language of words." (3).

Artaud's new language was not just vaguely theorised about however, in his first manifesto of *The Theatre of Cruelty*, Artaud goes into a good deal of practical detail as to what exactly this new language entails. The most important elements of this new language are gesture and sound, and therefore the actor also is central in significance. The list of theatrical elements to be reconsidered in the manifesto goes further and includes ideas and guidelines on; the stage space itself, the use of costume, props, masks, etc., lighting, music and musical instruments and

finally lists some works which were to be performed by the new Theatre of Cruelty.

Gesture and Sound are referred to often by Artaud and were of great importance to him. Artaud by no means totally rejected the use of speech and the voice in the theatre, it was the manner in which it was used which disturbed him. Stage language would not, he said, dispense with words altogether but rather give them the qualities they have in dreams. Artaud hoped to treat sound in much the same way as gesture "words, too have possibilities of sonorisation, various ways of being projected into space" (4). Words would no longer be a means of communicating through but instead be used for their qualities as objects with their own physical existence, as tonalities, prolonged modulations, incantations, yelps, barks, in harmony or calculated dissonance with the gestures and objects in the theatre space, "one must manipulate it like an object which is solid and which can move things, first in the air, and then in an infinitely more mysterious and secret domain" (5). Artaud also mentions that words will be able to represent an infinite variety of expressive colour in his Theatre. Here he is referring to a technique adopted from one used by the Cabala. It involves a system of breathing and expressive techniques in which each type of breath corresponds to a basic emotional colour which can then be varied by the actor by permutation and combination. It is through breathing and other physical links that audiences begin to make the connections between their own bodies and those of the actors.

"To restore the links in the chain of a rhythm when audiences saw their own real lives in a show, we must allow audiences to identify with the show breath by breath and beat by beat." (6).

The Balinese dancers whom Artaud saw in 1931 were a major factor in the

forming of his theatrical ideas in general and those on gesture in particular. The dancers expressed for Artaud the perfect poetry of space he had conceived of and gave him a 'concrete conception of the abstract'. There was no learnt literary language of movement with the Cabala or Balinese as there is in mime or pantomime whose subordination to literary interpretation Artaud saw as perverse. Of the Balinese he said,

"These mental signs have an exact meaning that only strikes one intuitively but violently enough to make any translation into logical, discussive language useless." (7).

To break down the barriers between the audience and the action, Artaud envisages a complete rethinking of the concept of stage/auditorium. The stage must be replaced by one single area without divisions in which the action will take place. The audience will no longer have the protection of a defined stage space as the action will take place all about them and they in fact become part of the action. Artaud wanted the audience to be in the centre of the action facilitated by the house being circular. The action will take place all around the audience and on all levels, even from above. To assist the audience view the work, they will have swivel chairs so they may follow the action. Artaud argues for the abandonment of the theatre houses for barns and aeroplane hangers, rebuilt to take on the aura of a 'church' or 'holy place'. The walls will be whitewashed and there will be no scenery or decor, so that instead, all the elements of the theatre take on the role or effect of the decor. "Hieroglyphic characters, ritual costume, thirty foot high effigies of King Lear's beard in the storm, musical instruments as tall as men, objects of unknown form and purpose are enough to fulfil this function." (8) In this Artaud borrowed a great deal from the decor and style of Kabuki and Noh Theatre.

Of the costume, Artaud says it should be of a timeless ritualistic nature

where each costume will convey its own precise hieroglyphic type of meaning as an abstract reflection of the human being.

"As to costume, without believing there can be any uniform stage costume that would be the same for all plays, modern dress will be avoided as much as possible not because of a fetishistic superstition for the past, but because it is perfectly obvious certain age-old costumes of ritual intent, although they were once fashionable, retain a revealing beauty and appearance because of their closeness to the traditions which give rise to them." (9)

Artaud envisaged the use of towering puppets and masks to create magical effects and strong impacts.

Artaud also refers to lighting and music in his theories. Artaud was forming his theories at a time when lighting was being given much more consideration in the theatre and he (like his contemporary Gordon Craig), considered it to be a vital part of the theatre with a more important part to play than it had done up to then. In his writing Artaud talks of effects which were still not available, looking forward to new inventions he foresaw would revolutionise lighting in the theatre. Artaud envisaged effects such a vibrating light, waves of light and explosions of light all of which would have large colour and tonal ranges to produce magical effects of great impact and meaning. He hoped that lighting could act in this way directly on the mind and produce in the viewer real sensations of heat, cold, anger fear etc.

As well as his new approach to natural sound, Artaud wished to include sound instruments in his theatre, discovering old forgotten instruments as well as newly invented ones, capable of producing unbearable levels of noise. Artaud saw that these instruments would act as objects on the stage as well, not there purely to produce sound, so that their shape and

presence would have a meaning and would therefore add to the decor, for Artaud felt all objects on the stage had mathematical relationships to one another.

Finally in his discussions on a new Theatre language Artaud talks of the work he feels this new theatre should produce. Although Artaud did not manage to produce many on his list, it nevertheless gives a good insight into the very large scope and field of reference he felt this new theatre language possessed, being able to tackle such a diverse range of work. The list of works to be performed by the Theatre of Cruelty includes; an adaptation of an Elizabethan drama, Oedipus Rex, Shelly and Stendal's The Cenci and Artauds own play The Conquest of Mexico. "We will not act out written plays but will attempt to stage productions straight from subjects, facts or known works; the type and lay-out of the auditorium itself governs the show as no theme, however vast, is precluded to us." (10). It is ironical to note however that for reasons discussed further on in the section in implementation, the only play produced by Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, from whose manifesto this list comes, was The Cenci a scripted play by Artaud adapted by him from the work of Shelly and Stendal.

'CRUELTY' AND 'THE DOUBLE'

The technical side of Artaud's writings occupy only a very small part of his overall theories on the theatre. The largest proportion of his work is a philosophy of what theatre should be, for Artaud's theatre was revolutionary and demanded change, the purging of all involved on and off the stage. Two words appear constantly in Artaud's writing and are the key to the understanding of much of his theories on this purgation or change; they are 'cruelty' and 'the double'.

It was while on his way to Mexico that Artaud decided on a title for the book of his theories which was about to be published - "The Theatre and its Double"

"'For if the theatre is the double of life' he said 'then life is the double of the true theatre ... the title will correspond to all the doubles of theatre which I thought I had found over so many years; metaphysics, the plague, cruelty. The reservoir of the energies made up of myths which men no longer carnate is incarnated in the theatre. And by that I mean the great magic element of which the theatre, in its forms, is only the figuration while we wait for the theatre to become the elements of transfiguration'". (11).

Therefore not only is theatre the double of life and life the double of theatre, according to Artaud, but within theatre itself there is a second double. Theatre is a mirror held up to life but as well beyond the theatrical experience there is an interplay between those taking part (both audience and actors) and the great magical element of which the theatre work is hopefully a transfiguration. Therefore this second double, the magical element, must be the ultimate source of not only theatre but all the arts, for Artaud says that "beneath the poetry of texts there is poetry pure and simple without shape and without text" (12). Therefore Artaud's basic argument is that theatre must actually become life.

As has been stated Artaud saw the dramatic performance or happening (a word Artaud actually uses in his writings probably it's first use ever) would ideally produce this transfiguration of which he speaks. To produce this entails, of course, destroying the double since the elements must all become one to succeed as total theatre. This wish to unite two points giving each half the essence of its opposite is common in Artaud's writing. This binary view is further illustrated in the following quote

where Artaud says he wishes to, "resolve or even annihilate all the conflicts arising from the antagonism of matter and mind, idea and form, of the concrete and the abstract, and to smelt down all appearances into one single expression which would be like spiritualised gold." (13) For Artaud this meant that the audience do not identify themselves with what happens on stage but actually take part, for Artaud true theatre is a dangerous intimidating experience which is primary rather than secondary.

Artaud's whole notion of the double has its roots in a number of areas notably Rimbaud, whom Artaud admired, had expressed similar ideas. Artaud was also in line with the surrealists who wanted art to become life. (Artaud however could not be said to be influenced by them as he joined the movement for the similarities in the ideas on this issue).

Art as an entity must go, to merge back into life - the double destroyed becoming one. In this we can understand Artaud's statement, "I am the enemy of the theatre. I have always been that. As much as I love the theatre, as much am I, for that reason, its enemy." (14). Artaud was, of course, not the first person in the world of theatre to strive for catharsis, but was perhaps almost totally unique at the time (with the possible exception of the Marquis de Sade) in the way in which he proposed to obtain this 'transfiguration'. Artaud's answer is a Theatre of Cruelty.

What Artaud felt he was fighting against in trying to bring about catharsis was culture. Artaud saw the arbitrary overlay of artificialities of custom as being the destroyer of the basic intrinsic qualities of human nature which we all possess. Since Artaud believed art to be reality he wanted to strip away these layers of artificiality and reveal the true nature of the audience within. Artaud believed that beneath these layers

of civilized behaviour would lay bare the pure emotion within us all and that the protective wall of decorum could easily be smashed by a forceful appeal to irrational emotion. In this attitude there is an obvious link between Artaud and Freud's view that the malaise of western society was due to the repression of much of man's instinctive subconscious, impulsive life. Artaud was strongly influenced by Freud's writings, in particular his book The Interpretation of Dreams.

Artaud wanted his theatre to disregard culture and concentrate totally on the basic human instincts as he saw it (anger, hate, longing, the physical desires etc.). Form in art was of no interest to Artaud as he saw it as a barrier between him and this elemental theatre. Artaud rejects artistic form as negative both for the spectator and the artist. The spectator has become used to analysing rather than responding and participating emotionally. By doing away with these 'rules' in the Theatre, Artaud hoped to no longer allow the audience to disassociate themselves from their own experience. For the artist, he wanted a rejection of the 'safe' bounds of art so that in future the artist "will be like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames." (15).

Cruelty therefore applies to all those taking part in the theatrical event, however Artaud does concentrate more on the audience of this theatre, for him cruelty will mean a theatre addressing itself neither to the audiences mind or body but to their total existence. For Artaud each performance was a real event not merely play. Therefore he is adamant that on leaving the theatre each member of the audience

"Should have been shaken and taken aback by the internal power of the performance and that power should be in direct relation to the anxieties and preoccupations of his own life. The illusion will no longer be dependent on the probability

or improbability of the action, but on the power to communicate and the reality of that action." (16)

Artaud compares going to the theatre to going to the surgeon or dentist where although certain not to be fatal, the visit to the theatre should leave the spectator neither morally or emotionally intact. This immediacy is the cruelty of which Artaud speaks. The audience must never identify with what's on stage as this removes them from the action. They are a part of a unique action, the true theatre must be a dangerous and intimidating experience, there is no place for placid emotions and reassuring intimacy. Artaud saw theatre as being unique in being able to act physically on a crowd without actually hurting them

"...The poetic images of the theatre are a spiritual force which starts its trajectory in the senses and can then transcend reality. Once launched into his fury the actor needs infinitely more virtue to stop himself from committing a crime than an assassin needs courage to commit his, and it is here that the action of an emotion in theatre, in its purity appears as infinitely more valid than that of an emotion carried to the point of realisation in action." (17)

Artaud's theatre of cruelty opposes a separation of art and life, he rejects all artistic form which implies a difference between reality and representation. Though not denying there exists such a difference he proclaims (as in the above quote) that this difference can be transcended. The means of transcendence is for Artaud a spectacle sufficiently cruel to re-awaken and re-activate "certain psychological emotion in which the most secret recesses of the heart will be brought into the open" (18) and in this way prove his claim that both established culture and its creators/slaves; the bourgeois public, are dead, and that this new theatre can shock/wake them from their stupor.

Basically the cruelty of which Artaud speaks is knowledge and truth, and

following on from this that an image is only true insofar as it is cruel. The new theatre must be one of consciousness - raising. Using the analogy of theatre as shadow (the double) Artaud claims his purpose is the "naming and directing of shadows" and the destroying of "false shadows" to "prepare the way for a new generation of shadows" around which will "assemble the true spectacle of life" (19). Artaud has quite a moralistic attitude to theatre. To reach the essence of our metaphysical existence Artaud believes that ironically the body is the key. This is what made Artaud's discovery of the Bali dancers so influential.

"It was the revelation of the mysterious forces which rule the universe through their strange movements and hieratic costumes, the miraculous music that accompanied their dance, the presence of cosmic power in the unarticulated cries which made him realise the true nature of the theatre as a potential instrument for the redemption of mankind." (20)

Therefore it can be said that Artaud regarded true theatre as a religious ritual where a crowd strive to re-establish the link with their primal being, with the forces which govern them. Believing as he did that theatre could give the masses the opportunity to experience these feelings without involving them directly in a real life situation. Artaud hoped that through this primal experience, the masses attitude to life, to their entire consciousness could change and hence transform society.

Artaud also regarded his theatre as cruel since it reflects the condition of man with regard to the unrelenting incomprehensible cosmic powers which govern him. The new theatre would make man aware and come to terms with the implacable cosmic powers/cruelty which no one can avoid (the closeness to tribal ritual is again obvious here). The form all this cruelty takes on stage to some extent involves corporal cruelty but Artaud places only minor importance on this. These acts of violence would purge the viewer

of similar emotions but more importantly the overall 'cruelty' would entail the revealing of the dormant violence and emotion and spirituality within each participant (both actor and audience) and the omnipotence of the force outside of their control. Artaud suggests that his theatre would combine suppression with mystic union, with defiance and protest, again somewhat similar to tribal performance/ritual, and all this would combine to create an ecstatic hypnotic theatre which would shatter the foundations of the spectators existence.

It is an interesting point that Artaud saw that the 'cruelty' in his theatre could take the form of humour, destructive humour as he called it. In his article "Production and Metaphysics" Artaud gives the example of the Marx Brothers, whom he greatly admired, as a destructive humour. Artaud defines this humour as that which called for "explosive interventions of poetry and humour aimed at disorganising and pulverising appearances." (21).

Because Artaud's theatre is not simply cathartic but exists (or should exist) with a cognitive function, his work avoids randomness totally. The violence Artaud suggests (unlike say Dada anti-art performance) is very controlled for "he assumes that sensory violence can be a form of embodied intelligence." (22). Therefore this theatre is quite scientific and, avoiding randomness, entertainment, spontaneity, must take on a very serious and ultimately religious purpose. To orchestrate this purpose in his Theatre Artaud regards the 'metteur-en-scene' or director as central in importance.

METTER-EN-SCENE

As has been stated earlier in this chapter, Artaud dismissed the relevance of the playwright as the basis on which a theatrical event is founded. Instead Artaud saw the director as the driving force behind the performance, acting as a new type of authority who created his work using every element that is basically theatrical (as listed earlier), as a starting point from which to compose a performance of not merely words, as previously had been the case with the playwright. This was one of the fundamental lessons that Artaud got from his experience with the Balinese dancers in 1931.

"The Balinese realise, with the utmost rigour, the idea of a pure theatre, in which everything, conception as well as execution is valid and exists only in the measure in which it is objectivised on the stage. They rigorously demonstrate the absolute preponderance of the director whose creative power eliminates the words." (23)

Therefore

"Artaud's theatre is essentially a directors theatre, with the director acting as a poet using the concrete language of the whole gamut of physical existence from space to the minutest nuance of the actor's bodily movement." (24)

Artaud gives little more insight, on a practical level, to the role of the director in his work, yet it is the whole notion of the author/director which Artaud fostered which has become one of the most influential aspects of his writings. This can be explained as follows: although dealing little with it himself, all of Artaud's writings are filled with the same sense of purpose and singlemindedness with regard to the theatre which makes him an ideal model of the metter-en-scene. The feeling of moral

purpose and conviction in his work is quite remarkable.

"His unwavering conviction that the art of theatre is the loftiest of arts and in direct contact with primal forces has left an aura of aesthetic sanctity and martyrdom to many of the more impassioned but less explicable utterances in the The Theatre and its Double. There appears to have been a threshold in the development of Artaud's concepts beyond which the ideas became rarefied. This volatilisation was no doubt frustrating to positivists, but it was accompanied by an incandescence which has continued to inspire playwrights and directors - albeit with extremely diverse results - whereas many of his and other's specific recommendations have become traditional or proved impractical." (25)

In many of Artaud's writings he speaks of a kind of metaphysical calling with regard to the theatrical event. One always gets the sense of mission from Artaud's writings on 'essential theatre', a quest for truth and light. It is clear on learning of Artaud's personal life that the whole idea of his mission is linked to his mental and physical health as well as his work. Indeed in much of his writing he identifies this mission as a hunger, the need to fill some void, not just in himself, but as he saw it a hunger afflicting the whole world. Throughout his writings Artaud identifies himself with similar artists who are, as he sees it, part of a great quest to fill the hunger of mankind. He claims to understand better the work of artist who are 'tormented and lost' (Baudelaire, Van Gogh, Rimbaud) rather than those who have a facility for artistic form. Artaud goes as far as to say that this affliction is a requisite for important writing/art and therefore the job of artist or metteur-en-scene falls at random on those who are suitably maledicted. For this reason as well as close similarities in their personal lives, Artaud greatly admired Vincent Van Gogh. His essay as a defence of Van Gogh is as much a defence of Artaud himself and any whom he saw as outcasts with a mission. It is a good insight into the role which Artaud saw as his own as one of these maledicted artists.

"And what is an authentic madman? It is a man who has preferred to go mad, in the sense in which society understands the term, rather than be false to a certain superior idea of human honour. That is why society has had all of those of whom it wanted to rid itself, against whom it wanted to defend itself, because they had refused to become its accomplices in certain acts of supreme filthiness, condemned to be strangled in its asylums. For a madman is also a man to whom society did not want to listen and whom it wanted to prevent from uttering unbearable truths." (21)

Artaud's writings deal with the task he had set himself as one of the chosen ones to bring about some sort of cultural, spiritual revolution in his case through theatre, which he saw as having the possibilities of a 'total art'. These writings have gained in importance as influences on directors and performance artists since their publication, becoming the starting point for much of the greatest theatre since Artaud. However a survey of Artaud's own practical implementation of his ideas shows only some signs of the potency of his writings.

IMPLEMENTATION

Artaud will always be remembered for the influence his unsurpassed writings have had on the theatre, and not for his career as a director himself. His entire practical career was marred by many problems, not least of which was Artaud's own mental health which both prevented him from implementing more of his ideas and discouraged support from potential financiers and critics. The limitations on Artaud both internal and external mean that most of his practical implementation can only be seen as an approximation of the Artaudian ideal.

Looking at the various practical examples of his work to assess his relative success or failure leads us to some conclusions as to whether

Artaud ever created his 'total theatre', his 'theatre of cruelty'.

The Spurt of Blood which was published in Artaud's lifetime (1925) is a short surreal play which is quite similar to Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi which as we have seen in chapter one was a profound influence on Artaud. Artaud however never actually produced this work and it was not seen on stage until in 1964, Peter Brook began a 'theatre of cruelty' workshop/company who went on to produce this work. (Brook although a one time ardent follower of Artaud's principles later shifted the emphasis of his work away from some of Artaud's ideas). The Philosopher's Stone which Artaud wrote in 1930 remained unpublished until after his death (1949). It too was a surrealist play. An erotic pantomime it again was unproduced by Artaud. There are no heavens any more is closer to Artaud's ideas than either of the first two examples as it is basically a script written in several movements yet contains little dialogue in accordance with Artaud's belief in the subjugation of the spoken text. Dealing with the collision of Earth and Sirius it remained unfinished and unpublished until 1961. The conquest of Mexico was according to Artaud in the 2nd manifesto of cruelty, to have been the first production of the theatre of cruelty. There is a clear outline of the play in this manifesto but it was not produced because to obtain backing Artaud was forced to produce instead The Cenci. The conquest of Mexico dealt with the defeat and death of Montezuma at the hands of the Cortez. The Cenci is the only full length play which Artaud wrote and produced. As the first production of the theatre of cruelty it was inconsistent with Artaud's ideology as it was based on written text. It was an adaptation from the works of Shelly and Stendal, Artaud used the poetry of Shelly's version of the story in conjunction with the brutality of Stendal's version (in this way Artaud did fulfil one of his convictions, which was that he should have the right to

adapt totally from old work to create something new). The production was marred from the beginning by poor financial backing which forced Artaud to use inexperienced actors and a traditional theatre house. Artaud called this "not the theatre of cruelty, but it is a preparation for it" (27). Besides two lost plays (both unproduced); The Burnt Belly or Crazy Mother and The torture of Tantalus this amounts to the sum total of Artauds theatrical career as author/director before his admission in 1937 to a succession of asylums until his release in 1946. Three more theatrical performances mark the end of his career but these represent Artaud's finest achievements in the theatrical field.

The first occurred in 1933 but, as distinct from the work listed above, it was a solo performance which Artaud sprung on an unsuspecting crowd, while giving a lecture on Theatre and the Plague at the Sorbonne. As reported by Anais Nin who was present, the lecture began in the normal way but he then began to act out the death of a victim of the plague.

"No one quite knew when it began ... his face was contorted with anguish, one could see the perspiration dampening his hair. His eyes dilated, his muscles became cramped, his fingers struggled to retain flexibility. He made one feel the parched and burning throat, the pains, the fever, the fire in the guts. He was in agony. He was screaming. He was delirious. He was enacting his own death, his own crucifixion. At first people gasped. And then they began to laugh. Everyone was laughing. They hissed. Then one by one they began to leave, noisily, talking, protesting. They banged the door as they left ... But Artaud went on until the last gasp. And stayed on the floor." (28).

The second, Tete-a-Tete with Antonin Artaud performed in 1947 at the Vieux-Clombier was to have been a reading by Artaud which, again, ended up being a spectacular theatrical evening. Using a great deal of his theories on theatre, Artaud raved through some poems and accounts of his mexican trip to a totally shocked crowd from the arts world. In an article called

"Saint Artaud" in the Times Literary Supplement, Artaud's performance is described as oscillating between genius and madness. Andre Gide (a follower of Artaud's) who was present describes the performance as follows:

"Artaud's lecture was more extraordinary than one can imagine. It was of a nature never before heard or seen and which will never be seen again. I have retained an indelible memory of it, atrocious, painful, and at moments almost sublime." (29)

Artaud's final work was a piece for radio entitled To have done with the judgement of God. This was recorded in 1947 and was to be for Artaud his last opportunity to put his ideas into practice. It consists of a sequence of texts orchestrated for four voices and some percussion instruments. Artaud's performance of voice work was said to be spine chilling, which was enhanced by his own use of gongs, drums etc. The broadcast was banned however on the basis that it was obscene and offensive to the United States of America (30). Despite being passed as suitable by a review board the work was never broadcast and Artaud died the following year, disillusioned that the work he considered his greatest achievement never reached a wide audience.

Artaud himself considered the last banned radio piece his greatest achievement (it was a miniature sample of what could be done he said). It is however more widely agreed (By Barrault, Weingarter, and Jean Hart (31)) that Artaud's life was a strange sort of theatrical work and that his best work might be seen as the two least structured of his pieces: the evening at the Sorbonne in 1937 and the readings at the Vieux-Colombier in 1947. This conclusion fits in well with Artaud's quest to merge life with art, - it would be difficult to argue whether those two evenings were theatre events or just events in Artaud's life.

After the performance which he gave at The Sorbonne, described above by Anais Nin, Artaud discussed with her his feelings regarding the work and the audience who had left in derision.

"They always want to hear about: they want to hear an objective conference on 'The Theatre and the Plague' and I want to give them the experience itself the plague itself, so they will be terrified and awaken. I want to awaken them. they do not realise they are dead. Their death is total, like deafness, blindness. This is agony I portrayed. Mine, yes, and everyone who is alive ... I feel sometimes that I am not writing, but describing the struggles with writing, the struggles of birth." (32).

ILLUSTRATION IV

ARTAUD - THE YEAR OF HIS DEATH



FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II

- 1 Antonin Artaud, 'Production and Metaphysics' p. 26 from The
2 Theatre and its Double (any follow ref. T T A I D).
3 Antonin Artaud, Complete Works vol. 4
4 Ibid
5 Antonin Artaud 'Production and Metaphysics' T.T.A.I.D.
6 Artaud 'Oriental and Western Theatre' p. 53. T.T.A.I.D.
7 Artaud 'An Affective Athleticism' p. 95 T.T.A.I.D.
8 Ibid
9 Artaud 'Theatre of Cruelty 1st Manifesto' p. 76 T.T.A.I.D.
10 Ibid p. 74
11 Ibid . 76
12 Artaud Complete Works vol. V
13 Artaud 'No more masterpieces" T.T.A.I.D.
14 Artaud Complete Works vol. iv p. 63
15 Martin Esslin Antonin Artaud: The man and his work
16 Artaud The Theatre and its Double
17 Artaud 'The Theatre of Cruelty 1st Manifesto' T.T.A.I.D.
18 Artaud Complete Works vol. IV p. 30-31
19 Ibid
20 Sellin The Dramatic Concepts of Antonin Artaud
21 Martin Esslin Antonin Artaud: The Man and his work p. 81
22 Artaud Complete Works IV p. 149-50
23 Susan Sontag Under the sign of Saturn p. 41
24 Artaud Complete Work vol. IV p. 64-5
25 Esslin Antonin Artaud: The man and his work p. 84.
26 Eirc Sellin The dramatic concepts of Antonin Artaud p. 101.
27 Artaud Complete Works vol. XIII p. 17.

- 27 Artaud Complete Works vol. v p. 45
- 28 Anais Nin Journals vol. I
- 29 Sellin p. 148.
- 30 The part referring to the US apparently concerned a plan Artaud
imagined he had heard about, according to which the US, afraid
that they would be lacking cannon-fodder for future wars they had
planned, were stockpiling the sperm of boys entering school in
frozen form to be used in artificial insemination for the
subsequent production of soldiers.
- 31 Sellin p. 112.
- 32 Anais Nin Journals vol I

The main idea behind the following that Artaud has had on theater and performance art, is in fact all necessary to enter the artistic and aesthetic that I have used to understand this study, for Artaud's influence is not just a matter of style. It would be impossible to even attempt to survey all the influences that Artaud has on theater performance as we know it today. Some things to be aware of Artaud places his writings as follows: the most important is certainly theater.

It has had an impact on a profound that the course of all modern western theater in Western Europe and the Americas has been said to divide into two periods - before Artaud and after Artaud. He was the voice to the theater now is connected by the impact of Artaud's specific ideas about the actor's body and voice, the use of music, the role of the written text, the relationship between the actor and the audience, and the understanding of what was theater, what was drama? (1)

CHAPTER 3

AFTER ARTAUD

The concept of Artaud as a great spiritual father of contemporary theater today was questioned. Artaud, with other great innovators (e.g. Brecht), remains relatively unknown of our time who show obvious independence from the very ideas to be ignored of his existence (at least measure of Artaud's theories as particular). For example Brecht, Ibsen, and Grotowski are often not viewed as examples of work in theater which have elements of Artaud as they follow their respective art. Let us see Brecht and Grotowski how they are like and how they are different, and Ibsen claims to have read Artaud's works and found his without much interest. This can be explained by the fact that Artaud's theories have all been answered by the Brecht and Ibsen as having been proved or done, and Grotowski as having been already answered with the theories and approach of Brecht and Ibsen. This is what makes any problem. Artaud's influence on theater, indeed, there is the fact that there is a wide range of interpretations and the nature of Artaud's ideas have all been taken into account. There have also been other the great work of Artaud.

To begin this section on the influence that Artaud has had on theatre and performance art, it is first of all necessary to state the criteria and structure that I have used to undertake this study, for Artaud's influence is vast and problematic. It would be impossible to even attempt to survey all the influences that Artaud has on theatre performance as we know it today. Susan Sontag in her article on Artaud places his writings as perhaps the most important in twentieth century theatre:

"... he has had an impact so profound that the course of all recent serious theatre in Western Europe and the Americas can be said to divide into two periods - before Artaud and after Artaud. No one who works in the theatre now is untouched by the impact of Artaud's specific ideas about the actor's body and voice, the use of music, the role of the written text, the interplay between the space occupied by the spectacle and the audiences space. Artaud changed the understanding of what was serious, what was worth doing." (1)

This placing of Artaud as a most important thinker on contemporary theatre raises some questions. Artaud, unlike other great innovators (e.g. Brecht), remains relatively unheard of and many who show obvious influences from his work claim to be ignorant of its existence (or at least unaware of Artaud's theories in particular). For example Beckett, Ionesco, and Genet are often put forward as examples of work in theatre which have elements of Artaud in them (which they certainly do). Yet both Beckett and Genet claim never to have even read Artaud, and Ionesco claims to have read Artaud's essays some years ago without much interest. This can be explained by the fact that Artaud's theories have all been consumed by the theatre and because of having been passed on from one theatre-maker to another they have been totally integrated into the theories and approach of other workers in theatre. This of course poses many problems. Receiving the message as they do, second, third maybe fourth hand, there is a large degree of misrepresentation and the essence of Artaud's ideas have in many cases been lost. There have also been over the years some attempts to

revitalise or re-enact, straight from Artaud's text, the works of the Theatre of Cruelty, most notably in the 1960's by Peter Brook, but I have chosen not to cover this area as Brook's is more a study of Artaud rather than work which has been influenced by him. Here, I will deal primarily with work which at least marginally falls into the category of art performance (though the scope of the term is debatable) I also attempt to use as examples, wherever it has been possible, works which I have seen 'first hand' for obvious advantages. I have chosen to divide this section into three sections, each dealing with a different area of contemporary work which in some way has its roots in Artaud. The first section is Body Art/Performance in which I look at work which seems to fit the criteria of Artaud's theories and also works which manipulate and misrepresent Artaud. The second area is that of theatrical performance, the non-narrative theatre which has gained recognition in Europe and America over the past twenty years and owes much to Artaud. The final part deals with social/political theatre, looking at Artaud's ideas on revolutionary theatre versus political action. This concentrates on one group who have, I feel, embodied more than any the ideas of Artaud, but have extended these at the same time, altering them (as Artaud would have wished) to create a vibrant and totally revolutionary theatre.

Although some of those discussed do not recognise Artaud as an influence in their work, their work is on examination obviously Artaudian, and is therefore legitimate to discuss, since it fulfils the criteria set for its inclusion.

BODY ART/PERFORMANCE FROM THE BODY

Body Art has produced in the last twenty years many works which have been

labelled Artaudian. In many cases however this work tends to be an almost complete misinterpretation of Artauds ideas on the most simplistic level. The 1960's did see a revival of interest in work with elements of violence in them (Genet, de Sade, Strinberg) including Artaud. In Performance Art, this led to a series of works in the late sixties and seventies which used elements of violence and cruelty. This came about at a time, in Europe and America, when there was a general anti-establishment attitude. This was reflected in the art scene with a disdain for the commercialise and whole structures and establishment of the art system. This was one of the reasons for the popularity of performance art at that time; the rejection of the commercial art object. It was also a study or challenge concerning the question of where did art end and life begin (the whole Artaudian notion of merging art and life).

The strand of performance which relied heavily on the violence of its actions has often been spoken of as Artaudian, but this I believe is incorrect. The most important artists working in this area were a group of four Viennese artists who initiated this type of theatre. These were; Gunter Brus, Otto Muhl, Herman Nitsch and Rudolf Schwarzkogler. In America Chris Burden is perhaps the most important. It is interesting to note that although there were many other artists working in a similar vein, the whole movement is totally dominated by men, the only major female figure was Gina Pane in Paris. The aims of this form of performance were fairly clear. Firstly it was a gesture against order both within the art world and in society in general. The hope was that through incredibly violent actions, the performers would fulfil for those watching the need for the violent act, which because of the structure of western society, is impossible for most people to express in their daily lives. This suppression of violence has led mankind into living false lives, always withholding the violence inbuilt in them (the Austrian group in particular

were interested in Freud's writing on this suppression). Through their work, these performers hoped to purge the viewer of this violence, fulfilling the need for it, but through this as well bringing about catharsis through shock, allowing the audience to experience their own subconscious. The ideas are certainly similar to those of Artaud but the actual means by which these artists thought they could achieve this are simplistic in the extreme. Nitsch's rituals involved the disembowelment of dead animals over the naked bound-up bodies of men and women. Others have inflicted wounds on themselves to initiate this catharsis. Pane inserts cuts on her arms with a razor blade, Burden has been crucified and shot, and most extreme of all was Rudolf Schwarzkogler who brought this work to its 'logical' ending when in 1960, by successive acts of self mutilation he ultimately brought about his death for art at twenty nine years of age.

The problem with all this work is that the catharsis never happens. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly this work has become a genre of performance art, and because it relies so heavily on shock there is a predictable escalation of violence from one work to the next since people become shockproof so quickly, yet the reason for the escalation is simply because of the need to complete with a previous performance work (the 'logic' seems to be the last person cut off their finger, so now I must cut off my arm to achieve anything). This I feel shows the simplistic level these performances work on and hints at their ineffectualness. The second point is again related to the fact that this work has become a genre. It is taken that these works were conceived to shock and change a complacent bourgeois audience, the fact that this is now an established genre means that audiences who now go to see this work are either identifying with the artist against society (preaching to the converted) or just go to be

titillated (like going to a horror-movie), and no catharsis can possible take place. The art world assimilates, and any attempt to merely escalate the shock language is soon learnt and once again accepted in the name of art. The third reason for this work's lack of success is its attitude towards the audience which it approaches with utter contempt. The attitude seems to be one of victimiser (performer) and victim (audience) where the performer does not feel in need for catharsis but wants to, from what he sees as his position of knowledge, bring about some change in his audience. However, as has already been stated the audience are immune to these shock tactics and the work therefore becomes mere self-indulgence. Artaud on the other hand was aware that truly cruel theatre meant something that was above all difficult and cruel for himself. Artaud saw the performer as being on the same basis as the audience, all working together towards a common goal, unlike this form of body art which preaches arrogantly and therefore nobody listens, which results in it becoming sterile. John Fraser deals with a similar point in his book

Violence in the Arts:

"... the truly shocking and cruel in art, I suggest, occurs when the artist's gaze has been turned as firmly as possible on concrete human behaviour, and when he himself has been shocked by the capacity of people and events to pass violently beyond limits to which he himself has assented. One of the ironies involved in the notion of the outrageous is the endeavour of proponents of it to get outrageousness all on their own side, so that emancipated and unshockable themselves, they can watch comfortably as the people are outraged in piquant ways. Good art, however, doesn't shock only the bourgeois; in some degree it shocks everyone, including the artist. And it is because of the daring and ruthlessness of its interrogations - its intellectual cruelty in Artaud's sense of that term - that distinguished violent art remains genuinely radical however often one returns to it." (2)

This leads to the fourth and final point, which is that the reason why this work does not function as intended is that it bears no relation to the

real. Artaud saw the most cruel thing (and only worthwhile thing) one could present was the truth. However, although their aim of the work discussed may be to present people with their suppressed realities, this cannot happen because the performers alienate themselves from the audience. Artaud wished to bring art back to becoming once again part of life but the work of the body artist works in the reverse, reducing life to a state of art.

"It is not at all a matter of vicious cruelty, cruelty bursting with perverse appetites and expressing itself in bloody gestures, sickly experiences upon an already contaminated flesh, but on the contrary, a pure and detached feeling, a veritable movement of the mind based on the gestures of life itself." (3).

The criticisms above do not apply to all aspects of body art as there have been many artists who use performance art in many ways which do fit the Artaudian criteria (at least in some respects). Joseph Beuys work in performance was most influential in leading others to experiment with performance, and his work has many similarities with Artaud's ideas. His interest in making art once again a potent force in the lives of people is essentially Artaudian, this was shown most clearly in his approach to the education of art students when he taught at the Dusseldorf Academy. Within body art there are also good examples of performers who have used ideas which have a great similarity to Artaud's theories. I will deal specifically with two, to show how Artaud's ideas have become an integral part of much of contemporary performance art. They are the works of Vito Acconci and the collaborative work of Ulay and Marina Abramovic.

Vito Acconci, who came to prominence as a performance artist in the mid sixties, is a good example of art which Artaud referred to as being difficult and cruel first and foremost for the artist himself. There is

also in Acconci's work much destructive humour which Artaud saw as being very important. The main objective in Acconci's works is that through an investigation of himself, using his own body as a medium, he can explore aspects of selfhood and relationships within contemporary society.

Acconci became a performance artist through poetry (as did Artaud). His poetry and early performances work from the modernists formal traditions and were quite minimalist, inquiring into the "material properties and abstract structure of things." (4). His early poetry for example dealt with words as physical objects so that they "cover a space rather than uncover a meaning" (5). (Very Artaudian). Early performances consisted of work like inviting people to his home to watch him step up and down on steps until exhausted.

Acconci then went on to work on performances concerning the self through exploring and challenging his own. He was interested in how one can establish one's identity to a certain extent, relative to another, so the relationship with which he was dealing included those of leader/follower, giver/received, male/female, exploring within these just how free an individual self ever really is. The minimal nature of Acconci work continued with pieces like Following Piece (1969) in which Acconci follows at random members of the public, detailing on paper their every action until they enter a private dwelling. The work was not an act of intimidation, the person never discovered that they were followed and the only evidence that the work had taken place was the documentation of the activities which Acconci sent to selected art critics (there were 24 works sent and dedicated to 24 art critics). Acconci saw the work as allowing himself to be dictated to at random by an unwitting stranger. Further explorations of self followed with Acconci, in 1971 with Project for Pier 17, standing waiting on a pier to tell invited guests who

came along real secrets he had never told anyone which would be detrimental to him if ever made public. In this he deals one to one with his audience giving them power over him, creating a special relationship where they must decide what to do with this information. Acconci explored this one to one relationship with audiences further in Security Zone (1971) where (again on a pier) he stood blindfolded with a person he knew but could not fully trust. The piece was designed to test their relationship since Acconci was vulnerable and his acquaintance, Lee Jaffe, had the potential power to either assist Acconci falling off as he walked around the pier or allow him to fall or even push him off the pier.

Up to this point Acconci was dealing with a very specific audience but his work in public art galleries was no less challenging. Seedbed 1972, performed underneath a false floor in the gallery with an attempt by Acconci to activate the space 'by my presence underground ... by my movement from point to point underground' ... the goal was "the scattering of seed throughout the underground area by means of private sexual activity aided by the sounds of spectators footsteps on the ramp." (6) In this work Acconci implicates the spectator, making their role in the piece active instead of passive as they are the instigators of Acconci's fantasies. This work was one of the performances in which Acconci used his ideas of the 'power' field. The power field represents for Acconci the activating of a specific space by himself which was, however, also dependent on the presence of the audience who in activating the space created this power field. (7). Acconci finally left performance art behind in 1974 with a work entitled Command Performance which offered the audience the facilities to produce their own work.

Acconci displays in all of his work (in particular his activated sculpture

and installations) a humour, but at the same time deals with the very serious issues and selfhood today. This has a very strong connection with Artaud's work and there have been few others who deal with these notions of self in an ironic or humourous way. (Beckett is one other example). Acconci's deep concern with his audience and his unflinching challenging of firstly himself show his work to be in many ways Artaudian.

Within the body art movement the work which best represents the essence of Artaud's theories is that of Marina Abramovic and Ulay. These two have been collaborating on work since 1976 and bring to their work a religious conviction not unlike Artaud's. They also bring art back to being an actual force in real life, believing that art which does not have a true connection with life is worthless and also that life which does not partake in the motivation to make art is somehow less than human. The fact that the works of Abramovic/Ulay have an aesthetic dimension is incidental, their concern is with ethics. The collaborative elements of the work is extremely important.

"Their work together has been and still is what they have called 'relation work' - work which both lives off of and feeds into the investigation of relationships between two humans as they try to relate simultaneously to one another and to the world around them." (8).

Their work has always had a very formal structure. Their early work dealt a great deal with their own individual endurance and the 'supportive partnerships with which they faced the world together' (11). Early work often showed the couple as complementary in the formal sense, for instance sitting back to back with their long hair plaited lightly into the others, or running from each other into walls, breathing each others breath, or running around a room at full speed to collide in the centre. These endurances challenge and test them on a personal level with regard to their

relationship.

"You know, all this work really only exists because of our relationship - when we met, both of us were at the end of our own work, it was like miracle. We are presenting female and male energy, put together as a symbol, like and its not question of competition, just presenting these two different forces" (10).

The work always keeps to the background the personalities of the artists as they consider personality an unimportant factor to communicate to the viewer, yet the work is dependent for themselves on each other's personal make-up, they must challenge themselves most of all, all of which is Artaudian.

A later work moved away totally from the overt physicalness of the work described above yet focusing on the violent and cruel in a different way. Night Sea Crossing was performed for ninety days (not consecutive) in which the two artists sat motionless across a table from each other for up to seven hours a day. This work is concerned to a great degree with consciousness.

"In the past we have done a lot of actions - activities directing physical motion towards physical limitations. Really testing our limits, and this is the same work, just reverse, now the activity is more mental." (11).

This strange power and energy is transmitted to the audience, to which Abramovic and Ulay show respect and challenge as they challenge themselves.

"The idea of sitting is that we control our thoughts, we can transmit our thoughts very quickly to the audience. If you are sensitive and creative as an observer you can plug immediately into our minds. There is no action outside our minds, so the public is not attracted to our movements. Its a kind of mind contact." (12).

Abramovic and Ulay display a great spirituality in their work; both believe in the idea of reincarnation, the performances have similarities with religious rites (but this is purely because of their conviction rather than the work actually having religious content). They place great importance on their chance meeting believing in fate (when they met accidentally on the street as strangers they were both dressed identically with their long hair tied in a similar fashion, it was also the birthday of both. They have been together ever since as a couple, combining their work and lives. They have travelled to many countries to study other cultures, aspects of which they use with the conviction that they are in some way reaching out to all cultures and all people as they see so many common human links. Although not overtly political they are political in the sense that they spread their doctrine wherever they go concerning the energy and power of human consciousness. Like Acconci, Abramovic and Ulay's body art is essentially about the mind.

ILLUSTRATION V

ABRAMOVIC/ULAY - RELATION IN TIME (1977)

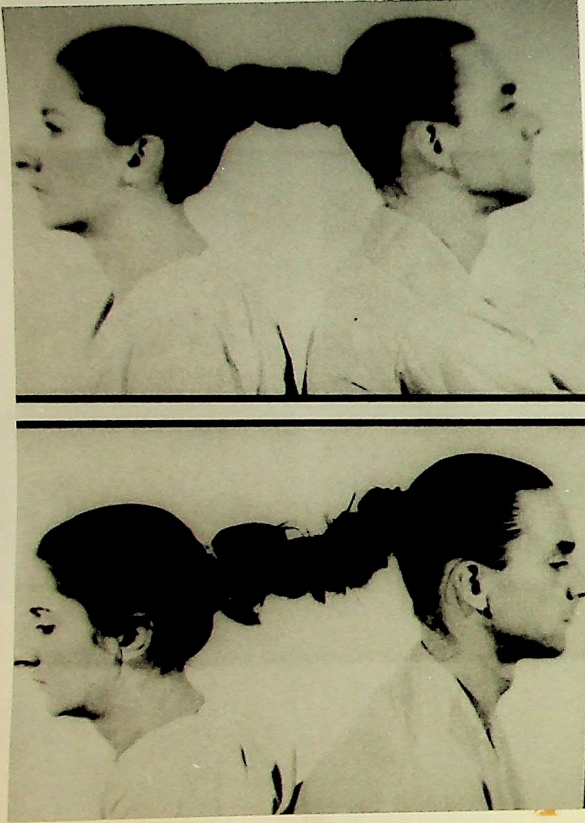


ILLUSTRATION VI

ABRAMOVIC/ULAY - NIGHTSEA CROSSING (1982)



NON-NARRATIVE THEATRE

The tradition of non-narrative theatre which had gained much prominence in the last twenty years owes a great deal to the writings of Artaud. The work in non-narrative theatre can be seen as the direct descendant of Artaud's own work as it more or less still works within the realm of the theatre both as a means of functioning and attracting an audience. Neither body art nor social/political happenings are dependent in any way on the theatre world.

This study concentrates on those practitioners of non-narrative theatre who at the same time find themselves on the fringes of art performance. There are many examples to be found, of such figures at present; Pina Baush or Jan Fabre in Europe, Meredith Monk and Robert Wilson in America. This movement although without direct reference to Artaud is easily traced back to his influences in the theatre. Working backwards, this form of theatre can be linked to the performances of John Cage and others in Black Mountain College in 1952 (where Cage read Artaud) and the Absurd Theatre of the 40's and 50's which was also significant and which leads back to Dada, Futurist and Surrealist performance and therefore directly back to Artaud. The connection between Artaud and contemporary non-narrative theatre far from being remote is as solid and important as any direct influence could be, for Artaud is the backbone of this type of theatre.

The fact alone that there is a growing audience for non-narrative theatre today shows how forceful Artaud's ideas have become. It is still considered 'fringe' but there is definitely more acceptance for non-dialogue, non-narrative theatre. The emergence of the director has been the chief creative force behind a work, eliminating the importance or need

for a script, (an Artaudian concept) Baush, Wilson etc. have all developed their own system to mould a work while completely avoiding dependence on a script. They instead deal directly with contemporary issues and human consciousness in a purely theatrical way. Ironically, this has been made possible along with other important recent developments due to the return of the influences of fine art and other particular disciplines. Wilson comes from a fine art/architecture background, Baush from dance and Monk from a musical background, all three began their careers with very formal training in their particular discipline, before becoming involved with non-narrative theatre.

Pina Baush's work has concentrated a great deal on movement and space, beginning as she did from a foundation in classical ballet. The development of a work for Baush is a collaborative effort with the entire cast, which is in keeping with the themes she deals with which revolve around basic motifs of human existence; love, death, fear etc.

Meredith Monk has pursued sound and vocal work to a great extent in her work. She is arguably only rivalled by Wilson in the extent to which she has used the human voice as an instrument rather than merely a way of expressing literary ideas. In one work such as Turtle Dreams (1982), which deals with urban life, the use of the human voice as a means of expression is outstanding. Much as Artaud had predicted, Monk uses both movement and voice in total unison removing the need for literary dialogue since she had proved that the theatrical use of these is far richer and more complex than narrative and character representation could ever be. The following quote is Monk's, its similarity to the writings of Artaud on the voice is very clear:

"Words are too compelling ... the subtle emotional palate is

what I'm most interested in ... the voice is a very powerful connection to feeling, even on a physical level, - it comes from your gut, it comes straight up through your body, and it goes out your mouth. And I think society is now so systematically eliminating emotion, people are less and less comfortable with it. It's not cool. In a way it's sort of a stand to make a music that makes a person in the audience remember what it is to have emotion ... I remember going to a New Music Festival where people would be leaving other performances looking like they'd just been drugged, and I was very happy to see people leaving our concert with their cheeks pink - they were awake." (13).

It is again interesting to note that unlike the physically violent, in body art, women have taken a much more prominent role in the development of non-narrative theatre. For example, Trisha Brown, Twyla Tharp, Anna Halprin, Martha Graham, Joan Jonas, Yvonne Rainer and Laurie Anderson as well as those already mentioned. At least fifty percent of non-narrative theatre is produced by women which (although it's not in the context of this essay to discuss its implications) is itself a very important distinction between non-narrative and gratuitously violent performance discussed earlier, making the validity of the latter even more questionable.

One person who embodies more than any the theories of Artaud is non-narrative theatre is Robert Wilson. Wilson has been described by Eugene Ionesco as the greatest living dramatist in America (14) and he certainly has advanced further than any other dramatist in America the notion of the non-narrative theatre. His work, coming as it does from diverse background influences and disciplines, has a unique sensibility and approach which would be very similar to Artaud's ideal. The connection between Wilson and surrealism is often made and in the early 1970's when his work was first shown in Europe some of the surviving surrealists saw Wilson's work, one of whom (Louis Aragon) described it in a letter to Andre Breton as, "the future that we predicted". Wilson's work is

certainly surreal but it has links closer to the surrealism of Artaud than with that of the rest of the movement.

Wilson's theatre developed a great deal due to influences from fine art, dance, architecture and music as well as personal contact with handicapped people (which helped him develop a heightened awareness in his stage language). These many influences Wilson brought together to create a total work of art in the form of theatre presentations. Wilson's highly developed stage language is unique to him and besides all the formal influences listed above such as fine art, (Wilson was and still is in many ways a minimalist) he had derived his stage language from personal encounters in his life. He learnt the way in which a deaf boy, whom he worked with (Raymond Andrews), created a totally visual language (much as Artaud discovered in Mexican culture). This language was the basis of one of Wilson's most important works Deafman Glance (1971). In a similar way Wilson devised a spoken language while working with Christopher Knowles (an autistic). Knowles used verbal language in a totally abstract musical way which Wilson and Knowles were able to incorporate in many of their productions. Wilson's use of movement came about through both the influence of modern dance in America and his work as a therapist with brain damaged children, creating games of movement with them to enhance their understanding of their immediate environment. Wilson is also heavily influenced by oriental theatre as can be seen in Knee Plays, a recent work taken from his most ambitious project Civil Wars : A tree is best measured when it is down. Here Wilson used many elements of the Kabuki and Noh Theatre mixed with the monologues and music of David Byrne.

Wilson is the director/metter-en-scene that Artaud predicted - he oversees all the rehearsals where most of the creativity takes place, as opposed to the playwrights preconceived text.

Wilson also uses and often prefers non-actors in his work as he feels actors techniques can inhibit their work with him.



ILLUSTRATION VII

ROBERT WILSON - DEATH DESTRUCTION AND DETROIT

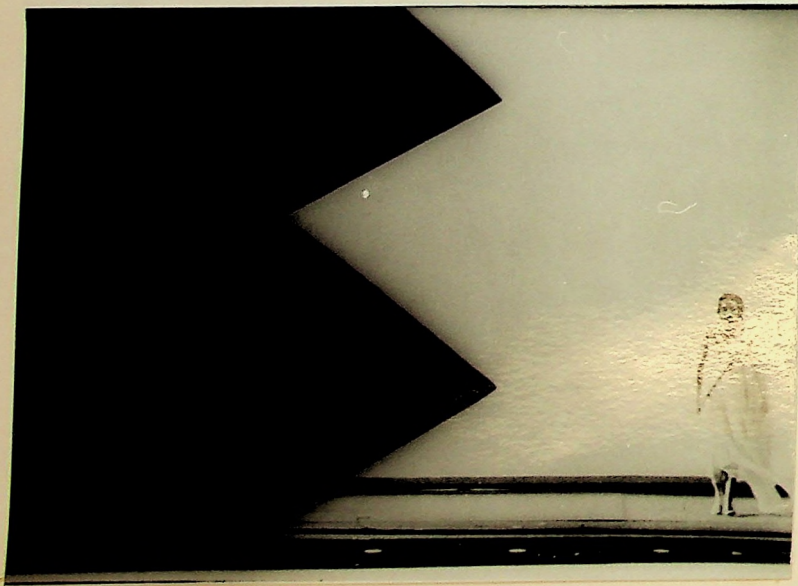
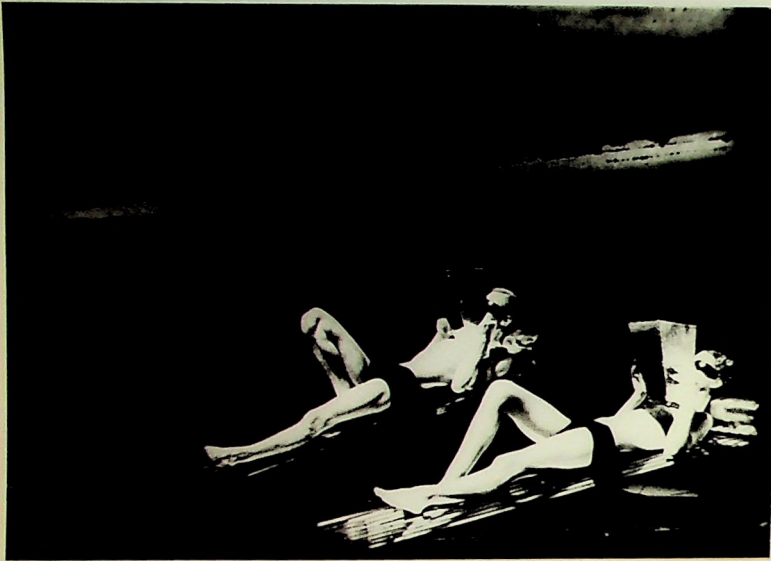


ILLUSTRATION VIII

ROBERT WILSON - EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH

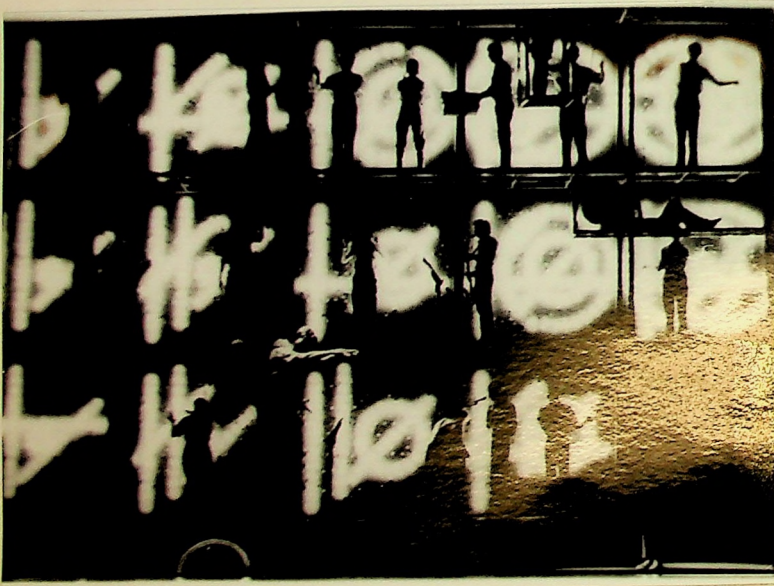
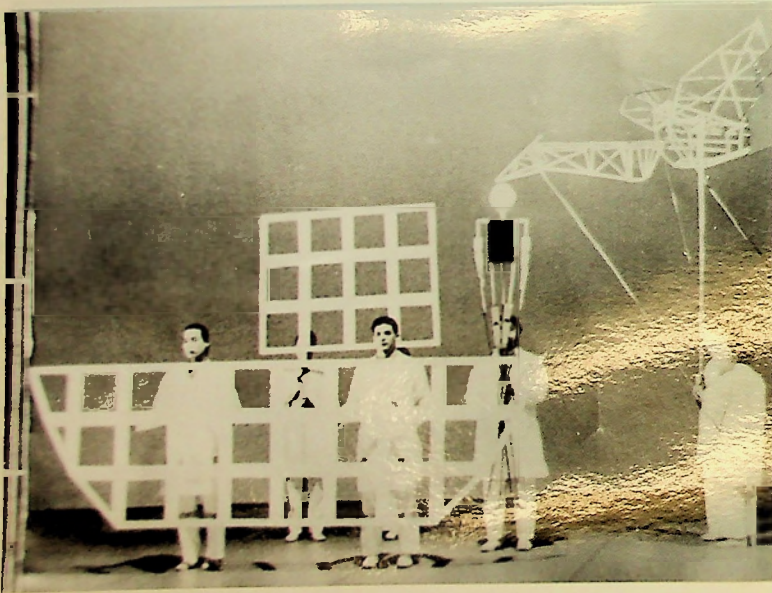


ILLUSTRATION IX

ROBERT WILSON - CIVIL WARS : A TREE IS BEST MEASURED WHEN IT IS DOWN



The subjects/titles of Wilson's plays may be misleading, with works entitled The life and times of Joseph Stalin, The life and times of Sigmund Freud, Einstein on the beach or A letter to Queen Victoria one might expect that Wilson was interested in character analysis. This however is not Wilson's main concern, rather he adapts (like Artaud) these themes to suit the needs of his expression. In 1976 Wilson co-authored with Philip Glass the work for which he has become best known; Einstein on the Beach. This was an opera which brought together music, movement, image, poetry all with equal prominence and importance on the stage. This was the vision of total theatre that Artaud predicted, it has also been called the first true 'gestantkunstwerk' (Wagners ideal of a total theatre).

Wilson has for the most part remained within the realm of the theatre which Artaud rejected, hoping to return the theatre to a living force by no longer associating with the traditional theatre. Wilson has once worked outside of the theatre creating a truly Artaudian surreal ritual entitled Ka Mountain : Gaurdina Terrace in Iran. The work lasted seven days and nights and took place over several mountains so that the audience had to follow on foot (with tents etc.) in order to see the work and thereby become part of the huge ritual. However, even with his work within the theatre, Wilson has managed to discover his own key into the real world so that his work cannot stagnate. Despite the surreal quality of the work, Wilson's theatre is potent because, at the same time it is based totally in reality. The reality of Christopher Knowles or Raymond Andrews or the dancer Lucinda Childs or his own movement and voice work, all of which the audience reflects on and can see is truth, which the audience can perceive as reflecting some truth within themselves. Anthony Howell in his essay on Wilson says of the effect the work has on the audience:

"Each member of his audience will experience realisations of their own, with all the immediacy of personal detection. His work allows the freedom to breathe ... as an audience, our own reaction ought to be the first thing we examine ... Always the instigator of unusual reactions hidden deep in each mind, Robert Wilson provides us with a profound stimulation of our own unconscious." (15).

Like Artaud, Wilson's strength comes from the fact that he 'continues to engage fundamental question of art and life' (16).

SOCIAL/POLITICAL HAPPENINGS

Happenings as art events can be dated back to as early as 1917 with the Cabaret Voltaire. America's first 'happening' came about due to the influence of Josef Albers and Xanti Svhavisky, ex-teachers of the Bauhaus who came to work in America at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. The first American 'happening' was that of John Cage and his friends (Merce Cunningham and Robert Rausenberg among others) at the same Black Mountain College in 1952. This led to a huge amount of happenings in America with an impulse always to include the general public and break down barriers between art and life. This led in turn to social/political performances or happenings, since one way to break down the barrier between art and life is to regard art as an instrument of revolution.

As previously mentioned Artaud saw his art as revolutionary, but the revolution he conceived of had nothing to do with a political revolution. Artaud's revolution was a spiritual revolution hence his repulsion from the surrealist movement at joining the communist party (it would seem at any rate, in retrospect, that Breton's joining with communism was something of a posture). Artaud was not alone in his belief in a pure cultural

revolution (Nietzsche whom he admired was another) but his failure to achieve the total cultural change which he wished for with his art can be directly related to his unwavering conviction in a cultural revolution without a political one. Susan Sontag in 'Approaching Artaud' describes his attitude as follows:

"He was anti-bourgeois almost by reflex (like nearly all artists in the modernist tradition) but the prospect of transferring power from the bourgeois to the proletariat never tempted him. From his avowedly 'absolute' viewpoints, a change in social structure would not change anything. The revolution to which Artaud subscribes has nothing to do with politics but is conceived explicitly as an effort to re-direct culture. Not only does Artaud share the widespread (and mistaken) belief in the possibility of a cultural revolution unconnected with political change, but he implies that the only genuine cultural revolution is one having nothing to do with politics ... Artaud's plans for subverting and revitalising culture, his longings for a new type of human personality illustrate the limits of all thinking about revolution which is anti-political." (17).

Any transformation or catharsis of which Artaud speaks is spiritual and never actually relates to the real political or social change of those involved. The fact that these elements (political and social) might in some way effect a transformation, in the spiritual way which Artaud wished does not seem to have concerned him.

Spiritual transformation was Artaud's ultimate concern and he wanted theatre more than anything to transform his audience, but he was unable to test his theories in his own troubled lifetime. Jerzy Grotowski (18) in the 1960's in Poland brought about a catharsis through theatre which must be the closest one could get to Artaud's writings in actual implementation. However, where Artaud's concern was with the audience, Grotowski's concern was with the spiritual transformation of the actor which then could be viewed, in all its intensity, by an audience. Grotowski's vision therefore has a slight difference in emphasis than

Artaud's. Grotowski has succeeded whereas Artaud failed in his aim, and though Grotowski claims the audience's presence is incidental, his theatre is by all accounts very moving to watch. Artaud on the other hand neglected, to a great extent, the needs of the actor as a human being, using his/her instead to bring about catharsis in the viewer. If Grotowski can be seen as the ultimate instigator of almost all that Artaud preached, (he is without doubt the most important figure in the theatre since Brecht) he is also ultimately caught within the same dilemma as Artaud; one cannot produce a cultural revolution without concerning oneself with social and political issues. To study this further I have chosen, finally in this essay, to deal with the work of a theatre that has managed to deal with all the elements of Artaud's writing but rejects his political apathy and instead deals directly in its work with social and political issues, making it a truly revolutionary theatre, it is Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre.

The Bread and Puppet Theatre was formed in 1962/63 by Peter Schumann. He had come from Germany to New York in 1960 working with Yvonne Rainer (a pupil of Anna Halprin) at the Merce Cunningham Studio. Schumann's stated that the aim of this theatre would be 'to work directly into and out of the interior of people. A demonic thing.' (19) In doing this the Bread and Puppet Theatre deals with many contemporary issues such as war, the nuclear threat, urban life, and combines these with a very spiritual element in the work, using often as a base, stories from; the bible. Two recurring themes have been resurrection and redemption. Schumann however does not regard himself as a preacher and says his reason for using these themes is because there are basic and human.

He rejects totally the traditional theatre as being 'too comfortable, too

well known'. (20).

"I really don't like the regular theatre much. But there have been theatres that made sense; news reports, religious devices; these things communicate. Our (contemporary) theatre is still in the thirties. We still hang onto that little cultural revolution." (21).

He is uninterested in revolutionising theatre for the sake of doing so, like many other companies do, and like the violent performances do which he regards as a failure because instead of reaching out to the audience, they cut themselves off by shock tactics, and he says 'if you reach out to an audience with what you want to get from them, your're hung up.' (22) Schumann although dealing with political and social issues in his theatre is anxious not to become yet another professional protest group who on becoming this lose their impact, by becoming predictable. He wishes to make it clear that he deals with issues which are real concerns of his and his company's and it is this truthfulness of expression which is so compelling in the work of the Bread and Puppet Theatre.

"In theatre you're involved in a political context ... you can expose and probe. You can say what you want to say so that it gets to the brains and feelings of people. ; But we don't take a problem solving attitude. We just try, with each show, to be a little real. We want to evoke a direct emotional response to what is happening - like protesting the war or urban society , or telling kids about violence in our children's plays. We have a show 'The Dead Man rises' - which doesn't prescribe a thing. It's much stronger than protest. It's a clear expression of outrage and disgust with city life. It's and answer to living in the city. ;It's a celebration of something else, maybe love." (23).

For Schumann the audience are as much part of his theatre as the members of the Bread and Puppet Theatre. He does not want to say anything that is particular to a theatre audience so he performs in the street to be able to talk instead to everyone. There is no admission charge, Schumann rejects the way theatre is a commodity, Schumann's theatre is 'more like bread - a

necessity, this theatre is a form of religion. It is fun'. (24) With the Bread and Puppet Theatre everyone around makes the theatre work. On going to an area to perform Schumann gets as many locals to perform and assist in the production as is possible. ; Before the performance there is a parade through the streets inviting all to join in and follow there is very much the air of a celebration (Schumann is very interested in old community festivals in Europe). Because the audience are a focal point of this theatre there is great emphasis on their understanding of what is happening i.e. communication. Therefore regardless of whether they are performing a peace march, political demonstration or celebration of Easter or Christmas, Schumann wants every child to be able to comprehend whats going on and this in no way means a work without depth the works profundity stems from its simplicity. The follow account of part of a performance will give some idea of the interaction involved between the company and the audience and also indicate the general 'look' of the theatre.

"For me the most effective scene was when the performers erected a twenty-five foot wooden mast, letting billow from it a vast blue and white sail. They unwound many yards of blue and white cloth, about three feet wide. With this about fifteen of them formed the outline of a boat. The sail caught the brisk Vermont wind and this veritable ark sailed across the meadow as the crowd of spectators parted like the waters to let it pass. The players chanted 'The storm is here° the storm is here'. They invited the audience to come aboard. Soon most of the several hundred spectators ducked under the bands of cloth and sailed along with the ark." (25).

In this we see that the audience is invited to participate physically in the work, to make a choice between remaining a spectator or becoming part of the work, and in doing so become part of the society that is being saved; to identify themselves among those who want to change the world or start a new world.

In the work Schumann acts as narrator, conductor, actor, musician, lighting technician and he stage manages the production in full view of the audience. This is because for Schumann his concerns with the content are more important than those of stagecraft. He is not trying to trick anyone, what he presents above all is honest, that is his strength. The actors are almost all amateurs, again stagecraft is not allowed to interfere. The actors who are almost always masked push themselves to great extremes to achieve this theatre, and this is evident to the audience who are drawn in to the work by the efforts of the non-actors. James Roose-Evans notes that:

"To observe his actors sitting on the floor when not in a scene, or standing by to make noises and sound effects, to see their faces is to know and experience with them the continuing nature of what they are about. Their gentleness, their humour, their caring, their concern is part of the total action, more it is the base and ground from which all their work stems ... the play is presented with a simplicity that radiates from the inner certainty of Schumann and his followers ... it is impossible to separate the quality of their life from their work." (26).

In 1974, Schumann disbanded his Bread and Puppet Theatre. He was concerned that he was becoming a professional protest theatre maker. Working in Vermont on a farm with his family he has integrated in a more personal way with his own home community. He still gives workshops and occasional performances. His only large work now, however, is a three day festival each summer for his local community which combines all of the previous work of the Bread and Puppet Theatre. The work is performed and assisted on every level by local people whom Schumann oversees. Crowds of up to fifteen thousand have come year after year to take part in the event, a true celebration of a community, a true ritual, a true theatre. A quote from a local newspaper shows the importance the community places on

ILLUSTRATION X

BREAD AND PUPPET THEATRE - THE CRY OF THE PEOPLE FOR MEAT



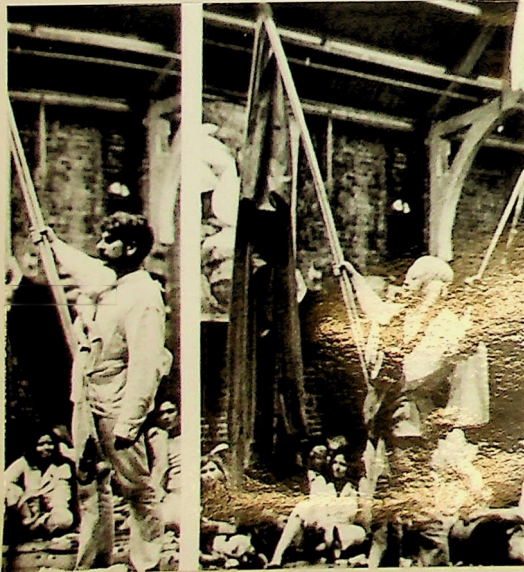
ILLUSTRATION XI

BREAD AND PUPPET THEATRE - THE LAST SUPPER



ILLUSTRATION XII

BREAD AND PUPPET THEATRE - THE GREAT WARRIOR



Schumann's event, saying that the Bread and Puppet Theatre 'is the source of so much drama, excitement and pride in this town.' (27).

In every performance ever given by the Bread and Puppet Theatre, Pete Schumann gives out bread to ;all of the audience to eat together, and when asked why he said simply 'we would like to be able to feed people.' (28).

CONCLUSION

Having assessed the power of Artaud's writing and how it's force can still be felt today in work as diverse as the examples I have given it is necessary in conclusion to define how Artaud can still be used as a foundation of new performance work. It is impossible to apply strictly the theories of Artaud for two reasons. One, some of it is quite impossible to put into practice, since unless one was of a similar nature to Artaud it would be pointless and it was his very nature which ultimately prevented Artaud from implementing his ideas. The second reason is that Artaud himself believed that there was little point in simply reproducing works again and again away from their time and relevance and to reproduce Artaud today would be to do just that. Artaud's power today stems from another source. Artaud is a force in as much as he inspires:

"Forbidden assent, or identification or appropriation or imitation the reader can only fall back on the category of inspiration ... One can be inspired by Artaud. One can be scorched, changed by Artaud. But there is no way of applying Artaud. Artaud's work becomes usable according to our needs, but the work vanishes behind our use of it. When we tire of using Artaud, we can return to his writings."
(29).

This is why I have chosen the examples I did to show those whom I feel

follow Artaud. They all bring to theatre their own vision. Artaud can be seen as an inspiration to implement these visions into theatre. These contemporary works are original and strong, their strength being in their truthfulness. This is why Artaud can be said to have influenced such a diverse range of theatre practitioners. Artaud must still be read and studied, but not so much for specific guidelines for theatre (most of the important or practical guidelines have been assimilated into the theatre today as common practice) but for his overall sense of purpose and conviction which can still inspire, and transform.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III

- 1 Susan Sontag Under the sign of Saturn p. 42.
- 2 John Fraser Violence in the Arts p. 116. Fraser's book deals with many related points in particular in Chapter 3 'Revolt'.
- 3 Artaud The Theatre and its Double
- 4 Vito Acconci
- 5 Vito Acconci "Vito Acconci" Avalanche no. 6 (Fall 1972).
- 6 David Bourdon 'An Eccentric Body of Art' from Battcock and Nickas Art of Performance.
- 7 Acconci's ideas on powerfield come from the study of the Principle of Topological Psychology by psychologist Kurt Levin.
- 8 Thomas McEvilley 'Ethics, Esthetics and REvolution in the work of Marina Abramovic and Ulay' from Modu Vivendi by Abramovic and Ulay.
- 9 Ibid
- 10 Kirsten Martin Performance another dimension interview with Abramovic/Ulay.
- 11 Ibid
- 12 Ibid
- 13 Billy Bergman and Richard Horn Experimental Pop p. 42.
- 14 Programme for Robert Wilson Readings Dublin 1985.
- 15 Anthony Howell 'Subjective Denouncement the work of Robert Wilson'.
- 16 Noel Sheridan 'Slow Theatre/Fast Sculpture' Circa No. 25, Nov/Dec 1985.
- 17 Susan Sontag p. 46/47
- 18 Jerzy Grotowski (born 1937 Poland) has become the most important contemporary dramatist. He was a major force in the rejection of the narrative and replacing the playwright with a director. His main influence has been in the area of acting, in which his effect has been as great as that of Stanislavsky. His influence comes mainly from his book Towards poor theatre since only a minority have seen his theatre works.

- 19 Helen Brown and June Seitz 'With the Bread and Puppet Theatre'
Drama REview vol. 12. no. 2. p. 62.
- 20 Ibid p. 72
- 21 Ibid p. 70
- 22 Ibid p. 64
- 23 Ibid p. 69
- 24 Peter Schumann Drama Review vol. 14. no. 3 p. 35.
- 25 Richard Schenhrere taken from James Roose-Evans
Experimental theatre.
- 26 James Roose-Evans Experimental Theatre
- 27 Chris Braithwaite 'The Chronicle' from James Roose-Evans
Experimental Theatre
- 28 Brown and Seitz p. 73
- 29 Sontag p. 63.

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