

Antonin Artaud

ORIENTAL AND OCCIDENTAL THEATRE



Edited by - Dr. Binny Deka

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ANTONIN ARTAUD

ORIENTAL AND OCCIDENTAL THEATRE

*Procured with
RUSA Grant*

Edited By

Dr. Binny Deka

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PREFACE

Antonin Artaud, renowned dramatist of the twentieth century has left an indelible impression on the history of European Theatre. He was a serious practitioner of theatre, convinced that the role ascribed to it was too limited and that it was capable of much more. He seemed to dislike contemporary, realistic and naturalistic theatre and devised his own theory of what the theatre ought to be.

This book hopes to aid under-graduates in their study of the essay: ORIENTAL AND OCCIDENTAL THEATRE by Antonin Artaud.

Suggestions for improvement are welcome and will be incorporated in later editions.

I am indebted to Bookland Publishers for their wholehearted support.

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LIFE AND WORKS (1896-1948)

Antonin Artaud was born in Marseille, France to Euphrasie Nalpas and Antoine-Roi Artaud. His parents were of Greek descent and he was greatly affected by his ancestry. When he was four years old Artaud suffered a severe attack of meningitis, which affected him temperamentally and made him a nervous and irritable adolescent. He also suffered from neuralgia, stammered and fell into long periods of clinical depression for which he had to be confined in a sanatorium. During such attacks of depression he was treated with opium which unfortunately turned into a life-long addiction. He was also introduced to the writings of Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe while undergoing "rest-cures" for his ailment.

In 1916 Artaud was conscripted into the French army. But he was allegedly discharged from the army because of his habit of sleepwalking. In 1919 he was prescribed laudanum by the doctor for the first time which he continued using and ultimately became addicted to. Artaud left for Paris in 1920 with the intention of becoming a writer. But he soon discovered that his talent was better suited for the theatre and he began to receive training and performing for prominent directors of theatre, Charles Dullin and Georges Pitoeffs. He also wrote poems and essays during this time. In 1923 he sent some of his poems to a journal edited by Jacques Riviere for publication, but these were rejected. However, the editor wrote back to him and in this way a relationship developed between them which later became Artaud's first publication under the title *Correspondance avec Jacques Riviere*. In 1925 Artaud became an active member of the surrealist movement; he began writing articles

in support of the movement and headed the Bureau of Surrealist Research. But in 1926 Artaud expressed his disillusionment with the activities of the group which according to him was not conducted in a true revolutionary spirit. The leader of the movement Andre Breton started proceedings against him. Artaud was a radical who refused to accept that the surrealist movement was supposed to confine its activities to opposing rationalism and bourgeois art. To him surrealism was, 'both a critique of mind and a technique for improving the range of mind'. When he discovered it to be another kind of confinement and the surrealists about to join the French Communist Party, he got himself expelled from the group. In 1927 he wrote a polemic against this 'surrealist bluff'. Between 1925 and 1929 Artaud published three small books-The Umbilicus of Limbo, The Nerve Meter and Art and Death which have been classified as prose poems and show him as one of the best prose poets in the French language.

Artaud developed a liking for the cinema and very soon he got the opportunity to write the scenario of 'The Seashell and the Clergyman', the first surrealist movie directed by Germaine Dulac. He acted as Jean-Paul Marat in Abel Gance's 'Napoleon' and as the monk Massieu in Carl Theodor Dreyer's 'The Passion Of Joan of Arc'. In 1926 after his expulsion from the surrealist group he began to run the Theatre Alfred Jarry in collaboration with Roger Vitrac who was as committed as himself. They produced and directed original plays written by Paul Claudel, August Strindberg and Vitrac. Though their theatre was frequented by famous artists like Andre Gide, Arthur Adamov and Paul Valery it closed down in 1928. Artaud had seen a Cambodian theatre in Marseilles in 1922 and the Balinese theatre in 1931 at the Paris Colonial Exposition. The Southeast Asian theatre he witnessed inspired his theory of the theatre of cruelty though it remains uncertain whether he was able to understand traditional oriental theatre. But the use of sounds ,music, gestures and the freedom from language that he observed in it made him reflect on a theatre which did not require to depend on texts alone. His perception of drama was first published in La Nouvelle Revue

Francaise which was later published as 'The First Manifesto for a Theater of Cruelty' in the book titled The Theatre and its Double (1938). It also contained a Second Manifesto (1933) and a reading of both the manifestoes are a must for an understanding of Artaud's view of theater. In 1933 his historical novel Heliogabalus was published. In 1935 Artaud produced his first theatre of cruelty, 'The Cenci' which was an adaptation of Shelley's tragic drama. In spite of the usage of innovative techniques, unique sound effects, a stage design by Balthus and with Artaud himself in the lead role it proved to be a commercial disaster. It ran for seventeen days filling Artaud with despair. After this failure he abandoned theatre and decided to go in pursuit of primitive cultures.

In 1936 Artaud received a grant to travel in Mexico. He lived with and studied the Tarahumara Mexicans and later wrote a book, Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara which exhibits his interest in the supernatural. While in Mexico ,with the Tarahumara he was able to overcome his addiction only to pick it up at a later date. A year later, in 1937 Artaud returned to France and proceeded to Ireland. Just before his trip to Ireland he wrote a book The New Revelations of Being. Since he had no knowledge of the Irish language he could not connect with the people and reportedly he spent the better part of his visit in his hotel room for which he could not pay the rent. On his return trip to France he became violent with some of the crew of the ship in which he was travelling and had to be arrested. On his arrival he was sent to an asylum and when the Nazis occupied France his friends took him to a psychiatric hospital in Rodez where he was placed under Dr. Gaston Frediere's care. Artaud was subjected to a number of electric shocks as treatment for his mental condition and after a number of such episodes he began to respond positively. He was discharged in 1946 and his friends placed him in another psychiatric clinic in Ivry-sur-Seine. He began to write again and after visiting a painting exhibition by Vincent Van Gogh in 1947, he wrote Van Gogh le suicide de la societe (Van Gogh, The Man Suicided by Society). It won a critic's award and in the same year he was commissioned to present a radio-play which was recorded under the title Pour en Finir avec le Jugement de dieu

(To Have Done With the Judgement of God). But the director of French Radio found it unsuitable for airing and cancelled it a day before it was to go on air. It has been described as 'a heretic's tirade at the extreme of the lunatic fringe'. He was disappointed by this censorship and died about a month later. French radio released it thirty years after his death. During the last two years of his life Artaud wrote a lot of poems, Essays, letters and dramatic monologues. Artaud died of intestinal cancer in the year 1948.

Chronology



CHRONOLOGY

- 1896 : September 4, Marseille, France. Birth of Antonin Artaud.
- 1920 : Moves to Paris.
- 1922 : Sees Cambodian theatre
- 1923 : Poems rejected for publication but editor Jacques Riviere initiates correspondence with him.
- 1925 : Becomes an active member of surrealist movement.
- 1925-1929: Writes The Umbilicus of Limbo, The Nerve Meter, Art and Death.
- 1926 : Disassociates himself from the surrealist movement.
Establishes Alfred Jarry Theatre with Roger Vitrac
- 1927 : Activity as stage and film actor.
- 1928 : Dismantles Alfred Jarry Theatre.
- 1931 : Sees Balinese Theatre. Writes First Manifesto.
- 1933 : Writes Second Manifesto.
- 1935 : Produces 'The Cenc
- 1936 : Receives grant to travel to Mexico.
- 1937 : Publishes Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara.
Travels to Ireland.
Writes The New Revelation of Being.
Returned to France by the police in a straitjacket.
- 1937-1946: In various Psychiatric hospitals.
- 1946 : Discharged from hospital.
- 1947 : Publishes Van Gogh, The Man Suicided by Society. Wins Critic's award for it.
Radio-Play To Have Done With The Judgement of God banned by French Radio.
- 1948 : Dies of intestinal cancer.

ARTAUD'S THEATRE OF CRUELTY

Antonin Artaud has been described by author Martin Esslin as, 'One of the most extraordinary men of his age, actor, director, prophet, blasphemer, saint, madman- and a great poet.' His theory of the theatre and his experiments in theatre and cinema towards transforming his ideas to practice are of immense importance in the world of theatre. These ideas are directly related to the total seriousness with which he viewed theatre and to his belief that it held the key to bringing life into the collapse and demoralization of his time. Indeed he wanted the stage to be replete with instinctive, primordial forces, mythical power and magical beauty which would disrupt the passivity of the spectator's experience and purge hidden fears, repressed desires to bring forth purity. He assigned a far more significant role to theatre than a political or social one; he wanted the experience to be a spiritual one.

In the first chapter, 'The Theatre and The Plague' of his book *The Theatre and Its Double* Artaud writes that according to him true theatre is comparable to the plague. He derives the theatre from the plague when, 'the dregs of the population, immunized by their frenzied greed, pillage the riches they know will serve no profit. At that moment the theatre is born, i.e., an amusing gratuitousness provoking acts without use or profit'. He quotes St. Augustine in *The City of God* as complaining of the 'similarity between the action of the plague that kills without destroying the organs and the theatre which, without killing, provokes the most mysterious alterations in the mind of not only an individual but an entire populace.' After elaborating on the similarities he writes, 'In the true theatre a play disturbs the senses' repose, frees the repressed unconscious, incites a virtual revolt...and imposes on the assembled collectivity an attitude that is both difficult and heroic.' He believed that theatre was the triumph of 'dark powers that are nourished by a power even more profound until extinction. Ford's, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore' is a perfect

illustration of what he means by these dark powers for it exposes the 'super human passion' between Giovanni and Annabel 'which laws obstruct and condemn but which they will put beyond the law'. Their love may be adulterous but their passion has transcended threats, horror, law, morality and anyone who has dared to be judgmental. To him theatre, 'releases conflicts disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these possibilities and these powers are dark, it is the fault not of the plague nor the theatre but life.' The action of the theatre is beneficial for it impels men 'to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and the hypocrisy of our world: it shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses; and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it.'

Realism and Naturalism were dominant when Artaud expressed his dissatisfaction of contemporary theatre. Theatre according to him depended too much on dialogue, on the text which was the prerequisite of the written forms of literature as opposed to those meant for acting. In the second chapter of *The Theatre and Its Double* titled 'Metaphysics and the Mise en Scene' he writes, 'Dialogue - a thing written and spoken- does not belong specifically to the stage, it belongs to books, as is proved by the fact that in all handbooks of literary history a place is reserved for the theatre as a subordinate branch of the history of the spoken language.' Artaud found that unlike occidental theatre oriental theatre did not relegate whatever could not be expressed in speech or dialogue into the background. He believed that the stage was a 'concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak.' The concrete language which Artaud refers to had to be independent of speech; it would have to satisfy the senses. Like poetry of language so also there existed poetry of the senses which was capable of expressing thoughts beyond the reach of the spoken language. He determines what this solidified, materialized physical language of theatre which differentiated itself from speech consisted

of: 'It consists of everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as is the language of words.' Thus the poetry of language must be replaced by a poetry in space, 'which will be resolved in precisely the domain which does not belong strictly to words.'

Poetry in space would be able to create different material images equivalent to word images. Music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting, scenery are all aspects of this complex poetry. It becomes effective in theatre only when it is able to produce objectively as a sound in Balinese theatre, 'has its equivalent in a gesture and instead of serving as an decoration an accompaniment of a thought, instead causes its movement directs it, destroys it, or changes it completely.' Sign-language as they exist in "unperverted pantomime" is another aspect of poetry in space. By this he means an effective concrete manner of evoking objects or natural details which he had observed in oriental theatre, 'which represents night by a tree on which a bird that has already closed one eye is beginning to close the other.' Abstract ideas or attitude of mind would be represented by symbols from scriptures. Language which evoked images of an intensely natural or spiritual poetry is poetry in space totally independent of the spoken language. 'This language is derived from the stage, draws its efficacy from its spontaneous creation on the stage, to the degree that it struggles directly with the stage without passing through words-it is the *mise en scene* that is the theatre much more than the written and the spoken play.' In the Balinese theatre the playwright is done away with and instead of the presence of an author in western theatre, the organizer, the producer is felt, 'working with exclusively objective stage means'.

Contemporary theatre was decadent because it was involved primarily with problems of a topical and psychological nature and had lost its sense of seriousness and laughter. Artaud believes that theatre had shied away from 'danger' by which he meant from the effects that are immediate and painful. Every object or the use of a

natural form depends on convention. To illustrate his meaning Artaud states that the word 'tree' brings to mind the form of a tree as nature had meant it to be. But if nature had devised its form like an animal or a hill we would have attached the word 'tree' to that form. Such an idea causes a radical transformation of the inner understanding of the world. To Artaud, 'Theatrically these inversions of form, displacements of signification could become the essential element of that humorous poetry in space which is the exclusive province of the *mise en scene*.'

Occidental theatre was a theatre of psychological tendencies while the oriental theatre was of metaphysical ones. As such the entire range of gestures, signs, postures and sonorities which constitutes the language of oriental drama develops all its physical and poetic effects on every level of consciousness and senses. This language induces thought to adopt profound attitudes which Artaud calls 'metaphysics-in-action'. In the oriental theatre Artaud found that their sign language was given more importance than the written text because they attributed magical powers to it. It is this magic that he wanted to bring back in the theatre. He wanted to position theatre at that position where words had not been coined to depict objects and emotions. In a letter to Jean Paulhan in 1933 he writes, '... let words be joined again to the physical motions that gave them birth, and let the discursive logical aspect of speech disappear beneath its affective, physical side, i.e., let words be heard in their sonority rather than be exclusively taken for what they mean grammatically, let them be perceived as movements, and let these movements themselves turn into other simple, direct movements as occurs in all the circumstances of life ... the language of literature is reconstituted, revived, and furthermore-as in the canvasses of certain painters of the past-objects themselves begin to speak. Light, instead of decorating, assumes the qualities of an actual language, and the stage effects, all humming with significations, take on an order, reveal patterns. And this immediate and physical language is entirely at the director's disposal.'

In his essay 'No More Masterpieces' Artaud proposes a theatre of cruelty which would incorporate all his ideas regarding theatre. He

singles out a number of faults which needed to be overcome at the very outset. The occidental theatre of his day was complacent. It did not wish to perform anything which might hurt the sensibilities of the audience. Its psychological tendencies did not appeal anymore and he believes this tendency to be the greatest reason for the theatre's loss of energy. Its other weakness was its love or respect for masterpieces of the past. This veneration has petrified and deadened responses; it has prevented the present generation from establishing contact with what Artaud calls underlying power, thought energy, life force and the determination which initiates change. Dead poets must make way for others; poems will no longer be personal, benefitting only the poet and not the reader; the flippant and random use of art without an understanding of the power it possessed and the forces it could arouse had to be changed. The written word according to Artaud spends itself once it is read but theatre which permitted action could never be exhausted as no two actions can ever be exactly the same.

As used by Artaud, the word 'cruelty' has a special connotation; it does not stand for 'blood' or for the cruelty that a person can cause another by "hacking at each other's bodies". By theatre of cruelty he means a theatre, 'difficult and cruel for myself first of all'. In a letter to his friend, J.P. in 1932 Artaud writes, 'I employ the word "cruelty" in the sense of an appetite for life, a cosmic rigor and implacable necessity, in the gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness, in the sense of that pain apart from whose ineluctable necessity life could not continue; good is desired, it is the consequence of an act; evil is permanent. When the hidden God creates, he obeys the cruel necessity of creation which has been imposed upon himself by himself, and he cannot not create, hence not admit into the centre of the self-willed whirlwind a kernel of evil ever more condensed, ever more consumed.' Since theatre in this sense is continuous creation and a magical action it obeys this necessity. When there is an absence of, 'this blind appetite for life capable of overriding everything', a play ceases to be useful; it becomes an unfulfilled play. The theatre of cruelty in this sense is a theatre, 'in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theatre as by a whirlwind

of higher forces.' It has nothing to do with psychology and everything to do with the recounting of the extraordinary, staging natural conflicts, natural and subtle forces, and devising itself into a powerful platform of redirection. The violent and concentrated action that it recounts has its own lyricism, its own imagery of the supernatural which forms a 'bleeding spurt of images' in the poet's head and is formed in the spectator's head as well. It is capable of inducing trances like the dances of Dervishes which induces trances with precise instruments to effect cures similar to the tribal music cures. As this theatrically violent gesture is disinterested it teaches the spectator the total uselessness of the action and summons to mind the superior use of the state which was not used by the theatre. This process produces a purification which is the precise aim of the theatre of cruelty. He believed implicitly that, 'Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theatre must be rebuilt' so that the experience of cruelty can be related to truth, reality like the violence of birth, death, war and so on.

This theatre was meant to appeal to the common public because it drew from individual and collective dreams, myths, or from the subconscious in men. These would produce an effect upon reality provided it was projected with the necessary violence to liberate its magical qualities. As Artaud opined, 'One does not separate the mind from the body nor the senses from the intelligence, especially in a domain where the endlessly renewed fatigue of the organs requires intense and sudden shocks to revive our understanding.' His vision consisted of producing a spectacle where direct means of action are used to explore the senses and the nerves through the usage of objects, gestures, signs, sounds, words, twitterings, resonances, spaces packed with silence and immobility: all used in a new spirit.

'The Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto)' and 'The Theatre of Cruelty (Second Manifesto)' contain Artaud's most practical suggestions regarding his idea of theatre though direct reference to 'cruelty' in the Manifestoes is brief. He writes in the First Manifesto, 'Without an element

of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible. In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds'. Clearly, Artaud wanted a theatre which would appeal to the vast masses through the senses and the nerves. In the same manifesto he writes of abolishing the stage and the auditorium; there will be one single site like a huge barn or hangar where the action of the theatre takes place. Galleries for height and depth would be constructed for the actors and they would have its use along with the four corners of the room. The spectators being placed within the action, they are engulfed and physically affected by it. Lighting of this huge space would be obligatory and the varied lighting for performances would fall on the spectators as well. It would play an important role in this new theatre as he wanted light to produce different specific actions on the mind. New ways of spreading light in waves, sheets, fusillades of arrows would have to be investigated. He also wanted light to be employed to create an impression of heat, cold, anger, fear and so on. Masks, manikins, objects of strange proportions hieroglyphic characters, ritual costumes would be used with the same sanction as verbal images. They would fulfill the function of a set. Artaud wanted to avoid modern costumes for the actors as much as possible and wanted to preserve age-old costumes, of ritual intent because they, 'preserve (d) a beauty and a revelational appearance from their closeness to the traditions that gave birth'. Musical instruments would be used as part of the set. But all music required, 'to act directly and profoundly upon the sensibility through the organs' for which he advocated research to find new instruments for new sounds, or a combination of new sounds from existing ones. He emphasized the need to create 'unbearably piercing sounds' for the theatre. The language of the theatre would be constituted around the *mise en scene* with the intention of dissolving the author and the director. Instead there would be a creator on whom the spectacle and the plot would devolve. Though Artaud was against the written text for the theatre he did not suggest the suppression of the spoken language. He wanted them to be given the same importance that one would give to it in a dream. He wanted a concrete language for

the theatre, which meant everything would have to be turned into signs and symbols. 'Code language and musical transcription will be valuable as a means of transcribing voices,. 'Similarly ten thousand and one expressions of the face caught in the form of masks can be labeled and catalogued, so they may eventually participate directly and symbolically in this concrete language of the stage, independently of their particular psychological use.' All these would go into the making of the spectacle. In Artaud's words, 'Every spectacle will contain a physical and objective element, perceptible to all. Cries, groans, apparitions, surprises, theatricalities of all kinds, magic beauty of costumes taken from certain ritual models; resplendent lighting, incantational beauty of voices, the charms of harmony, rare notes of music, colours of objects, physical rhythm of movements whose crescendo and decrescendo will accord exactly with the pulsation of movements familiar to everyone, concrete appearance of new and surprising objects, masks, effigies yards high, sudden changes of light, the physical action of light which arouses sensations of heat and cold, etc.'

Artaud intended to create an atmosphere of 'hypnotic suggestion' with which the senses would directly affect the mind. He believed that the poetic state was essentially a transcendent experience which people tried to achieve through 'love, crime, drugs, war, or insurrection'. The theatre of cruelty aimed to create such a 'passionate and convulsive conception of life'. The 'violent rigor and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the creation of such theatre required necessitated cruelty and it is in this sense that Artaud utilizes the term Theatre of Cruelty. In the Second Manifesto he writes, 'This cruelty... can thus be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid.' Hence subject and themes of his theatre would correspond to the problems of his time but it would be dealt with in its own way. Themes cosmic and universal would be interpreted according to ancient Hindu, Judaic, Mexican and Iranian cosmogonies. In essence he wanted to bring back the essential passions of man which he believed had been concealed by

the modern theatre under the cover of the pseudocivilized man.

In 1935 Artaud produced 'The Cenci' which was a play based on Shelley's Five act tragedy and an account of a historical event translated by Stendhal. Artaud's 'Cenci' was a four-act play of revenge, incest, rape, murder and bloodshed. He played the role of Count Cenci and incorporated all the elements of his vision of the theatre of cruelty. But despite his best efforts the play did not live up to expectations and after suffering financial losses he decided to abandon theatre forever. Yet his concept of theatre and its function began to circulate and after his death his vision gained more followers and a new generation of people became inspired and intrigued by his approach. As Susan Sontag opines, 'The Cenci' is not a very good play, even by the standards of convulsive dramaturgy which Artaud sponsored, and the interest of his production of "The Cenci", by all accounts, lay in ideas it suggested but actually did not embody. What Artaud did on the stage as a director and as a leading actor in his productions was idiosyncratic, narrow, and hysterical to persuade. He has exerted influence through his ideas about the theatre, a constituent part of the authority of his ideas being precisely his inability to put them in practice.' Playwrights like Albert Camus and Jean Genet's work showed Artaud's influence and Famous Polish director Jerzy Grotowski incorporated many of Artaud's ideas in his theatres as did a host of other dramatists. Artaud's contribution to theatre cannot be ignored.

TEXT :

Ces ORIENTAL AND OCCIDENTAL THEATRE

The Balinese theater has revealed to us a physical and nonverbal idea of the theater, in which the theater is contained within the limits of everything that can happen on a stage, independently of the written text, whereas the theater as we conceive it in the Occident has declared its alliance with the text and finds itself limited by it. For the Occidental theater the Word is everything, and there is no possibility of expression without it; the theater is a branch of literature, a kind of sonorous species of language, and even if we admit a difference between the text spoken on the stage and the text read by the eyes, if we restrict theater to what happens between cues, we have still not managed to separate it from the idea of a performed text.

This idea of the supremacy of speech in the theater is so deeply rooted in us, and the theater seems to such a degree merely the material reflection of the text, that everything in the theater that exceeds this text, that is not kept within its limits and strictly conditioned by it, seems to us purely a matter of *mise en scene*, and quite inferior in comparison with the text. *Occi*

Presented with this subordination of theater to speech, one might indeed wonder whether the theater by any chance possesses its own language whether it is entirely fanciful to consider it as an independent and autonomous art, of the same rank as music, painting, dance, etc...

One finds in any case that this language, if it exists, is necessarily identified with the *mise en scene* considered:

1. as the visual and plastic materialization of speech,
2. as the language of everything that can be said and signified upon a stage independently of speech, everything that finds its

expression in space, or that can be affected or disintegrated by it.

Once we regard this language of the *mise en scene* as the pure theatrical language, we must discover whether it can attain the same internal ends as speech, whether theatrically and from the point of view of the mind it can claim the same intellectual efficacy as the spoken language. One can wonder, in other words, whether it has the power, not to define thoughts but to *cause thinking*, whether it may not entice the mind to take profound and efficacious attitudes toward it from its own point of view.

In a word, to raise the question of the intellectual efficacy of expression by means of objective forms, of the intellectual efficacy of a language which would use only shapes, or noise, or gesture, is to raise the question of the intellectual efficacy of art.

If we have come to attribute to art nothing more than the values of pleasure and relaxation and constrain it to a purely formal use of forms within the harmony of certain external relations, that in no way spoils its profound expressive value; but the spiritual infirmity of the Occident, which is the place *par excellence* where men have confused art and aestheticism, is to think that its painting would function only as painting, dance which would be merely plastic, as if in an attempt to castrate the forms of art, to sever their ties with all the mystic attitudes they might acquire in confrontation with the absolute.

One therefore understands that the theater, to the very degree that it remains confined within its own language and in correlation with it, must break with actuality. Its object is not to resolve social or psychological conflicts, to serve as battlefield for moral passions, but to express objectively certain secret truths, to bring into the light of day by means of active gestures certain aspects of truth that have been buried under forms in their encounters with Becoming.

To do that, to link the theater to the expressive possibilities of forms, to everything in the domain of gestures, noises, colors, movements, etc., is to restore it to its original direction, to reinstate it in its religious and metaphysical aspect, is to reconcile it with the



universe.

But words, it will be said, have metaphysical powers; it is not forbidden to conceive of speech as well as of gestures on the universal level, and it is on that level moreover that speech acquires its major efficacy, like a dissociative force exerted upon physical appearances, and upon all states in which the mind feels stabilized and tends towards repose. And we can readily answer that this metaphysical way of considering speech is not that of the Occidental theater, which employs speech not as an active force springing out of the destruction of appearances in order to reach the mind itself, but on the contrary as a completed stage of thought which is lost at the moment of its own exteriorization.

Speech in the Occidental theater is used only to express psychological conflicts particular to man and the daily reality of his life. His conflicts are clearly accessible to spoken language, and whether they remain in the psychological sphere or leave it to enter the social sphere, the interest of the drama will still remain a moral one according to the way in which its conflicts attack and disintegrate the characters. And it will indeed always be a matter of a domain in which the verbal solutions of speech will retain their advantage. But these moral conflicts by their very nature have no absolute need of the stage to be resolved. To cause spoken language or expression by words to dominate on the stage the objective expression of gestures and of everything which affects the mind by sensuous and spatial means is to turn one's back on the physical necessities of the stage and to rebel against its possibilities.

It must be said that the domain of the theater is not psychological but plastic and physical. And it is not a question of whether the physical language of theater is capable of achieving the same psychological resolutions as the language of words, whether it is able to express feelings and passions as well as words, but whether there are not attitudes in the realm of thought and intelligence that words are incapable of grasping and that gestures and everything partaking of a spatial language attain with more precision than they.

Before giving an example of the relations between the physical

world and the deepest states of mind, let me quote what I have written elsewhere:

"All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is *to dissimulate it*. True expression hides what it makes manifest. It sets the mind in opposition to the real void of nature by creating in reaction a kind of fullness in thought. Or, in other terms, in relation to the manifestation-illusion of nature it creates a void in thought. All powerful feeling produces in us the idea of the void. And the lucid language which obstructs the appearance of this void also obstructs the appearance of poetry in thought. That is why an image, an allegory, a figure that masks what it would reveal have more significance for the spirit than the lucidities of speech and its analytics.

"This is why true beauty never strikes us directly. The setting sun is beautiful because of all it makes us lose."

The nightmares of Flemish painting strike us by the juxtaposition with the real world of what is only a caricature of that world; they offer the specters we encounter in our dreams. They originate in those half-dreaming states that produce clumsy, ambiguous gestures and embarrassing slips of the tongue: beside a forgotten child they place a leaping harp; near a human embryo swimming in underground waterfalls they show an army's advance against a redoubtable fortress. Beside the imaginary uncertainty the march of certitude, and beyond a yellow subterranean light the orange flash of a great autumn sun just about to set.

It is not a matter of suppressing speech in the theater but of changing its role, and especially of reducing its position, of considering it as something else than a means of conducting human characters to their external ends, since the theater is concerned only with the way feelings and passions conflict with one another, and man with man, in life.

To change the role of speech in theater is to make use of it in a concrete and spatial sense, combining it with everything in the theater that is spatial and significant in the concrete domain; to manipulate it like a solid object, one which overturns and disturbs

things, in the air first of all, then in an infinitely more mysterious and secret domain but one that admits of extension, and it will not be very difficult to identify this secret but extended domain with that of formal anarchy on the one hand but also with that of continuous formal creation on the other.

This is why the identification of the theater's purpose with every possibility of formal and extended manifestation gives rise to the idea of a certain poetry in space which itself is taken for sorcery.

In the Oriental theater of metaphysical tendency, contrasted to the Occidental theater of psychological tendency, forms assume and extend their sense and their significations on all possible levels; or, if you will, they set up vibrations not on a single level, but on every level of the mind at once.

And it is because of the multiplicity of their aspects that they can disturb and charm and continuously excite the mind. It is because the Oriental theater does not deal with the external aspects of things on a single level nor rest content with the simple obstacle or with the impact of these aspects on the senses, but instead considers the degree of mental possibility from which they issue, that it participates in the intense poetry of nature and preserves its magic relations with all the objective degrees of universal magnetism.

It is in the light of magic and sorcery that the *mise en scene* must be considered, not as the reflection of a written text, the mere projection of physical doubles that is derived from the written work, but as the burning projection of all the objective consequences of a gesture, word, sound, music, and their combinations. This active projection can be made only upon the stage and its consequences found in the presence of and upon the stage; and the author who uses written words only has nothing to do with the theater and must give way to specialists in its objective and animated sorcery.

SUMMARY

Antonin Artaud singles out the basic difference between Balinese (oriental) and Occidental theatre. (The Balinese theatre has revealed a physical and non verbal idea of the theatre where everything that happens on the stage is independent of the written text. Occidental theatre on the other hand is limited by the text. Words are of paramount importance and even if theatre is confined to what happens between cues, then too it is inseparable from the idea of a performed text.)

(The idea of the supremacy of speech is so deep rooted in the west that everything which is not a part of the text is considered to be mise en scene and is considered inferior to the text.)

Theatrical language as an independent and autonomous art of the same rank as music, painting, dance... does not exist. It is regarded as mise en scene and is considered to be visual and plastic materialization of speech. (Mise en scene stands for everything that can be said and signified without depending on speech and it finds its expression in space or on that which can be affected or broken down by it. If the mise en scene is accepted as the true theatrical language then the next step will be to discover whether it possesses the power to cause thinking, whether it can entice the mind to take profound and efficacious attitudes towards it from its own point of view. This language would have to depend on objective forms, shapes, noise or gestures to be capable of intellectual efficacy. Artaud believes that questioning the intellectual efficacy of this language is questioning the efficacy of art.)

The Occidents have always been spiritually poor because they confuse art and aestheticism. Engrossed in the formal forms of art, and certain external relations they are unable to attain the mystic attitudes they might have acquired through their realization of the absolute. Their objective to resolve social or psychological

conflicts, moral issues have led them away from precisely those objectives which Artaud believes the theatre ought to be involved in: 'to express objectively certain truths, to bring into the light of day by means of active gestures certain aspects of the truth that have been buried under forms in their encounters with Becoming.'

Theatre must regain its lost religious and metaphysical aspect in order to reconcile with the universe.)

(Oriental theatre believes that words and speech have metaphysical powers which exerts on physical appearances, and stabilized minds tending towards repose like a disassociative force. But in the Occidental theatre words or speech is not used as an active force which springs out of the destruction of appearances to reach the mind. On the contrary words lose their impact as soon as they are spoken.)

Speech in the Occidental theatre was used only to express psychological conflicts of man in his daily life. Whether these conflicts remain on the social or on the psychological level the interest of the drama remains a moral one where the spoken language retains its supremacy. But by doing so the Occidental theatre has turned its back on the immense possibilities of the stage along with its physical necessities. The objective expression of gestures and of everything which affects the mind by sensuous and spatial means is ignored.

Artaud believes that there exist attitudes in the realm of thought and intelligence that words are unable to grasp and that gestures and everything which is expressible in space is capable of more precision than the spoken language.

The work of the Flemish painters are a perfect example of the relations between the physical world and the deepest states of mind. They originate in those half-dreaming states that produce seemingly incongruous images of the mind. Artaud explains his meaning by quoting from his own work where he states that true feeling is untranslatable; to express it is to betray it. But to translate it is to conceal it. In fact true expression hides that which it wants to reveal. It creates a fullness in thought or a void in thought by setting the mind in opposition to the real void in nature. All powerful feelings

produce a void in thought. Language obstructs the appearance of this void and the appearance of poetry in thought. But an image an allegory, a figure which masks what it seeks to expose becomes more significant for the spirit than speech and its analytics.

Artaud does not aim at suppressing speech in theatre rather he seeks a reduction of its role. Language in theatre must be used in a concrete and spatial sense, combining it with everything in the theatre which is spatial and concrete. By manipulating language in space like a solid object, which overturns and disturbs things first in the air and then in an infinitely more mysterious and secret extended domain. He identifies this domain with that of formal anarchy on one hand and with that of continuous formal creation on the other hand.

The identification of the theatre's purpose with formal and extended manifestation gives rise to the idea of a certain poetry in space which is considered to be sorcery.

Unlike the Occidental theatre of psychological tendency the Oriental theatre of metaphysical tendency affects not one level but every level of the mind simultaneously.

It becomes obvious that the Oriental theatre can disturb charm and continuously excite the mind because of the multiplicity of their aspects and because they do not deal with external aspects of things. Neither is it satisfied with the simple obstacle or with the impact of these aspects on the senses. Instead it considers the mental possibilities from which they issue and in which it participates in the intense poetry of nature and preserves its magical relations with all the degrees of universal magnetism.

Artaud maintains that it is in this light of magic and sorcery that the mise en scene has to be viewed. It is not a reflection of, or a physical double of the written text. It is the burning projection of all the objective consequences of a gesture, sound, music and their combinations. This is possible only on the stage and the author who uses the written word has nothing to do with it. He must give way to the specialists in its objective and animated sorcery.

NOTE

It is clear that Antonin Artaud wanted to use Balinese theatre as an example of Oriental theatre and as a basis for those ideas in which he firmly believed. He demanded that the theatre should have its own language, independent of the written word. Hence the author should give way to the theatre specialists to bring back the magic and seriousness to the theatre in the west. Influenced by the Balinese dances that were performed in The Paris Colonial Exposition in August 1931, he wrote a review about them in the Nouvelle Revue Francaise which was published in October in the same year. These observations were further improved upon and appeared again in The Theatre And Its Double in 1938. According to Leonard Cabell Pronko the essays 'Oriental and Occidental Theatre' and 'Metaphysics and the Mise en Scene' are the chief testimony for Artaud's Balinese dream. There are several more references to Asian drama throughout the other essays in The Theatre And Its Double where the above mentioned essays appear. He states that the concepts that Artaud associates with Balinese dance and drama, 'informs the general aesthetics of the theatre he espoused'.

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ANNOTATIONS

- Sonorous:** having or producing a full, deep, or rich sound. Impressive in style of speech.
- Cues:** a word in a play telling an actor when to come on stage.
- Autonomous:** that which is self-controlled and not governed by outside forces.
- Plastic:** having the power to give form or fashion to a mass of matter; as the plastic hand of the creator or the plastic mind of the child.
- Efficacy:** effectiveness; power or capacity to produce a desired effect.
- Correlation:** two random variables are positively correlated if high values of one are likely to be associated with high values of the other. They are negatively correlated if associated with low values of the other. Here used as negative correlative.
- Actuality:** reality; state or fact of being actual.
- Dissociative:** separation;
- Metaphysical:** of or relating to metaphysics; of or relating to the transcendent or to a reality beyond what is perceptible to the senses.
- Spatial:** relating to the nature of space; having extension in space.
- Dissimulate:** to hide one's feelings, motives etc by pretense; under a feigned appearance.
- Manifest:** apparent to the senses, especially that of sight and to the mind.
- Void:** not occupied, vacant, empty.
- Image:** imitation or representation of person or thing, drawn, painted, sculptured photographed etc.

- Allegory:** a symbolic representation; the representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures, or events in narrative, dramatic, or pictorial form.
- Analytics:** logical analysis
- Lucid:** transparently clear, intelligible
- This is why... makes us lose:** The setting sun is beautiful because we become aware of all we stand to lose by its setting; True beauty is perceived indirectly when confronted by its absence.
- Flemish:** Dutch painters active in Southern Netherlands.
- Specters:** a mental representation of some haunting experience.
- Multiplicity:** the state or quality of being manifold or various; a great number.
- Sorcery:** use of supernatural powers over others through the assistance of spirits.
- Animated:** infused with life, someone described as 'bigger than life'. For example the facial expressions on a mime's face.

TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the differences between occidental and oriental theater according to Antonin Artaud?
2. Describe what Artaud means by *mise en scene*.
3. What is *mise en scene* in oriental theater?
4. How can occidental theater benefit from the oriental theater's concept of *mise en scene*.
5. What is the function of theater according to Artaud and in what aspects does he find western theater lacking?
6. What does Antonin Artaud mean by 'Theater of Cruelty'.

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