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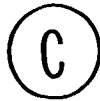
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TOWARDS A THEATRE OF CRUELTY: ANTONIN ARTAUD, PETER BROOK,
THE LIVING THEATRE, HAPPENINGS, JERZY GROTOWSKI

by



DUANE CREDICO

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Towards A Theatre Of Cruelty: Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, The Living Theatre, Happenings, Jerzy Grotowski submitted by Duane Credico in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Two analogous aims motivate this study: a better understanding of the theatrical orientation of Antonin Artaud, and a clarification of the divergent and often contradictory tendencies in post-Absurdist theatre. The method is comparative: a juxtaposition of recent theatrical trends with Artaud's theory of the Theatre of Cruelty, a catalytic and visionary ideal which predicts, exemplifies and encompasses many of the most innovative developments in contemporary experimental theatre.

In the first two chapters, attention will center on Artaud's most influential work, Le théâtre et son double. Beginning with a definitive examination of his ideals of theatre and of cruelty, some time will then be given to Artaud's own examples of this ideal from the antecedent corpus of Western dramatic literature, and to the four events, fantasized and realized, theatrical and otherwise, which compose Artaud's frustrated search for the Theatre of Cruelty.

The next four chapters will focus on those exemplary achievements in theatre during the past decade which attain to a significant degree a realization of Artaud's expansive and elusive ideal: Peter Brook and the Royal Shakespeare Company in England, the American-based phenomena of the Living Theatre and the Happening, and the Polish Laboratory Theatre of Jerzy Grotowski.

PREFACE

The unique personality of Antonin Artaud composes four intrinsic facets: madman, poet, actor and theoretician of the theatre. However, only the last will be a major concern of this study. With nine well-documented volumes of Artaud's Oeuvres complètes at our disposal, we will restrict much of our attention to Le théâtre et son double, a relatively slim volume of essays, first published in 1938. Written during the first five years of Artaud's quest for the Theatre of Cruelty, Le théâtre et son double encompasses the period from his catalytic confrontation with the Balinese Dance Theatre in 1931 to the sole production of the Theatre of Cruelty, Les Cenci, in 1935.

There are two reasons for this apparent narrowness of scope. First of all, critical opinion is fairly unanimous that Le théâtre et son double contains all of Artaud's central theatrical beliefs in their fullest conception. Thus, his other writings pertaining to the theatre will be seen either as leading towards Le théâtre et son double, as for example the documents of his Alfred Jarry Theatre, or, like much of his later writings, as extrapolations upon the basic ideas contained within this central work.

Secondly, an overwhelming importance is attached to Le théâtre et son double; and to its subsequent translations, by the metteurs en scène to be examined in this study. This emphasis is in marked contrast to the comparatively negligible impact which the rest of Artaud's writings have had on these same directors. Except for some pertinent

digressions, this study will follow the same generalization: that Antonin Artaud is Le théâtre et son double.

An equal degree of restriction will be applied to the choice of theatre directors analysed in this study. Thus, consideration of the productions of Jean-Louis Barrault and Roger Blin, both of whom have worked with Artaud himself, will be replaced by a detailed study of the directorial achievements of Peter Brook, whose theatrical milieu and pattern of development is largely parallel to that of the two French directors, and whose productions, in particular his Marat/Sade, have had considerable influence on such later experiments in the Theatre of Cruelty as Barrault's Rabelais (1968) and Blin's Nonnes (1969). Likewise, the Grand Théâtre Panique of Jérôme Savary can be seen as the French response to the Living Theatre: a concentrated analysis of the aims and productions of the latter serves to explain much of the orientation of the former.

As a comparative study concerned with the impact of Artaud on many of the divergent contemporary approaches to theatre, this thesis will focus upon exemplary models of the Theatre of Cruelty on an international level, since Artaud's ideal attained an earlier and more total realization outside of his own country. To a large extent, much of the increased interest of French directors and playwrights in the theatrical vision of Artaud is due to the innovative and far-reaching work of Peter Brook and the other directors considered in this study.

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CHAPTER I

ANTONIN ARTAUD AND THE IDEAL OF CRUELTY IN THE THEATRE

The writings of Antonin Artaud present a lifelong casebook on the inability of language to encompass painful physical torments and terrifying mental hallucinations. As such, the essays of Le théâtre et son double burn with the same intensity and frustrated overreaction which characterizes much of the anti-literary literature of Artaud. With increasing conviction, Artaud rejects the solitary act of poetry and turns to the medium of the theatre for relief from his sufferings. As Dr. Armand-Laroche explains, the theatre becomes "ce cheval de Troie qui l'eut introduit dans la citadelle des vivants".¹

Written by Artaud after a decade of active involvement in film and stage acting in Paris, both with such luminaries as Jouvet and Dullin, and in his own short-lived Alfred Jarry Theatre, Le théâtre et son double is motivated by this same passionate quest for relief from pain, and by an equally characteristic protest against the traditions of Western society which Artaud sees the established theatre as exemplifying:

On doit en finir avec cette superstition des textes et de la poésie écrite. La poésie vaut une fois et ensuite qu'on la détruisse. Que les poètes morts laissent la place aux autres. Et nous pourrions tout de même voir que c'est notre vénération devant ce qui a été déjà fait, si beau et si valable que ce soit, qui nous pétrifie, qui nous stabilise et nous empêche de prendre contact avec la force qui est dessous. . . Sous la poésie des textes, il y a la poésie tout court, sans forme et sans texte. . .

et la poésie et l'efficacité du théâtre est celle qui s'épuise le moins vite, puisqu'elle admet l'action de ce qui se gesticule et se prononce, et qui ne se reproduit jamais deux fois.²

Artaud diagnoses the schizophrenic confusion of European society as caused by "une rupture entre les choses, et les paroles, les idées, les signes qui en sont la représentation" (Td, 12). He believes that the theatre has the ability to retain credibility, but only insofar as it can liberate itself from the written text of dramatic literature and develop its own characteristic language:

Le dialogue--chose écrite et parlée--n'appartient pas spécifiquement à la scène, il appartient au livre; et la preuve, c'est que l'on réserve dans les manuels d'histoire littéraire une place au théâtre considéré comme une branche accessoire de l'histoire du langage articulé.

Je dis que la scène est un lieu physique et concret qui demande qu'on le remplisse, et qu'on lui fasse parler son langage concret. (Td, 45)

To revitalize Western theatre, Artaud advocates a radically increased awareness of the non-literary language of mise en scène: not in the sense of the métier parfait of theatre, functioning primarily to illustrate an antecedent text of verbal dialogue; but rather, as a theatrical hiéroglyphique, immediate and independent of dramatic literature (Td, 112). His ideal is a total theatre of music, dance, plastic art, mime, gesture, sounds, lighting and scenery, explored and exploited to their fullest capacity (Td, 47). Artaud believes that the diversified elements of mise en scène possess an evocative and powerful language of signs that must be utilized to the fullest: lighting and musical effects must project "une idée concrète. . .interviennent comme des personnages" (Td, 113).

Although the spoken word is not entirely discarded from Artaud's ideal theatre, the importance of verbal dialogue is severely reduced. His non-verbal theatre must use words "comme un objet solide" (Td, 87): as moans, cries and incantations in space.

Artaud's denial of the literary theatre is linked with his conviction that the true creative process of theatre occurs in the free manipulation of the stage event by the metteur en scène: "Pour moi, nul n'a le droit de se dire auteur, c'est-à-dire créateur, que celui à qui revient le maniement direct de la scène. . ." (Td, 141).

In a theatre of hieroglyphics rather than words, the ideal actor must become a physical instrument of action. To work effectively in Artaud's ideal theatre of physical mise en scène, the actor must become an "athlète du coeur" (Td, 154), rigorously training in the techniques of breathing and control "pour se servir de son affectivité comme le lutteur utilise sa musculature" (Td, 156). For Artaud, it is not so much a question of the actor limiting his actions to the jerkings and cartwheels of a puppet, but rather concerns the extension of the limits of the actor's physical instrument, which Artaud sees Western theatre, in its decadence, as having neglected in favor of the extreme limitations of naturalistic dialogue, slipshod in its methods and incapable of training a total actor:

N'importe qui ne sait plus crier en Europe, et spécialement les acteurs en transe ne savent plus pousser le cri. Pour des gens qui ne savent plus que parler et qui ont oublié qu'ils avaient un corps au théâtre, ils ont oublié également l'usage de leur gosier. Réduits à des gosiers anormaux ce n'est même pas un organe mais une abstraction monstrueuse qui parle: les acteurs en France ne savent plus que parler. (Td, 163)

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Fundamental to his advocacy of a theatre of physical action is Artaud's condemnation of all theatre dealing with rationalized individual character analysis, which he sees as alien and dangerous to the true concept of theatre:

Cette obstination à faire dialoguer des personnages, sur des sentiments, des passions, des appétits et des impulsions d'ordre strictement psychologique, ou un mot supplée à d'innombrables mimiques, puisque nous sommes dans le domaine de la précision, cette obstination est cause que le théâtre a perdu sa véritable raison d'être, et qu'on en est à souhaiter un silence, où nous pourrions mieux écouter la vie. C'est dans le dialogue que la psychologie occidentale s'exprime; et la hantise du mot clair et qui dit tout, aboutit au dessèchement des mots. (Td, 142)

Besides causing the decay of language, psychological precision has deadened contemporary theatre and destroyed the ritualistic and magical powers which theatre once possessed:

La psychologie qui s'acharne à réduire l'inconnu au connu, c'est-à-dire au quotidien et à l'ordinaire, est la cause de cet abaissement et de cette effrayante déperdition d'énergie, qui me paraît bien arrivée à son dernier terme. Et il me semble que le théâtre et nous-mêmes devons en finir avec la psychologie. (Td, 92)

Accordingly, Artaud contends that the actor must train athletically to interpret roles with "chaque personnage étant typé à l'extrême" (Td, 118), since the theatre is not meant to delve into the nuances of naturalistic character portrayal:

Je sais bien d'ailleurs que le langage des gestes et attitudes, que la danse, que la musique sont moins capables d'élucider un caractère, de raconter les pensées humaines d'un personnage, d'exposer des états de conscience clairs et précis que le langage verbal, mais qui a dit que le théâtre était fait pour élucider un caractère, pour la solution de conflits d'ordre humain et passionnel, d'ordre actuel et psychologique comme notre théâtre contemporain en est rempli? (Td, 50)

Artaud's desire for an "inhuman" theatre of spectacle and mystery is a deliberate rejection of what he sees as the Western dramatic tradition:

. . . un théâtre qui soumet la mise en scène et la réalisation, c'est-à-dire tout ce qu'il y a en lui de spécifiquement théâtral, au texte, est un théâtre d'idiot, de fou, d'inverti, de grammairien, d'épicier, d'anti-poète et de positiviste, c'est-à-dire d'Occidental. (Td, 50)

Thus, much of the dramatic orientation in Le théâtre et son double is the result of Artaud's single, overpowering confrontation with Oriental theatre, through the medium of the dance theatre of Bali, which he witnessed in 1931 at the Colonial Exhibition. The mute Balinese dancers speak a preliterate but complicated language of gesture and music which Artaud sees as epitomizing what "le théâtre n'aurait jamais dû cesser d'être" (Td, 71). Artaud's infatuation with the Balinese dancers stems from a realization that this theatre exemplifies immediate mise en scène, having no existence but in "son degré d'objectivation sur la scène" (Td, 65). This non-verbal spectacle reinforces Artaud's ideal of "la prépondérance absolue du metteur en scène dont le pouvoir de création élimine les mots" (Td, 65). Moreover, Artaud compares the Balinese dancers to "mannequins animés. . . grands insectes" (Td, 77). His opposition to psychobiographical theatre finds its ideal in these anonymous dancers, who submerge their own individuality in a total harmony in which "rien n'y est laissé au hasard ou à l'initiative personnelle" (Td, 69), emitting complex messages through a highly evocative and precisely controlled non-verbal language of athletic gesture: "C'est une sorte de danse supérieure, où les

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danseurs seraient avant tout acteurs" (Td, 69).

At this point, little of Artaud's ideal of the theatre seems innovative. Other theoreticians of the theatre advocate the primacy of production over text in terms closely analogous to those of Artaud. Gordon Craig in particular devotes much of his writing to the belief that "the art of the theatre was born from gesture, movement, dance. . . the father of drama was the dancer".³ His analysis of the theatre is also defined in terms of stage design, with the director-designer as the primary creator, making use of all the arts to illuminate the underlying color, texture and music of a play in a manner beyond the limits of mere textual illustration.

Artaud's emphasis on the physical craft of the actor recalls the übermarionette of Craig's model theatre.⁴ Both theoreticians seek a rediscovery of the theatre's ancient ability to emit feelings and attitudes through controlled gesture, and both admire Oriental theatre and its dancer-actor as pure theatre, which preserves the pre-verbal elements of communication in a manner infinitely preferable to the European tradition of drama as literature.

The parallels between Artaud and Appia are also evident: the primacy of music and the dancer in theatre over any consideration of the written word are starting points for both theorists.⁵

Alain Virmaux recognizes Artaud's affinity with Craig and Appia as being of necessity not coincidental: "Travaillant avec Lugné-Poe, avec Dullin, avec Pitoëff, le jeune Antonin Artaud n'aurait guère pu ne jamais entendre parler d'Appia ni de Craig. . . Il connaît les grands réformateurs de théâtre de son temps".⁶ Yet, as Virmaux concludes, the

relationships between the theatrical orientations of Artaud and those of Craig and Appia can be traced effectively only so long as the study is confined to aesthetic discourse:

L'ambition d'Appia et de Craig restre d'ordre esthétique. Pour Appia, nous venons de voir l'importance qu'il accorde à "la modification esthétique". Craig va dans le même sens: "Qu'on se pénètre au Théâtre du sens profond de ce mot 'la Beauté', et nous pourrions dire que l'éveil du Théâtre sera proche". La représentation devient, à leurs yeux, fin absolue et avènement d'un nouvel art.

In contrast to these Wagnerian-based notions of the Art of Total Theatre, Artaud's ideal Theatre of Cruelty is diametrically opposed to the Western concept of Art as self-justified and diversionary entertainment: "Le théâtre n'est plus un art; ou il est un art inutile. Il est en tout point conforme à l'idée occidentale de l'art. Nous sommes excédés de sentiments décoratifs et vains, d'activités sans but, uniquement vouées à l'agrément et au pittoresque; nous voulons un théâtre qui agisse. . ." (Td, 138). For Artaud, the double of the theatre is not art, but culture. In total opposition to the notion of theatre as an isolated and formal art, Artaud advocates a theatre which is an integral part of life:

La vraie culture agit par son exaltation et par sa force, et l'idéal européen de l'art vise à jeter l'esprit dans une attitude séparée de la force et qui assiste à son exaltation. C'est une idée paresseuse, inutile, et qui engendre, à bref délai, la mort. . (Td, 15)

As a reaction against the concept of art, Artaud's definitive ideal of cruauté corresponds to the necessity of life itself:

J'ai donc dit "cruauté", comme j'aurais dit "vie" ou comme j'aurais dit "nécessité", parce ce que

Je veux indiquer surtout que pour moi le théâtre est acte et émanation perpétuelle, qu'il n'y a en lui rien de figé, que je l'assimile à un acte vrai, donc vivant, donc magique. (Td, 137)

Yet, rather than a parallel to the concept of psychobiographical realism, Artaud's model aims at the heightened reality of the dream state:

Le théâtre doit s'égaliser à la vie, non pas à la vie individuelle, à cet aspect individuel de la vie où triomphent les caractères, mais à une sorte de vie libérée, qui balaye l'individualité humaine et où l'homme n'est plus qu'un reflet. (Td, 139)

For the theatre as Artaud sees it, the question is one of basic survival. The motivation behind Artaud's desire to reinstate the social importance of theatre is his conviction that Western theatre is, for the most part, dead. He believes that the theatre's literary format and attitude of aesthetic elitism no longer relates to the needs of the public, who have turned long ago to the debased activities of carnival and the spectacles of the street for their culture:

Si la foule s'est déshabituée d'aller au théâtre. . . c'est qu'on s'est ingénié à faire vivre sur la scène des êtres plausibles mais détachés, avec le spectacle d'un côté, le public de l'autre. . . cette idée désintéressée du théâtre qui veut qu'une représentation théâtrale laisse le public intact. . . (Td, 92)

Artaud is convinced that, in order to regain relevance in modern society, the theatre must revitalize its most primitive traditions of ritual communion. Thus, he rejects the idea of theatre as an accessory appendage, attended by a voyeuristic and noncommittal audience, in favour of a participatory theatre of ritual necessity:

Il faut pour refaire la chaîne, la chaîne d'un temps où le spectateur dans le spectacle cherchait sa propre réalité, permettre à ce spectateur de s'identifier avec le spectacle, souffler par souffler et temps par temps. (Td, 163)

He takes for his model the ancient non-European religious rites of the Aztecs, and the more contemporary Mexican peyotl cults, for which he expresses a deep attraction, later culminating in a physical exodus to Mexico in search of a primitive theatre of possession:

A notre idée inerte et désintéressée de l'art une culture authentique oppose une idée magique et violemment égoïste, c'est-à-dire, intéressée. Car les Mexicains captent le Manas, les forces qui dorment en toute forme, et qui ne peuvent sortir d'une contemplation des formes pour elles-mêmes, mais qui sortent d'une identification magique avec ces formes. (Td, 16)

To the European tradition of art for its own sake, Artaud opposes the Mexican tradition, in which "il n'y a pas d'art et les choses servent. Et le monde est en perpétuelle exaltation" (Td, 16).

Ideally, as in these Mexican tribal rituals, the participants are so aware of the rhythm of the event as to identify immediately on all levels. However, Artaud sees the contemporary Western audience as having forgotten the magical origins of participatory theatre, and requiring "d'abord des moyens grossiers" to attract and hold their attention (Td, 98). Since he sees these spectators as thinking primarily with their senses, his ideal theatre, to be immediately effective, must take hold of them by their nerve-ends rather than by their intellects. Artaud compares the audience to the snake charmer's subjects, who understand nothing of the spiritual notions of music, but who can respond to it because its vibrations affect them like a sensual massage:

Le théâtre est le seul endroit au monde et le dernier moyen d'ensemble qui nous reste d'atteindre directement l'organisme, et, dans les périodes de névrose et de sensualité basse comme celle où nous

plongeons, d'attaquer cette sensualité basse par des moyens physiques auxquels elle ne résistera pas.
(Td, 97)

In terms of mise en scène, Artaud's goal of active involvement necessitates the removal of the physical boundary between audience and actor, as exemplified in the distancing structure of the proscenium arch stage:

C'est pour prendre la sensibilité du spectateur sur toutes ses faces, que nous préconisons un spectacle tournant, et qui au lieu de faire de la scène et de la salle deux mondes clos, sans communication possible, répande ses éclats visuels et sonores sur la masse entière des spectateurs.
(Td, 103)

Artaud's desire to remove the traditional scène-salle boundary is predated by the theories of Appia and the revolutionary designs of Meyerhold. However, unlike these earlier theatrical innovators, Artaud is motivated by a desire for direct and violent attack upon the senses of his audience. His rationale is succinct: "Le théâtre contemporain est en décadence parce qu'il a . . . rompu avec la gravité, avec l'efficacité immédiate et pernicieuse, --et pour tout dire avec le Danger" (Td, 51). In accord with Artaud's search for a hieroglyphical mise en scène, this elemental image of Danger must be objectified on the stage rather than verbalized as an abstraction, by means of an imprévu objectif:

. . . le passage intempestif, brusque, d'une image pensée à une image vraie . . . l'apparition d'un Etre inventé, fait de bois et d'étoffe, créé de toutes pièces, ne répondant à rien. . . capable de réintroduire sur la scène un petit souffle de cette grand peur métaphysique qui est à la base de tout le théâtre ancien. (Td, 53)

Artaud retains and amplifies this belief in the initial necessity

of physical shock and audience agitation throughout Le théâtre et son double. It is for this reason that he designates his ideal as a theatre of cruelty: "La Cruauté: sans un élément de cruauté à la base de tout spectacle, le théâtre n'est pas possible. Dans l'état de dégénérescence où nous sommes, c'est par la peau qu'on fera rentrer la métaphysique dans les esprits" (Td, 118). Since for Artaud, the theatre is action rather than reflection, it follows that cruelty must be the theme and subject of his theatre: "Tout ce qui agit est une cruauté. C'est sur cette idée d'action poussée à bout, et extrême que le théâtre doit se renouveler" (Td, 102).

Since theatre is action, and all action is seen by Artaud as cruelty; and, in practical terms, since the theatre relies for its existence upon an appeal to a public for whom tragedy is equated with the mass cruelty of natural disasters and the individual cruelty of murder and war, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty takes for its themes examples of violence, pain, and other extremes of human will. Yet, for Artaud, the term cruauté has a very specific metaphysical meaning, for which the external appearances of violence and pain are symbolic means of expression rather than sadistic ends in themselves:

. . . sur le plan de la représentation, il ne s'agit pas de cette cruauté que nous pouvons exercer les uns contre les autres en nous dépeçant mutuellement les corps, en sciant nos anatomies personnelles mais de celle beaucoup plus terrible et nécessaire que les choses peuvent exercer contre nous. Nous ne sommes pas libres. Et le ciel peut encore nous tomber sur la tête. Et le théâtre est fait pour nous apprendre d'abord cela. (Td, 95)

At this point, many of the tenets of Artaud's ideal theatre seem directly correspondent to those of surrealism. The Theatre of

Cruelty is readily parallel to the surrealist emphasis on the breakdown of arbitrary boundaries between art and life, its rejection of rational thought in favor of a heightened state beyond the mundanities of quotidian perception, its antagonism towards outmoded traditions of language, and its attendant attraction towards the occult and the Orient. Moreover, Artaud's sensory hieroglyphics and his imprévu objectif can be seen as more plastic interpretations of the image poétique of surrealism.

Although Artaud was closely affiliated with the surrealists from 1924 to 1926, and was the major contributor to the third issue of La Révolution surréaliste in 1925, it is difficult to determine to what extent Artaud's intensely personal tendencies were shaped by his affiliation with the painters and poets of the French surrealist group. In any case, by 1927, Artaud was expelled by Breton from the surrealists.⁸ His reply, "Le bluff surréaliste" (1927), was an equally savage rejection of the surrealist clique. By 1928, antagonism towards Artaud resulted in an open protest by Breton and his followers at the production of Le songe at Artaud's Alfred Jarry Theatre. The resultant, relatively permanent estrangement of Artaud from surrealism leads Alain Virmaux to conclude:

. . . Artaud, sur le plan du théâtre, n'hérite à peu près rien du surréalisme. Il se borne à le vivre au naturel, et avec une intensité telle que la plupart des surréalistes, au prix de lui, font figure de tâcherons. . .⁹

Although founded after Artaud's official split with surrealism, the Alfred Jarry Theatre, for which "le hasard sera notre dieu",¹⁰ was still in accord with surrealism's characteristic faith in the primacy

of chance occurrence. In contrast, The Theatre of Cruelty is largely the product of Artaud's confrontation with the Balinese dance theatre, admired by him for the "effets méthodiquement calculés et qui enlèvent tout recours à l'improvisation spontanée" (Td, 66). His resultant ideal of cruelty as submission to necessity and rigorous self-discipline is antithetical to surrealism's emphasis on such improvisational flights of personal fancy as automatic writing. As Jacques Derrida explains:

. . . le théâtre de la cruauté est bien un théâtre du rêve, mais du rêve cruel, c'est-à-dire absolument nécessaire et déterminé, d'un rêve calculé, dirigé, par opposition à ce qu'Artaud croyait être le désordre empirique du rêve spontané.¹¹

As a ritualistic theatre of communal participation, the Theatre of Cruelty is not concerned with the vague nuances of the individual subconscious, but with universal and immediately recognizable themes: "Créer des Mythes voilà le véritable objet du théâtre, traduire la vie sous son aspect universel, immense. . ." (Td, 139).

Artaud's central "myth" for the Theatre of Cruelty is the plague. He describes the factual account of a certain viceroy of Sardinia who had "un rêve particulièrement affligeant: il se vit pesteux et il vit la peste ravager son minuscule Etat" (Td, 19). Shocked and moved by this dream, the viceroy refused to allow a foreign vessel entrance to the harbor of Sardinia. This same ship docked in Marseilles, and its crew, infected with the dread disease, spread plague throughout the area, but Sardinia was saved. The analogy to Artaud's ideal theatre is clearly designated:

. . . l'action du théâtre, comme celle de la peste, est bienfaisante, car poussant les hommes à se voir tels qu'ils sont, elle fait tomber le masque, elle

découvre le mensonge, la veulerie, la bassesse, la tartuferie. . . et révélant à des collectivités leur puissance sombre, leur force cachée, elle les invite à prendre en face du destin une attitude héroïque et supérieure qu'elles n'auraient jamais eue sans cela. (Td, 39)

As a means to change in the human organism, the Theatre of Cruelty, like the dream of plague, must be "le temps du mal", submerging the spectator in an ecstatic state of trance, and initiating a removal of this basic mal through intensely visceral audience identification within the controlled dream state of the theatre:

. . . je défie bien un spectateur à qui des scènes violentes auront passé leur sang, qui aura senti en lui le passage d'une action supérieure, qui aura vu en éclair dans des faits extraordinaires les mouvements extraordinaires et essentiels de sa pensée--la violence et le sang ayant été mis au service de la violence de la pensée--je le défie de se livrer au dehors à des idées de guerre, d'émeute et d'assassinats hasardeux. (Td, 98)

Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty aims at a goal of catharsis which the Western theatrical tradition of tragedy has officially claimed for itself since Aristotle: "le theatre est fait pour vider collectivement des abcès" (Td, 38). As Eric Sellin delineates, the difference between the catharsis of Aristotelian tragedy and Artaud's ideal theatre lies not so much in the goal itself, but in the means to that end.¹² Artaud depends entirely upon mise en scène, while Aristotle denigrates the element of spectacle in the theatre. Artaud wishes to emphasize physical violence and cruelty; Aristotle, to minimize direct physical confrontation on stage. As the raison d'être of a theatre form more ancient and primitive than the tragedy of Aristotle, Artaud's cathartic ideal is entirely visceral. His emphasis is on total trancelike

identification rather than on observation:

Je propose d'en revenir au théâtre à cette idée élémentaire magique, reprise par la psychanalyse moderne, qui consiste pour obtenir la guérison d'un malade à lui faire prendre l'attitude extérieure de l'état auquel on voudrait le ramener. (Td, 96)

Moreover, the Theatre of Cruelty aims beyond catharsis within an accepted system to encourage the destruction of that system. Seeing Western society as sick and suicidal, Artaud emphasizes that change must occur immediately and violently. Cruelty is thus a necessity in the degree to which Artaud delineates the alternatives: "Le théâtre comme la peste est une crise qui se dénoue par la mort ou la guérison" (Td, 38). However, Artaud also emphasizes that his ideal theatre seeks a magical state of ecstatic identification by the human organism, an identification which is outside the realm of revolution on the political level:

Or je dis, que l'état social actuel est inique et bon à détruire. Si c'est le fait du théâtre de s'en préoccuper, c'est encore plus celui de la mitraille. Notre théâtre n'est même pas capable de poser la question de la façon brûlante et efficace qu'il faudrait, mais la poserait-il qu'il sortirait encore de son objet qui est pour moi plus hautain et plus secret. (Td, 50)

Artaud seeks to restore the theatre to its most ancient, elevated function of myth creation, individual identification, and ritualized group purgation which leads to a revolution in the human organism on the innermost level of existence. His ideal means to this end is the Theatre of Cruelty, incorporating the physical language of mise en scène in a total theatre of controlled assault upon the physical senses of the participating spectator:

Je propose donc un théâtre où des images physiques violentes broient et hypnotisent la sensibilité du spectateur pris dans le théâtre comme dans un tourbillon de forces supérieures.

Un théâtre qui, abandonnant la psychologie, raconte l'extraordinaire, mette en scène des conflits naturels, des forces naturelles et subtiles, et qui se présente d'abord comme une force exceptionnelle de dérivation. Un théâtre qui produise des trances, comme les danses de Derviches et d'Aïssaouas produisent des trances, et qui s'adresse à l'organisme avec des moyens précis, et avec les mêmes moyens que les musiques de guérison de certaines peuplades que nous admirons dans les disques mais que nous sommes incapables de faire naître parmi nous. (Td, 99)

Thus, Artaud's ideal theatre is not only a dream of plague. If successful, its effects are similar to those of true plague: the collapse of decayed behavioral structures followed by chaos, gratuitous acts whose only justification is their own volition, and, ultimately, a social and individual body purged of its evil by means of the "temps du mal" of the Theatre of Cruelty.

CHAPTER II
THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY AND THE DRAMATIC
EXAMPLES OF ANTONIN ARTAUD

1. Antecedent Exemplification

In accordance with Artaud's devaluation of the written text, and his advocacy of a theatre-life continuum, his illustrative examples of the Theatre of Cruelty are often drawn from life itself: the Mexican Manas cult and the plague are his central analogies.

Within the realm of art, Artaud's emphasis on the plastic language of mise en scène draws him more immediately towards painting than literature. "Lot and his Daughters", by the sixteenth-century Flemish painter Lucas van Leyden, is Artaud's preferred example of "ce que le theatre devrait être, s'il avait parler le langage qui lui appartient" (Td, 44).

Artaud believes that van Leyden succeeds more fully than any of the theatre of his own day in hypnotizing the senses and portraying the obscurities of the metaphysical dream world in an elevated physical form: "C'est du théâtre muet mais qui parle beaucoup plus que s'il avait reçu un langage pour s'exprimer" (Td, 145). Artaud advocates the incorporation of the sophisticated, highly sensual level of imagery obtained in the paintings of van Leyden and Bosch as part of the theatre, amplified by the expressive language of gesture, the incantations of language, and the specifically dramatic realm of "la métaphysique en

activité" (Td, 54).

Artaud's non-verbal orientation draws him strongly towards such contemporary examples as the early films of the Marx Brothers and Jean-Louis Barrault's mime play of 1935, Autour d'une mere, as illustrations of his ideal in Le théâtre et son double (Td, 165-71). Both evolve largely in silence, and Artaud sees both as making use of a symbolic language of violent imagery to communicate directly to the senses of the audience. However, although he praises the emphasis of silent film on concrete imagery, Artaud is disenchanted with the distancing aspects of the medium of cinema, "qui nous assassine de reflets, qui filtré par la machine ne peut plus joindre notre sensibilité" (Td, 101). He sees Barrault's mime, although constituting true theatre, as being "sans prolongements parce qu'elle est seulement descriptive" (Td, 170), and in many ways akin to the "pantomime pervertie" of Western theatre, which represents words rather than "des attitudes de l'esprit" (Td, 48).

With his ideal theatre drawn largely from non-European sources, the corpus of Western dramatic literature which Artaud sees as relating in any way to his theatrical ideal is extremely limited: ". . . à peu près tout le théâtre contemporain, aussi humain qu'il est anti-poétique. . . . trois ou quatre pièces exceptées, me paraît puer la décadence et la sanie" (Td, 51).

Since he is primarily concerned with the themes rather than the variations, Artaud's program in the first manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty lists as many non-dramatic as dramatic sources: "La Prise de Jérusalem d'après la Bible et l'Histoire" and "l'histoire de Barbe-Bleu" are two examples. Those few plays which are included in the

program are to be staged "sans tenir compte du texte" (Td, 118). Even the "trois ou quatre pièces" which Artaud does accept as valid are to be stripped down to their bare themes and plot outlines, from which the metteur en scène may build up a physical poetry of action, rather than retaining any of the specifically literary poetry of the text.

Within this highly limited and truncated corpus, there is still critical discord as to the dramatic works which can be designated as outside Artaud's almost universal censure.

Eric Sellin sees Artaud's dramatic production largely as a continuum. Thus, including within his study the plays of Maëterlinck, Jarry and the late Strindberg, with which Artaud was involved during his surrealist period and in the Alfred Jarry Theatre, he divides Artaud's choice of exemplary plays into two categories: solar drama, "which is characterized by the Male, revolt and self assertion"; and lunar drama, "which is characterized by the Female, acquiescence and self-abnegation".¹ Sellin designates solar and lunar drama as two facets of Artaud's internal duality, and of the external duality of his theatrical ideals. The solar plays, founded in Artaud's admiration for the blood sacrifices and violently cathartic rituals of the Aztecs, are exemplified in the onrushing, self-propelled forces of action in the revenge tragedies of the Elizabethans and Seneca.² Lunar drama is seen by Sellin as based in Oriental theatre, specifically in the self-denial and interior "oeil stratifié, lunaire" (Td, 80) of the Balinese dancers, and exemplified in the mysticism and cyclic quality of Strindberg's Le songe.³

The point of contact between these two opposed attitudes is that,

for Artaud, they are both expressions of "le théâtre du rêve". Artaud's ideal is primarily an interior theatre of the subconscious: whether characterized by the driving action of the id, or in the determined activity of the superego, both solar and lunar types are diametrically opposed to an ego-based theatre of realism and rational logic.

In contrast to Sellin, Alain Virmaux sees Artaud's life in the theatre in terms of a series of definite progressions towards a goal which approaches final definition in Le théâtre et son double. Thus, Virmaux essentially discards Artaud's early productions of Strindberg and Maeterlinck, and most of Sellin's other examples of lunar theatre as "seulement un moment de la vie d'Artaud, en gros l'époque du Théâtre Jarry".⁴

There is, however, one play categorized by Sellin as lunar drama which Artaud does include in his first manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty: Büchner's Woyzeck. During the winter of 1931, Artaud expressed intense interest in producing the play, as his unsuccessful solicitations to Dullin and Jouvet attest: "Rien, et surtout rien, parmi le théâtre existant déjà écrit, ne me paraît plus urgent que de jouer cette pièce-là."⁵

The puppet-like characters and the ruthlessly deterministic nightmare world presented in Woyzeck, the necessity of skillful use of mise en scène for the numerous rapid scene changes, as well as the kinship Artaud felt with the tormented soul of the author himself, all combine to draw Artaud very strongly towards all of Büchner's writings.⁶ In his first manifesto for the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud includes Woyzeck on the program as a special exception to the most central

orientations of his ideal theatre: "8. Le Woyzeck de Büchner, par esprit de réaction contre nos principes, et à titre d'exemple de ce que l'on peut tirer scéniquement d'un texte précis" (Td, 119). However, with the exception of Woyzeck, Sellin is in accord with Virmaux that it is solar drama which supplies the dramatic exemplification in Le théâtre et son double.⁷

For Artaud, a major source of this solar drama is Elizabethan theatre. In a letter in 1933, Artaud writes:

Il y a quelque part un dérèglement dont nous ne sommes pas maîtres. . . A ce dérèglement toutes sortes de crimes inexplicables en soi, de crimes gratuits participent. . . C'est ce que l'on avait compris à toutes les époques où le théâtre a signifié quelque chose, comme par exemple au moment du Théâtre Elisabethain.⁸

Artaud's admiration for this luminous period in dramatic history is shared by the great majority of dramatists and critics of his own day and of the preceding century. However, for Artaud, it is decidedly not Shakespeare who epitomizes the positive elements of Elizabethan theatre:

Shakespeare lui-même est responsable de cette aberration et de cette déchéance. . . Si dans Shakespeare l'homme a parfois la préoccupation de ce qui le dépasse, il s'agit toujours en définitive des conséquences de cette préoccupation dans l'homme, c'est-à-dire, de la psychologie. (Td, 92)

To exemplify a theatre which is from the onset anti-psychological, Artaud takes as his sources either such seminal "apocryphal" plays as Arden of Feversham, or else works of the post-Shakespearean playwrights. In 1933, in an essay explaining the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud writes:

J'ai envisagé de jouer Woyzeck, de Büchner, et plusieurs autres pièces de dramaturges élisabéthains: la Tragedie de la Vengeance, de Cyril Tourneur; le Sicilien d'Amalfi et le Démon blanc, de Webster, des œuvres de Ford, etc. 9

Such characteristic elements of Elizabethan theatre as revenge and the resultant slaughter in the fifth act, present in all of these works, also form the basis of Shakespeare's tragedies. However, Artaud's exemplary plays are marked by a radically increased emphasis on violent action itself, often at the expense of the well-delineated characterizations of Shakespearean tragedy, and thus, a positive element for Artaud's ideal theatre of inhuman action.

This ideal of action unconcerned with social implications leads Artaud to choose Ford's Annabella ('Tis Pity She's A Whore) as an exemplary model of Elizabethan theatre. As Eric Sellin states:

Whereas Hamlet is psychological in essence, in that the play is as concerned with the purgation of the protagonist as with audience catharsis, 'Tis Pity She's A Whore evolves on the level of action, and the action is neither condemned nor praised. . . .10

The action of the play revolves around the theme of incest. Giovanni's passionate secret love affair with his sister Annabella leads to her pregnancy and hasty marriage to a licentious count. As a final revindication of both her and her husband, Giovanni stabs his sister under the pretext of a last embrace, defiantly presents her heart to the assemblage, and murders Annabella's husband before being cut down by the count's hired assassins.

For Artaud, the play's significance lies in the absolute amorality and total decisiveness displayed by the two protagonists. After having revealed their love for each other, Giovanni and Annabella

make love immediately and make love again and again for nine months. Not once do they waver or doubt their actions. The reaction of society, characterized by their Friar confessor, is one of shock and horror, but the two incestuous lovers are portrayed as being perfect for each other and beyond social censure. Thus, their actions are motivated by a social evil, but it is this same mal which ultimately drives Giovanni to his final act of total defiance, seen by Artaud as so excessive as to be ennobling:

Comme la peste il est le temps du mal, le triomphe des forces noires. . . Elle ressemble à la liberté de la peste où de degré en degré, d'échelon en échelon, l'agonisant gonfle son personnage, où le vivant devient au fur et à mesure un être grandiose et surtendu. (Td, 37)

It is this presentation of nature mocking moral codes, and of the elevation resulting from willful and violently defiant action, which Artaud admires in 'Tis Pity She's A Whore: "Si l'on cherche un exemple de la liberté absolue dans la révolte, l'Annabella de Ford nous offre ce poétique exemple lié à l'image du danger absolu" (Td, 35).

Yet the plays of Ford and his contemporaries are exciting and acceptable to Artaud only as raw material. As the first manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty makes clear, Artaud wishes to include "des oeuvres du théâtre élisabéthain dépouillées de leur texte et dont on ne gardera que l'accoutrement d'époque, les situations, les personnages et l'action" (Td, 119).

Artaud discovers the only literary equivalent to his Theatre of Cruelty in the tragedies of Seneca. In a letter to Jean Paulhan in 1932, Artaud writes: "On ne peut mieux trouver d'exemple écrit

de ce qu'on peut entendre par cruauté au théâtre que dans toutes les Tragédies de Sénèque, mais surtout dans Atrée et Thyeste."¹¹ He dedicates an enthusiastic public lecture to Seneca in 1932, and writes an adaptation (since lost) of Thyestes in 1934.

As Eric Baade points out, the Elizabethan themes of revenge, the supernatural, horror, and violent action find their source in the tragedies of Seneca.¹² In his search for a pure and primitive theatre, Artaud is understandably drawn more strongly to Seneca than to the later extrapolations upon this source by the Elizabethans.

For him, the exemplary model of Senecan tragedy is Thyestes, based on the violent legend of the vengeance enacted upon Thyestes by his brother, King Atreus, in return for the abduction of his wife and the golden fleece by Thyestes years before. Feigning reconciliation, Atreus lures Thyestes and his sons to his court, then brutally murders the boys, serves them to the unsuspecting Thyestes for supper, and reveals his act by presenting the father with his sons' heads on a golden platter.

The detailed descriptions of slaughter and sadistic torture throughout Thyestes certainly satisfy Artaud's prerequisites for cruelty, as does the action of Atreus, a character totally devoid of self-doubt. However, beyond the basic theme of crime without limit, there is in Thyestes a definite mood of "dérèglement dont nous ne sommes pas maîtres"; it exemplifies Artaud's definition of cruelty as "une sorte de déterminisme supérieur auquel le bourreau suppliciateur est soumis lui-même" (Td, 121).

The ghost of Tantalus, the grandfather of Atreus, is sent "as

a pestilence"¹³ who forces Atreus to act without real knowledge or free will in these actions:

ATREUS: . . . I am hurried I know not whither, but I am hurried on. . . Some greater thing larger than the common and beyond the bounds of human use is swelling in my soul, and it urges on my sluggish hands--I know not what it is, but 'tis some mighty thing. So let it be. Haste thou, my soul, and do it.¹⁴

Thyestes himself has no desire to return to the court: he feels himself dragged along, just as "a ship, urged on by oar and sail, the tide resisting both oar and sail, bears back".¹⁵ Yet Tantalus, the "bourreau suppliciateur" of these two puppets, has even less free will. Rather, he is hurried on by the vague and malevolent form of the Fury. Burning with hunger and thirst, he is taunted with mirages of food and drink until, in his frustrated rage, he envelops his offspring in a plague of evil..

There is little room in all this haste for the subplots and character analysis of Elizabethan tragedy: action is paramount. As Baade observes:

It seems unlikely that Seneca was at all concerned with character development in his plays; in fact, it would be irrelevant to, or in actual conflict with the emotional unity, or unity of mood, which he was attempting to achieve. . .¹⁶

Artaud sees the characters of Thyestes as "monstres. . . méchants comme seules des forces aveugles peuvent l'être".¹⁷ The affinity of Senecan stoicism to Artaud's metaphysics of cruel manipulation by dark forces is evident:

CHORUS: Clotho blends weal and woe, lets no lot stand, keeps every fate a-turning. No one has found the gods so kind that he may promise tomorrow to himself. God keeps all mortal things in swift whirl turning.¹⁸

The prescribed obedience to ritual, ordering the scenes of greatest violence in Thyestes, satisfies Artaud's desire to reinstate magic in the theatre. When Atreus slaughters Thyestes' sons, Seneca presents the murder as a frenzied and primitive religious offering:

MESSENGER: . . . Nothing is lacking, neither incense, nor sacrificial wine, the knife, the salted meal to sprinkle on the victims. The accustomed ritual is all observed, lest so great a crime be not duly wrought.

CHORUS: Who lays his hand unto the knife?

MESSENGER: Himself is priest. . . ¹⁹

After the sacrifice, Atreus carefully "handles the organs and enquires the fates and notes the markings of the still warm entrails".²⁰

Beyond these thematic considerations, the uniqueness of Thyestes for Artaud lies in the nature of the play's verbal poetry. The poetry of Thyestes, rhetorical and seemingly antithetical to an ideal of non-verbal theatre, is seen by Artaud as so heightened that it transcends bombast and aspires towards an incendiary level of incantation: "Dans Sénèque, les forces primordiales font entendre leur écho dans la vibration spasmodique des mots."²¹ Seneca's horrifically detailed and ecstatic description of Atreus' act of murder²² echoes Artaud's equally horrific and ecstatic description of the effects of the plague (Td, 24-27). Moreover, in their exacting attention to auditory and visual details of locale, Seneca's long descriptive passages are much more than rhetoric. As Eric Sellin points out, such scenes as the torment of Tantalus and the slaughter of Thyestes' sons may be read as highly descriptive scenarios, readily capable of transcription into physical imagery:

. . . we have the stage set by the messenger whose tale is a complete play within the play, with

melancholy colors and with a dead light shattered by flame-licks and pallid glimmerings, the whole echoing with bellows, cries, trumpets, and barkings, in the Artaudian manner.²³

Sellin also emphasizes the parallels between this inner garden in Thyestes, and Artaud's description of van Leyden's "Lot and his Daughters".²⁴ For Artaud, both exemplify ideal mises en scène of visual immediacy and power sufficient to possess the spectator in his Theatre of Cruelty, like the messenger who witnesses Atreus' supreme act of violence, in a state of physical shock:

CHORUS: Speak out and tell this evil, whate'er it is.

MESSENGER: When my spirit is composed, when numbing fear lets go its hold upon my limbs. Oh, but I see it still, the picture of that ghastly deed! Bear me far hence, wild winds, oh, thither bear me whither the vanished day is borne.²⁵

2. Attempts at Realization

To turn one's attention from the theoretical ideals of the Theatre of Cruelty to the practical realization of these ideals is to be confronted with a downward spiral of rejected dreams, unsatisfactory compromises and, ultimately, mental and physical collapse.

Only his first visionary project, La conquête du Mexique, written in 1934, is seen by Artaud as a faithful interpretation of his theatrical beliefs:

En ce qui concerne le Théâtre de la Cruauté j'ai rédigé enfin le scénario de mon premier spectacle, "La conquête du Mexique", et je crois qu'on peut y voir pour la première fois, et en clair, assez exactement ce que je veux faire,

que ma conception physique du théâtre y apparaît de façon indubitable. . .²⁶

The piece is a scenario without dramatic sources, based on the historical event of the violent confrontation between the cultures of Cortez and Montezuma, and the succession of violent upheavals resulting from this shock.

In terms of production, La conquête du Mexique was to depend "avant tout sur le spectacle. . . , une notion nouvelle de l'espace utilisé sur tous les plans possibles" (Td, 148). Any spoken language included in the production was to be minimal, fragmented and concrète, largely overpowered by the total sensual impact of a vast and turbulent spectacle. Artaud's central orientation, as Eric Sellin points out, aims at "direct exteriorization of the underlying idea of the story".²⁷ Artaud's emphasis on the concrete and plastic representation of the abstract is aptly borne out in such examples from La conquête du Mexique as his interpretation of Montezuma's inner confusion:

Montézuma lui-même semble tranché en deux, se dédouble; avec des pans de lui-même à demi éclairés; à d'autres aveuglant de lumière; avec de multiples mains qui sortent de ses robes, avec des regards peints sur son corps comme une prise multiple de conscience. . .²⁸

Artaud saw this ideal production more in terms of a musical score than either a rough scenario or a written script. The entire work was to be closely planned, with all the violently chaotic heavings of action to be carefully choreographed:

Ces images, ce mouvement, ces danses, ces rites, ces musiques, ces mélodies tronquées, ces dialogues qui tournent court, seront soigneusement notés et décrits autant qu'il se peut avec des mots et principalement dans

les parties non dialoguées du spectacle. Le principe étant d'arriver à noter ou à chiffrer, comme sur un papier musical, ce qui ne se décrit pas avec des mots.²⁹

Artaud envisioned a huge audience, surrounded on all sides by a spectacle vast enough to require "deux ou trois cents artistes" working together for its realization.³⁰ While fully aware of the grandeur of his vision, Artaud did not see his project as outrageous in the context of the vast operatic spectacles of the nineteenth century:

Il n'y a rien de chimérique là-dedans. Wagner était chimérique avant Bayreuth et avant Louis II de Bavière, sans qui nous n'aurions jamais vu Wagner qui serait demeuré utopique sans Louis II de Bavière.³¹

Unfortunately, Artaud's fund-raising campaign failed to interest any of the "angels" of the arts. He was forced to abandon La conquête du Mexique permanently, in favour of a project which he saw as involving "rien d'utopique".³²

Based on a combination of Artaud's preferential themes of incest, murder and the Renaissance, Les Cenci is a reworking by Artaud of Shelley's Cenci (1819), with added details of cruelty garnered from Stendhal's historical account of the notorious sixteenth-century Roman family in his Chroniques italiennes (1837). The versions of both Shelley and Artaud focus upon Count Cenci's torment of his family, specifically on his sexual violation of his daughter Beatrice, his murder by assassins hired by his daughter, and the subsequent torture and execution of Beatrice and her mother at the hands of the Papal Court.

However, any valid comparison between the two plays must

recognize their radically different orientations. Shelley's prime concern was with giving poetic elevation to a sordid and horrific story. In his Preface to The Cenci, Shelley writes:

This story of the Cenci is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous. Anything like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal, and diminish the actual horror of the events, so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which they spring.³³

Artaud also wished to give elevation to his story, and he shared Shelley's faith in the violent power of poetry. The fundamental difference is that Shelley's poetry is intensely verbal and Artaud's is the physical poetry of the stage. Thus, Artaud's Cenci is primarily concerned with exactly those scenes of horror and cruelty which Shelley's play tries to circumvent. Shelley's Cenci relegates murder and torture to the wings, and tastefully circumlocutes the facts of Beatrice's rape in a barrage of breathless intimations.³⁴ Artaud's Cenci focuses on the seduction of Beatrice by her father, the attempted murder, and the final stabbing of Cenci and torture of Beatrice. Artaud's Cenci seeks to portray these instances of "gestes poussées à bout" by means of the visual poetry of the stage, rather than through the heightened verbal poetry of description. Artaud believes that the specific innovation which makes his Cenci more than an adaptation of Shelley's play involves his integration of mise en scène as a central aspect of the script:

Les gestes et les mouvements y ont autant d'importance que le texte; et celui-ci a été établi pour servir de réactif au reste. Et je crois que ce

sera la première fois, tout au moins ici en France, que l'on aura affaire à un texte de théâtre écrit en fonction d'une mise en scène dont les modalités sont sorties toutes concrètes et toutes vives de l'imagination de l'auteur.³⁵

Accordingly, the verbal dialogue in Artaud's Cenci is often little more than a flat summary of Shelley's verse. The dialogue serves Artaud mainly as an introduction to powerful mise en scène, such as the orgy frieze in the first act, the exact opposite of spectacle as complementary illustration to poetic dialogue. Thus, the fourth act of Shelley's Cenci, containing Beatrice's impassioned and brilliant courtroom defense, is largely replaced in Artaud's Cenci by a single visual metaphor for guilt and exposure which, like the objective multiplication of Montezuma, aims at direct physical interpretation of the abstract:

. . .On voit, dans le haut du décor, Cenci réapparaître chancelant, le poing fermé sur son oeil droit comme s'il s'accrochait à quelque chose.

En même temps éclatent de terribles fanfares dont le bruit va en grossissant.

Rideau.

Scène II

Un fond de ciel blanc tombe devant le décor, que la lumière attaque aussitôt.

La fanfare reprend, extraordinairement proche et menaçante.³⁶

In spite of its incorporation of many of the Theatre of Cruelty's central tenets, Les Cenci was recognized by Artaud as a compromise from the beginning. His ideals once again transcended the limitations of his finances and his hastily-assembled company of

actors:

Il y aura entre le Théâtre de la Cruauté et Les Cenci la différence qui existe entre le fracas d'une chute d'eau ou le déclenchement d'une tempête naturelle, et ce qui peut demeurer de leur violence dans leur image une fois enregistrée.³⁷

In fact, the play defines itself largely within the conventional forms of its day. The plot is coherent and progresses logically by means of dialogue; the performance area of Artaud's production was limited to the proscenium stage of the Folies-Wagram Theatre. Artaud compromised his idea of giant masks and outsize effigies of Danger by casting the assassins as robot-like mutes. Likewise, his ideal of total immersion of the spectator was reduced to the use of four loudspeakers to project electronic music and the ringing of churchbells from the rear of the theatre.

Les Cenci opened on May 6, 1935 and ran for seventeen performances. By most accounts, the production was a fiasco. The great majority of Paris critics ridiculed the play as melodramatic and mannered, concentrating their attack on Artaud's highly-stylized interpretation of Count Cenci. The single exception was Pierre Jean Jouve, who praised the attempt for its unique awareness that "la tragédie est inséparable de son espace", but also emphasized the disastrous effects of an obvious lack of funds and a hastily mounted production.³⁸

Artaud was shattered by the failure of Les Cenci. In 1936, he left for Mexico, in search of a theatre of primitive ritual, on what was to become a ten-year journey into the depths of a personal hell, unmitigated until his release from the mental institution in Rodez in

1946.

During the remaining two years of his life following his release from Rodez, Artaud's only dramatic production was the six-part poem, Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu, which he wrote at the request of the Paris broadcasting system, to be aired on February 2, 1948 for its "Théâtre de minuit" series.³⁹

The poem consists of chants, cries, sound effects, vehement hallucinatory condemnations of American society, and a visionary description of the Tutuguri Indian blood sacrifice which recalls many of the themes of cruelty and ritual in Le théâtre et son double.

However, the broadcast was banned by the network on charges of obscenity, and was never subsequently aired.

Paule Thévenin, who, along with María Casarés and Roger Blin, aided Artaud in this production, saw the aborted broadcast as the first real play of the Theatre of Cruelty.⁴⁰ However, in a letter^o to Thévenin immediately following the attempt, Artaud clearly states that, even excluding the bitter disappointment of the interdict, the effectiveness of the production had been severely hampered from the onset by the limitations imposed by its technical medium:

Paule, je suis très triste et désespéré
mon corps me fait mal de tous les côtés
mais surtout j'ai l'impression que les gens ont été déçus
par ma radio-émission.
Là où est la machine
c'est toujours le gouffre et le néant
il y a une interposition technique qui déforme et annihile
ce que l'on a fait. . .
c'est pourquoi je ne toucherai plus jamais à la Radio.⁴¹

The only other public event following Artaud's release from Rodez was his poetry reading, "Tête à tête par Antonin Artaud", in

January, 1947 at the Vieux-Colombier Theatre. The evening was to consist of an explanation by Artaud of his life experiences, interspersed with readings from his works, before an audience of over four hundred friends, admirers and curiosity seekers. What took place is recorded by Jean-Louis Brau:

Vers neuf heures, Artaud paraît sur la scène, posant une liasse de feuilles de papier sur une table, et commence à parler. Décharné, les mains voltigeant, tordues, portées au visage, il dit ses "poèmes", parle de ses aventures en Irlande, des Tarahumaras.

Soudain, le ton change. Artaud dénonce avec véhémence les forces du mal, les psychiatres, l'électrochoc. . . Avec des cris, des éructations magnifiques, c'est l'envol des feuillets préparés, inutiles et aliénants. . . Artaud parle, invective et rugit plus de deux heures. Enfin sa voix se brise, pathétique, achèvement d'un cri dans le silence qu'André Gide rompt en montant sur la scène pour l'étreindre.⁴²

Gide later describes the event as the culmination of all of Artaud's past attempts and ideals: "Artaud triomphait, tenait en respect la moquerie, la sottise insolente; il dominait. . . Jamais encore il ne m'avait paru plus admirable."⁴³ Virmaux is led to conclude that these two tortured hours constitute the single realization of Artaud's ideal:

. . . c'est la conférence de 1947 au Vieux-Colombier. . . moment privilégié--et presque moment ultime--de la vie d'Artaud, où s'incarne enfin, comme présence et absence à la fois, le Théâtre de la Cruauté.⁴⁴

Perhaps, as Naomi Greene suggests, the sympathetic elevation experienced by Gide and others who organized the unfortunate event is tempered by the guilty awareness that they should have prevented the performance.⁴⁵ As Roger Blin, also present at Vieux Colombier, makes

clear, there is a great deal of difference between the expansive and violent energy of a man who attempts such multimedia stadium spectacles as La conquête du Mexique, and the inarticulate fear of a prematurely aged and toothless wraith, fumbling with his papers and fleeing in terror from people he can no longer recognize.⁴⁶

Yet, regardless of the critical attitude towards Vieux-Colombier as triumph or ultimate defeat, Artaud's last writings on the theatre reveal a frustrated awareness that "la danse, et par conséquent le théâtre, n'ont pas encore commencé à exister".⁴⁷

In Artaud's own mind, the urgent question posed by him in Le théâtre et son double some fifteen years before still remained unanswered at the time of his death in 1948:

Et la question qui se pose maintenant, est de savoir si dans ce monde qui glisse, qui se suicide sans s'en apercevoir, il se trouvera un noyau d'hommes capables d'imposer cette notion supérieure du théâtre, qui nous rendra à tous l'équivalent naturel et magique des dogmes auxquels nous ne croyons plus. (Td, 39)

As an ideal founded on the primacy of direct mise en scène, the Theatre of Cruelty is ultimately dependent upon the theatre director for realization. Thus, we will turn our attention to those selected directorial approaches to theatre in the past two decades which most immediately recall Artaud's unfulfilled dream of the Theatre of Cruelty.

CHAPTER III

PETER BROOK AND THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY:

THE ARTAUD EXPERIMENT IN ENGLAND

Our study of the interpretation of Artaud's ideal begins with the legitimate theatre of London, and focuses on the enfant prodige of post-war British theatre, Peter Brook. The record of Brook's directorial achievements is both lengthy and eclectic. His first production, at the age of eighteen, was Dr. Faustus, at the Torch in 1943. Since 1946, he has been directing and often designing at least three major productions a year, from both the classical and modern repertoire, not only in London, but also in New York, Paris, and Moscow, besides directing numerous films, television plays and filmed versions of his theatrical productions. However, for the purpose of this study, Brook's theatrical work during the past decade will be of major concern.

In 1960, along with Peter Hall, Brook was appointed co-director of the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre, assisted by Charles Marowitz and Michel Saint-Denis. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre was founded with two specific aims: to form a unified and relatively stable company of actors, possessing the coherence and style seen in such troupes as the Berliner Ensemble; and also, in the words of Peter Hall, "to do modern or classical plays that reflect on Shakespeare today".¹

Like the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare was founded as

a government-subsidized company. Thus, for the first time in his career, Brook was able to carry out extensive theatrical experimentation beyond the limited bounds of commercial necessity.

The Royal Shakespeare Theatre's interest in Artaud first became apparent during the 1962 season at Aldwych, as a result of what was later seen by Brook and Hall as a "ritualistic trend" in British theatre, evidenced in the plays of David Rudkin and Fred Watson, and in Hall's production of The Wars of the Roses.² Added to this recognizable trend was Saint-Denis' personal familiarity both with Artaud's writings and with the man himself during his Theatre of Cruelty period,³ and Brook's own intense interest in ritual theatre, engendered during his recent filming of "the little death ritual", Lord of the Flies.⁴ As a result, Brook dedicated the entire 1963-64 season at Aldwych to an experimental examination of the Theatre of Cruelty.

The "Artaud experiment", itself entitled the Theatre of Cruelty, was initiated, not in an attempt to interpret Artaud in his entirety, but rather to fill what Brook recognized as an obvious gap in the English stage tradition which, while attaining levels of near-perfection in dealing with the spoken word, still lacked a solid frame of reference in dealing with "the mysterious something between two words".⁵ The experiment was to be a "strictly technical" and "severely practical" study of the craft of acting, founded on a belief in the ultimate coherence of Artaud's dramatic ideal, which, as Marowitz later states, may be "beyond linguistic forms but accessible by other means. Otherwise it is soapy mysticism".⁶

After an audition based on the ability to cope creatively with

a nonsense text, a group of twelve actors was chosen for immersion in an intensive twelve-week laboratory of experiment. From the onset, Brook deliberately geared the workshop towards the destruction of the traditional ideal of "the voice as a medium for good speech, projection and resonance, the carrier of the theatrical 'message', and the body as a useful but secondary adjunct".⁷

Brook was in conscious opposition to the naturalistic, rationally-motivated approach of the Stanislavski-Method school of acting. He saw the "truth" of the Artaudian actor as in no way limited or even initiated by the rational motivations of the Method actor. In accord with Artaud's search for the "Invisible-made-Visible" in the theatre, Brook aimed at an acting style which could go beyond quotidian realism towards interpretation of the subconscious dream state:

We were denying psychology, we were trying to smash the apparently water-tight divisions between the private and the public man: the outer man whose behavior is bound by the photographic rules of everyday life, who must sit to sit, stand to stand-- and the inner man whose anarchy and poetry is usually expressed only in his words.⁸

For Brook, Artaud's approach to acting is characterized by a search for the surface truth of the ideogram, the stylized but non-cliché hieroglyph. It is opposed to the Method's emphasis on inner truth:

The Method actor's test for truthfulness is the intensity and authenticity of his personal feeling. The Artaudian actor knows that unless that feeling has been shaped into a communicative image, it is a passionate letter without postage.⁹

Thus, in opposition to conventional character development ("his plot thickens and his conflicts resolve"), Brook's search was for a

discontinuous style of acting, modelled on the collage of jarring impressions seen on the front page of a modern newspaper.¹⁰

The experiment began with improvisations based on utilization of the body as an instrument of sound, then progressed to attempts at grinding down dramatic situations to basic impulses. In direct opposition to the Method approach of verbal embroidering on a skeletal theme, the confrontations in Brook's improvisations were progressively stripped down from dialogue to essential lines to essential words to the most basic non-verbal grunts, squeals and moans which could still contain the essence of the conflict. In his search for alternatives to verbal communication, Brook had his actors make use of quick sketching, painting and noise-producing objects to record and communicate reactions in a readily discernible but non-verbal style.¹¹

Not surprisingly, the first dramatic piece attempted by the experimental company was one by Artaud himself: The Spurt of Blood (Le jet de sang), a six-minute scenario written in 1925 and never before produced. The play, filled with tonic chants, giant grotesque characters and bursts of violent energy, was "made more Artaud than Artaud because his dialogue was replaced entirely by screams".¹²

For Brook, the value of this particular attempt lay in the resultant discovery that the Theatre of Cruelty, far from being a permanent element, depends "upon contemporary forms if it is to be anything other than the historical reconstruction of a past theatre".¹³ Le jet de sang was seen by Brook as too impregnated with the imagery of surrealism to appeal to an audience schooled in Brecht and Beckett.¹⁴

Brook's subsequent discarding of Artaud's own dramatic writings

as sources for his experimental production is in full accord with Artaud's adamant rejection of past literary works on the grounds that their specific and often outdated forms and imagery obscure rather than elucidate the essentially universal and timeless themes (Td, 89-90).

The remainder of the program was thus made up of contemporary pieces: short scenarios written by John Arden and by Brook himself. Brook's Public Bath, for example, made use of the shock effect of a nude woman on stage, and the ritualistic effect of this same woman simultaneously assuming the roles of two "archetypal" females of the day, Christine Keeler and Jacqueline Kennedy, utilizing a single prop, first as a prison bathtub and then as the presidential coffin. In retrospect, however, this program was seen by the company as "work in progress", in preparation for the second phase of the experiment, which centered around the production of a contemporary play.¹⁵

Although Martin Esslin sees Artaud as the direct link between the "pioneers" and the Theatre of the Absurd,¹⁶ Brook felt compelled to go beyond the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and the so-called Absurdists in his search for a dramatic work for production. He saw the Theatre of the Absurd, by the time of his Artaud experiment, as having arrived at an impasse:

Fantasy invented by the mind is apt to be lightweight. The whimsicality and surrealism of much of the Absurd would no more have satisfied Artaud than the narrowness of the psychological play.¹⁷

The drama of Beckett and Ionesco is linked to the Theatre of Cruelty, its violent disavowal of realistic characters and dialogue, and, especially in the case of Ionesco, in its presentation of the surprising and often fearful imprévu objectif. However, in Robert

Brustein's opinion, the differences between Artaud and the Absurdists are even more readily discernible:

. . . Artaud's central idea of a ritual theatre of cruelty, exorcising fantasies, is not picked up by the Absurdists, who never stray too far from the limits laid down by Dada and Surrealism. . . the messianic element in Artaud's thought never infiltrates the "theatre of the absurd", which remains a ferociously avant-garde movement with an exclusively existential vision.¹⁸

Indeed, in Le théâtre et son double, Artaud both predicts and goes beyond the largely verbal vituperation of Ionesco and the minimal, nihilistic drama of Beckett:

Je ne crois pas que nous arrivions à raviver l'état de choses où nous vivons et je ne crois pas qu'il vaille même la peine de s'y accrocher; mais je propose quelque chose pour sortir du marasme, au lieu de continuer à gémir sur ce marasme et sur l'ennui, l'inertie et la sottise de tout. (Td, 99-100)

In his search for a modern dramatic equivalent of the Theatre of Cruelty, Brook was initially drawn to the ritual drama of Genêt. He had already produced the Paris première of Le balcon in 1960; for the company's experimental production, Brook chose The Screens (Les paravents).

The parallels between the theatrical orientation of Genêt and Artaud are immediately discernible. Both emphasize cruelty and ritual, and both are equally violent in their rejection of naturalistic theatre. Like Artaud, Genêt finds his ideal in Oriental drama, specifically in the Chinese theatre, to which his plays are aligned in their characteristic preference for glorious costumes, cothurni, heightened mask-like makeup, and extreme stylization in acting.

Brook chose Les paravents as a Fête of total theatre, a celebration of excess which seemed to recall Artaud's own ideal of spectacular mise en scène and action "poussée à bout":

There are few things in the modern theatre as compact and spellbinding as the climax of the first portion of The Screens, when the stage action is a scribbled graffiti of war on to vast white surfaces, while violent phrases, ludicrous people and outsize dummies all together form a monument to colonialism and revolution. Here the potency of the conception is inseparable from the multileveled series of devices that become its expression.¹⁹

In producing Les paravents, Brook found the completely non-naturalistic acting style initiated during the previous months of experimentation to be the key to interpreting Genêt's drama:

Ritualistic may be a critic's cliché but it becomes a directorial Rosetta stone in a rehearsal. Even the crudest situation, three soldiers farting a farewell to their dead Lieutenant (Scene 15), becomes more comic and more understandable by being acted ceremoniously instead of in a loose (The Long and the Short and the Tall) naturalistic style.²⁰

In his desire to incorporate Artaud's ideal of "mannequins de plusieurs mètres" (Td, 111), Brook replaced the representatives of Western colonialism with giant cardboard effigies.

However, for Brook and Marowitz, the total effect of their production of Les paravents was less than satisfying. Although the production was limited to the first twelve scenes of the play, Marowitz concludes that, while containing individual scenes and characters of startling power, Les paravents lacks drive and purpose. He sees the play, even in its edited version, as proliferating incidents without opening new ground, "winding back on itself like a

badly wrapped package which becomes fussy without becoming any firmer".²¹

Much of the incompatibility which Brook's production uncovered between the theory of Artaud and the drama of Genêt is traceable to their divergent use of language. While emphasizing their similarities, Brustein admits that, compared to Artaud's ideal of physical hieroglyphics, Genêt's theatre is sumptuously verbal; Brustein's subsequent attempt to parallel the sophisticated and baroque richness of Genêt's poetry to Artaud's ideal of incantation is less than convincing.²²

Roger Blin, who was closely affiliated with the theatrical productions of both Genêt and Artaud, believes that Genêt was neither influenced by nor aware of Artaud's dramatic theories.²³ The poetic ornateness of Genêt's language is seen by Blin as more directly influenced "by Cocteau, by the bric-a-brac of his poetry, just the kind of stuff Artaud could not stand".²⁴ Accordingly, Genêt's highly literate theatre is based on the convention, violently rejected by Le théâtre et son double, of a written text of dialogue.

Although Genêt's instructions to the actor Amidou to practice his judo as training for his role of Saïd in Blin's production of Les paravents recall Artaud's athletic approach to acting,²⁵ both actor and play require the limited and distancing medium of the proscenium stage which the Theatre of Cruelty seeks to eliminate. Amidou emphasizes: "I feel better in a théâtre where I cannot see the audience and where a ramp separates me from the audience."²⁶

Both Genêt and Artaud wish the theatre to be a hallowed place. Both make constant reference to religious celebration, but their

examples of this ritual theatre are radically different. Artaud's ideal is the primitive Mexican cult of violent possession and hallucinogenic trance; Genêt finds his ideal in the specifically European and highly civilized ceremony of the Roman Catholic mass. Far from involving the spectator on the level of intense and active identification demanded by Artaud, Les paravents is a ceremony which, as Virmaux concludes, "trouve en elle-même sa fin et son aboutissement".²⁷

Brook and Marowitz agree that Les paravents, more so than most other plays, relies for its existence upon the externals of costume and mise en scène, but they both rebel at what they see as the "dazzling camouflage" of this spectacle.²⁸ The experimental production of Les paravents led Brook to the formulation of a basic question and a tentative answer which cuts through the external affinities between Genêt and Artaud to expose the irrevocable differences in their theatrical orientations:

At what point is a search for form an acceptance of artificiality? This is one of the greatest problems we face today, and so long as we retain any sneaking suspicion that grotesque masks, heightened make-ups, hieratic costumes, declamation, balletic movement are somehow 'ritualistic' in their own right and consequently lyrical and profound--we will never get out of the art-theatre rut.²⁹

Unlike Artaud, who rejects false theatricality, Genêt is drawn to the theatre because of its element of artifice and masquerade. As Bernard Dort points out, the resultant theatre of disguise is in direct opposition to Artaud's aim of relentless self-exposure: Genêt's drama is not only "théâtre dans le théâtre mais encore théâtre sur le théâtre. Un théâtre doublement théâtral".³⁰

Unlike the intense sincerity demanded by Artaud's theatre of cruel purgation, the ritual ceremony of Les nègres, a divertissement from the "real" action occurring offstage, is a clownerie which ends as it begins, with an ironic fancy-dress minuet around an artificial and empty catafalque. While there is revolt in Le balcon, this revolt is inevitably ineffectual in a world of masquerade: the revolution ends by embracing the Palace of Illusion. Les paravents is a Fête of celebration; but, as Genêt himself emphasizes in a letter to Roger Blin: "elle n'est la célébration de rien."³¹

Both Genêt and Artaud see the theatre and society as doubles. However, Genêt's characteristic theme revolves around the empty theatrical façade of life. In direct contrast, The Theatre of Cruelty is a statement of Artaud's search for a theatre to destroy this façade:

Il faut croire à un sens de la vie renouvelé par le théâtre. . . Aussi bien, quand nous prononçons le mot de vie, faut-il entendre qu'il ne s'agit pas de la vie reconnue par le dehors des faits, mais de cette sorte de fragile et remuant foyer auquel ne touchent pas les formes. Et s'il est encore quelque chose d'inférieur et de véritablement maudit dans ce temps, c'est de s'attarder artistiquement sur des formes, au lieu d'être comme des suppliciés que l'on brûle et qui font des signes sur leurs bûchers. (Td, 18)

As Bernard Dort concludes, Genêt strives to destroy Western theatre by "improving" upon it, rather than by rejecting it: ". . . il la pousse jusqu'à ses limites extrêmes, il la démultiplie, il en joue jusqu'à l'épuisement".³² Thus, Genêt's theatre ends where Artaud's seeks to begin: at "la dernière et peut-être la plus fascinante des fêtes de notre vieux théâtre".³³ Beneath the dazzling and intricate facade of baroque poetry and spectacle, Les paravents, like the Theatre

of the Absurd, defines itself as a theatre of negation. As such, it is alien to the rigorous affirmation which Artaud sees as inherent to his messianic ideal:

Le théâtre de la cruauté
 n'est pas le symbole d'un vide absent,
 d'une épouvantable incapacité de se réaliser dans sa
 vie d'homme,
 Il est l'affirmation
 d'une terrible
 et d'ailleurs inéluctable nécessité.³⁴

For the third and culminating production of the 1964 Artaud experiment, Brook chose a play by Peter Weiss which, like Genêt's Nègres, is actually a play within a play. As its title explains, Weiss' play presents The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade. The subject matter, as Weiss carefully records in his prefacing notes, is based on the fact of de Sade's imprisonment in Charenton, an asylum for mental and social misfits, from 1801 until his death in 1814. During this period, he produced several of his own plays, using inmates as actors, before an audience composed mainly of asylum overseers and thrill seekers from the Paris elite.³⁵

Like the clownerie of Les nègres, the play within Marat/Sade involves the ritual sacrifice of a victim: the murder of the revolutionary leader Jean-Paul Marat in 1793 by Charlotte Corday. The play of de Sade, like the clownerie, is presented for the entertainment of the Enemy, with the asylum director Coulmier, his family and their invited guests (the theatre audience) being the bourgeois equivalents of Genêt's Whites. Both dramatic works, constructed from telescoping frames of reference, are interspersed with the missed cues and fumbled

lines of the "actors" and the asides, initially condescending but ultimately terrified, of their onstage "audience".

However, Marat/Sade is set apart from Les nègres in the degree to which it is aligned to the ideals of the Theatre of Cruelty. All of the players in Les nègres are consummate actors, in perfect command of the poetic and seductive charms of language. But, for the actors in Marat/Sade's play, language is not primarily perceived as an empty, decorative mask to play with and hide behind, but rather as Artaud sees it: a painfully restricting muzzle which attempts and ultimately fails to restrain the beast erupting within.

Like Les Cenci, in which "chaque personnage a son cri",³⁶ the players in Marat/Sade are driven by dark and compelling inner necessities which undercut and often negate the meaning of their spoken lines. Except for de Sade, all the central players are anonymous, uniformed madmen, struggling to portray characters for whom they can feel little affinity. Charlotte Corday is played by a somnambulist, who alternatively falls into a trance of sleep and bursts into fits of automatic energy, forcing out her lines with telegraphic precision. Her Girondist lover, Duperret, is played by an erotomaniac, who must be violently restrained from raping her while stumbling distractedly over the précieux rhetoric of his role as an Incroyable. Marat is played by a paranoid, whose secret obsessional terrors magnify the torments imposed upon him by his role of sacrificial victim. His attendant, Simone, is played by a catatonic whose "acting" is limited to painful jerks and barely suppressed shrieks. De Sade, as director and writer of the piece, is in control of the play, yet he too is

possessed by his characteristic mania to such an extent that his own speeches, as for example his horrifically detailed description of the martyrdom of Damians, erupt into obsessional incantations of arousal and delirium.³⁷

For Brook, these deranged actors exemplified ideal Artaudian actors, performing in the grip of an all-pervading trance of possession so intensely emotional as to confound the limited scope of coherent dialogue and rational language. As Brook states:

What the play offers is a very disagreeable notion: everyone in the play, because he isn't an actor, but a madman playing an actor, believes totally in his part. . . An actor playing a role can just switch off like that. . . But a madman continues in his self-imposed role until the end.³⁸

The immediate parallel is to Artaud's desire, voiced in his prefacing notes to Les Cenci, to realize an inhuman theatre which strives "de faire parler, non des hommes, mais des êtres; des êtres qui sont chacun comme de grandes forces qui s'incarnent".³⁹

Artaud's double and seemingly irreconcilable vision of the Theatre of Cruelty as both therapeutic and destructive is also incorporated into Marat/Sade. De Sade's play has been sanctioned by Coulmier as a medium of socially acceptable release for the patients.⁴⁰ The resultant flood of barely suppressed vituperation which they unleash upon him and his guests, under the guise of dramatic fiction, serves as a necessary catharsis which exemplifies Artaud's belief that "le théâtre est fait pour vider collectivement des abcès" (Td, 38). Yet Artaud also believes that the theatre must work like a plague to destroy the social reality outside of the imaginary plague of theatre. Thus,

unlike the da capo ending of Les nègres, the play within Marat/Sade ends by breaking the restricting frame of dramatized and ritualized catharsis and initiating a violent and entirely naturalistic physical attack upon the authority figures of Coulmier and the nurses.⁴¹

How much of this affiliation to Artaud's ideal is inherent to Weiss' play and how much is due to Brook's interpretation of Marat/Sade in the context of the Artaud experiment? Steven Vivaner, reviewing Swinarski's Schiller Theatre première of Marat/Sade in Berlin, sees it as "a very formal production, four square or as square as you like, which attempts to put the play on stage".⁴² In the opinion of Marowitz, this Berlin production presented "an edictment of revolutionary fascism that set out to make a Marxist point. One either took the play or left it alone, but it was what it was and there was no question about its point of view".⁴³

Weiss' own orientation is admittedly and obviously Brechtian, not only in the alienation effects achieved by the play within the play, and in the expository scene titles and songs, but also in his attempt to stage a dialectic: an intelligent and living discussion between de Sade, the individualist, and Marat, the socialist. In an interview conducted shortly after Brook's production, Weiss stresses that "life in the asylum is only the background", and that "the essence of the play is not the chaos which develops towards the end, but the constant pull and tug of arguments which are intended to see through the humbug of society and provoke the audience to think".⁴⁴

Brecht's characteristic disavowal of illogical fantasy and emotionalism was a reaction against a theatre tradition which he saw

as drowning in mindless pageant and childish flights of expressionistic excess, a tradition in itself diametrically opposed to the established theatre of pièces bien faites and boulevard realism against which Artaud rebelled. Accordingly, Brechtian theatre centers around the intelligent and politically-aware confrontation between actor and audience, both of whom deliberately distance or alienate themselves from the event onstage so as to judge this event rationally,⁴⁵ a position entirely antithetical to Artaud's non-verbal theatre of mystery and ecstatic possession.

Weiss, the Brechtian playwright, states: "I am primarily interested in presenting a never-ending dialogue. . .the purpose of the dialogue is to clarify the situation. Everything irrational and absurd is foreign to me."⁴⁶

Artaud, seeing the magic of mise en scène as the essence of theatre, states: "Ce qu'il y a de latin, c'est-à-dire butée, c'est ce besoin de se servir des mots pour exprimer des idées qui soient claires. Car pour moi les idées claires sont, au théâtre comme partout ailleurs, des idées mortes et terminées." (Td, 49)

Rather than being political or intellectual, Brook's own orientation in Marat/Sade is primarily theatrical. Marowitz sees Weiss' play as a "rather long-winded and old-fashioned polemical tract".⁴⁷ He believes that the only real "message" of Brook's Marat/Sade is that "an Artaudian theatre, strong on imagery, disrespectful of plot and suspicious of theses, can resuscitate something in our jaded senses and overhaul our aesthetic appreciation".⁴⁸

Susan Sontag, for whom the function of criticism is to show "how

it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means",⁴⁹ defends Brook's increased emphasis on the medium of insanity, often at the expense of the didactic message of Marat/Sade's polemical debate. Sontag sees the lack of intelligent resolution of the play's complex social and political ideas as being of less importance than Brook's skilful use of these ideas, in much the same way that mise en scène is used, as "sensory stimulants". She sees the result as an Artaudian immersion in ideas, rather than a Brechtian presentation of these ideas.⁵⁰

Artaud's theatre of visceral rather than cerebral attack is exemplified, not only in the unresolved ideas of the play itself, but in Brook's greatly increased emphasis on a mise en scène of danger and l'imprévu objectif. Around a core of insanity, dark fears and erupting violence, Brook builds up a multileveled bombardment through the directorial medium of mise en scène. Like the fantasy stage of La conquête du Mexique, the stage of Marat/Sade "trembles and roars" with giant grotesque effigies, jarring music and contorted pantomimes of copulation and murder.⁵¹ The intense inner rituals of madness are magnified by Brook's extreme and non-naturalistic approach to mise en scène. For example, when Weiss calls for de Sade to be whipped during his long monologue in the first act,⁵² Brook has Corday flagellate de Sade with her own hair, in time to the inmates' choral accompaniment of shrieks and sighs. In Claude Roy's opinion, the resultant effect is stronger and more intensely physical than "des vrais coups de fouet qui ne seraient pas vrais, que le bruit d'un chat à neuf queues enregistré sur bande magneto par Fred Kinloff à la prison de Dartmoor et 'envoyé'

à chaque coup par un machine attentif au synchronisme".⁵³

All the action in the production, from the slow-motion stabbing of Marat with a wooden knife to the depiction of the guillotine's river of blood by the overturning of great buckets of red, white and blue paint, defines itself by the heightened reality of stylized mania. The use of violent gusts of wind and flapping curtains, heralding the orgy in the third scene of Les Cenci⁵⁴ and the orgy of violent release at the end of Marat/Sade,⁵⁵ exemplifies the belief shared by Brook and Artaud in the ability of mise en scène to transmit a physical hieroglyphic more powerful than that of verbal imagery.

However, it is a mistake to see Brook's concern with Artaud as a disavowal of the Brechtian elements inherent in Marat/Sade. Brook himself states that "Marat/Sade could not have existed before Brecht".⁵⁶ In fact, Brook's Brechtian orientation extended beyond the guidelines set within Weiss' text. In the Berlin production, the play ended in total chaos: the curtain fell on a wild battle between patients and nurses. In Brook's production, however, the final battle was halted instantly by the entrance of the stage manageress of the Aldwych Theatre, dressed in modern clothes and blowing a whistle to freeze the action. Brook explains this ending as yet another Brechtian frame of distancing imposed upon the audience:

A second ago, the situation had been hopeless: now it is all over, the actors are pulling off their wigs: of course, it's just a play. So we begin to applaud. But unexpectedly the actors applaud us back, ironically. We react to this by a momentary hostility against them as individuals and we stop clapping. I quote this as a typical alienation series, of which each incident forces us to readjust our position.⁵⁷

Moreover, in learning to simulate insanity in a manner so believable as to go beyond any stereotypes of theatrical madness, Brook's actors were required to exercise their intelligence to the degree demanded by Brecht. As Brook explains, the actor had to "cultivate an act of possession", but his character had to be not only vivid but also functional:

All the shaking, jibbering, and roaring, all the sincerity in the world can still get the play nowhere. He has lines to speak--if he invents a character incapable of speaking them, he will be doing his job badly.⁵⁸

Seen from this point of view, Brook's production was, in total effect, as much an innovative variation on the distancing theatre of Brecht as an attempt at realizing Artaud's ideal theatre. Since Brook's Marat/Sade was presented within the alienating boundaries of the Aldwych Theatre's proscenium stage by actors who "cultivated an act of possession", both the audience and the actors were much less than total participants in Artaud's ideal theatre of communal possession. Only within the illusive and innermost frame of the play does Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty approach realization: the dangerous and painful inner frame, inhabited by maniacs whose performance is motivated by an inner driving necessity, combining absolute control and absolute freedom in revolt, which overwhelms them in a state of total trance and purgation.

Although Marat/Sade marked the end of the 1964 Aldwych season of confrontation with the Theatre of Cruelty, the Artaud experiment was a means whose end was not Artaud, but Shakespeare. As co-director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, Brook chose Marat/Sade and Les paravents for their inherently "Elizabethan" qualities: their rejection of

naturalism and irrelevant action, and their concurrent goal of richly varied imagery and ideas. Brook's motivation in incorporating Artaud's ideas into the Brechtian frame of Marat/Sade was to cram his production with an optimum density of impact equal to the verbal density and scope of Shakespeare's blank verse:

Starting with its title, everything about this play is designed to crack the spectator on the jaw, then douse him with ice-cold water, then force him to assess intelligently what has happened to him, then give him a kick in the balls, then bring him back to his senses again. It's not exactly Brecht and it's not Shakespeare, but it's very Elizabethan and very much of our time.⁵⁹

Thus, one can begin to judge the effect of the Artaud experiment on Brook by comparing the style of his Shakespearean production before and after the "Theatre of Cruelty" season at Aldwych.

Many of Brook's characteristic attitudes towards Shakespearean production (his decided preference for the bare, non-illusionistic stage and his emphasis on the necessity of endless reworkings on the textual constant to appeal to the everchanging contemporary audience) were confirmed by Brook twenty years before the Aldwych Artaud experiment.⁶⁰ Ten years before, in 1955, Brook produced Titus Andronicus (based on the Thyestes of Seneca which Artaud so admired), a gruesome catalogue of thirteen deaths, two mutilations, one rape and the infamous cannibal banquet. In this production, the first Stratford production of one of Shakespeare's less characteristic plays, Brook assumed the role of absolute metteur en scène: he edited, directed, wrote the musical score, and designed the sets and costumes. In this instance, the cruel demands of the play itself led Brook to his first major confrontation

with the ritual violence towards which Artaud instinctively leaned.⁶¹

However, Brook's dramatic mentor during this period was not Artaud, but Gordon Craig, with whom he conducted several recorded interviews and to whom he devoted a central essay on dramatic production in 1955.⁶² At this time, Brook was still largely in line with Craig's dramatic orientation, with aesthetic beauty and harmony as his primary goals. Moreover, he disagreed with Craig's banishment of the poet from the theatre.⁴ He subordinated his most innovative productions, as for example his Titus Andronicus, to the function of illustrating the textual poetry of Shakespeare. In 1955, Brook writes:

. . .the stage picture can never make an important statement alone, it must always be an adjunct to the expression of the harmony and orchestration that the poet clothes in words and that the actor conveys through the instrument of his sensibility.⁶³

In Brook's 1957 production of The Tempest, this attitude was much in evidence. J. C. Trewin praised the production as "an island enchanted by a director of extraordinary craft and by some noble Shakespearean voices", but found Brook's emphasis on "harmony and orchestration" in the presentation of Shakespearean verse as diminishing the bestial qualities of Caliban and, by implication, the underside of dark forces existing within the entire play.⁶⁴

Brook's 1962 production of King Lear at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre was largely in opposition to his earlier Craigian goal of rhapsodic beauty. In his attempt to keep Shakespeare contemporary, Brook based his production on Jan Kott's topical essay, "King Lear or Endgame", building his production around Gloucester's leap, described by Kott in terms of the bare, decomposing world of Beckett.

Brook envisioned it as a metaphysical farce.⁶⁵

The externals of cruelty were indeed in evidence in this production. In an antagonistic article, written shortly after Brook's King Lear on the influence of Artaud's writings on the recent upsurge of violence in British theatre, Laurence Kitchen decried Brook's addition of spurs to the boots of Gloucester's tormentors, as well as his addition of scenes based on Gloucester's ill-treatment of his servants and their own subsequent tormenting of him, as "a habit of lingering over cruelty, of spelling it out", in a manner which Kitchen saw as reminiscent of the Grand Guignol Theatre of horror in Paris.⁶⁶

However, Brook's primary orientation in this production, besides Beckett, was the epic objectivity of Brecht, whose influence, in Marowitz's opinion, was much more strongly felt than Artaud's by much of the new British theatre during this period.⁶⁷ Accordingly, Brook brought up the house lights on such key scenes in the play as Gloucester's blinding so as to increase audience awareness and, as Marowitz emphasized, to encourage its evaluation of the proceedings with "le cul sur la chaise et la tête claire".⁶⁸

With the Artaud experiment, Brook's everpresent emphasis on total theatre defined itself increasingly by jarring and chaotic effects, rather than by harmony and rational analysis. As Brook later states, the Marat/Sade production was based on "a groping towards a theatre, more violent, less rational, more extreme, less verbal, more dangerous".⁶⁹ However, it is Brook's attitude towards the written poetry of Shakespeare which undergoes the most noticeable change during and after the 1964 season at Aldwych.

During the first part of the experimental workshop, on the assumption that Hamlet is part of the Englishman's collective unconscious, Brooks supervised a radically edited production of the play. The result was an eighty-five minute collage, retaining Shakespeare's essential words and scenes, but blending them in a totally new order.

In 1968, under the auspices of Jean-Louis Barrault and the Théâtre des Nations, Brook mounted a second London production of The Tempest which adhered closely to many of Artaud's theatrical preferences. In accord with Artaud's desire to abandon the conventional theatre area in favour of "un hangar ou une grange quelconque" (Td, 115), Brook's production took place in a nineteenth-century station house, built up into a huge gymnasium by extensive use of pipes and scaffolds. Audience and actors intermingled throughout the production, since both were often rolled into the playing area on the same wheeled scaffolding, serving a function analogous to Artaud's "chaises mobiles qui lui permettront de suivre le spectacle qui se passera tout autour de lui" (Td, 115).

As Margaret Croyden records, this Tempest production was in no way a literal interpretation of the Shakespearean play; rather, it consisted of "abstractions, essences and possible contradictions embedded in the text".⁷⁰ With the exception of certain key lines from the original, the entire production was composed of mime and, as Croyden states, "animal sounds, grunts, moans, howls, whispers, intonations, and gibberish--attempts to find a correspondence between the facial, the physical and the vocal".⁷¹ Accordingly, Ariel was played by a Noh actor, speaking a combination of Japanese and nonsense sounds. When language was retained, it was almost overwhelmed by the intense physical

activity of the speaker. For example, while speaking her opening lines, Miranda jumped, ran, skipped, climbed the scaffolding and appeared on a runway sixty feet above the audience.

The production largely involved variations on orgiastic themes, initially joyful but, following the nightmarish birth of Caliban high atop the audience, increasingly perverse, culminating in the homosexual rape of Prospero, a violent and bestial scene which ended abruptly with the entrance of Ariel, bearing ribbons and trinkets of appeasement. The marriage ceremony of Miranda and Ferdinand followed, with Prospero's closing soliloquy chanted in various voice modulations by the entire cast. Trewin's criticism that Brook's earlier production of The Tempest was "not alarming enough" is scarcely applicable here.⁷²

Brook's attitude towards the importance of Shakespearean verse in this second production was radically different from that of the 1957 version. In 1968, he writes: "I do not for one moment question the principle of rewriting Shakespeare--after all, the texts do not get burned--each person can do what he thinks necessary with a text and no one suffers."⁷³ Coupled with this new willingness to "use Shakespeare today as he used Kyd, Peele, or Holinshed",⁷⁴ was Brook's increased emphasis on physical danger, non-verbal communication and the athletic capabilities of the actor as acrobat. The resultant production of The Tempest was a conscious attempt at realization of Artaud's own aborted plans for the production of "des oeuvres du théâtre élisabéthain dépouillées de leur texte et dont on ne gardera que l'accoutrement d'époque, les situations, les personnages, et l'action" (Td, 119).

Brook's most recent Shakespearean production to date, A Midsummer-

Night's Dream (1970), was largely a result of the Tempest experiment, severely modified to fit the more conventional requirements of the Aldwych stage. The play was produced as a dream-circus, with the actors exhibiting the acrobatic virtuosity of their circus counterparts: the lovers were the pony-riders, the fairies were the high trapeze artistes, the rustics were the clowns. As Donald Richie records, the entire first act was devoted much less to the arts of Shakespeare than to those of spectacle:

The art of the circus is the art of pantomime--the enjoyment lies in what is done and not in what is said. Seeing the Dream as a circus, Brook produces a gloss on the play, an illustrated edition in which every line is underlined, acted out and the evocative power of the naked word, of the imagery, is ignored. When, for example, the fairies' lullaby ("You spotted snakes with double tongue. . .") is turned into a polyphonic chorus, no single word understandable, the fairies levitating in their sling chairs, the poetry itself evaporates.⁷⁵

Brook's justification of this anti-poetical stance recalls Artaud's rejection of verbal poetry as unsuited to the physical requirements of true theatre:

Vaulting speech is a good convention, but is there another? When a man flies over the audience's head on a rope, every aspect of the immediate is put in jeopardy--the circle of spectators that is at ease when the man speaks is thrown into chaos: in this instant of hazard can a different meaning appear?⁷⁶

Although akin to Artaud's desire for the minimizing of literary forms and the subsequent reworking of themes in forms both popular and physical, the ephemeral and nostalgic appeal of the circus is far from the hallowed, ritualistic theatre of primitive purgation envisioned by the Theatre of Cruelty. Moreover, rather than uniting

audience and actor in communal ceremony, the medium of the circus is characterized by the absolutely unbridgeable gulf between performer and spectator.

For Artaud, the Elizabethan theatre mainly serves as an immediately available but largely imperfect tool for the realization of the Theatre of Cruelty.⁷⁷ Conversely, for Brook, Artaud's ideal of theatre, severely modified and in combination with a myriad of other sources, is useful primarily insofar as it aids in the realization of a Shakespearean theatre of contemporary relevance. As Brook states: "Shakespeare is a model of the theatre that contains Brecht and Beckett but goes beyond both. Our need in the post-Brecht theatre is to find a way forwards, back to Shakespeare."⁷⁸ As long as Shakespeare is the constant, and Artaud's ideal theatre only one of many variables, Brook's realization of the Theatre of Cruelty, albeit admirable, is ultimately limited.

A fuller realization of the Theatre of Cruelty is achieved when Brook turns his attention away from Shakespeare and more directly towards ritual theatre, as in two of his most recent productions.

As guest director at the National Theatre in 1968, Brook attempted an Artaudian-based production of Seneca's Oedipus. Ted Hughes, who adapted the play for production, sees Brook's guiding ideal as being a production "that would release whatever inner power this story, in its plainest, bluntest form, still has, and to unearth, if we could, the ritual possibilities within it".⁷⁹

Artaud states his belief in the contemporary relevance of the central themes--plague, war, incest and implacable destiny--which compose

the Oedipal cycle, but rejects the Sophoclean version as obscuring these themes behind an outdated form: "Sophocle parle haut peut-être, mais. . . il parle trop fin pour cette époque et on peut croire qu'il parle à côté" (Td, 90). In choosing the Senecan rather than the Sophoclean version, Brook aimed at a more direct realization of the Theatre of Cruelty through the medium of one of Artaud's primary dramatic examples. The attitude of Hughes towards Sophocles is directly parallel to the anti-intellectual bias of Artaud:

The Greek world saturated Sophocles too thoroughly: the evolution of his play seems complete, fully explored and in spite of its blood roots, fully civilized. The figures in Seneca's Oedipus are Greek only by convention: by nature they are more primitive than aboriginals. They are a spider people, scuttling among hot stones.⁸⁰

In order to discover the primitive qualities of Seneca's tragedy, seen by Artaud as theatre "pas encore humain",⁸¹ Brook focused his total attention on the actor, reducing setting to a bare stage and costuming to a nondescript brown uniform. Rather than attempting characterization, which was seen as impossible to relate to the rhetoric of the play itself, Brook's actors ritualized and stylized their expression completely by means of impersonal, mask-like faces. Their voices were modulated by rhythms based on breathing patterns garnered from recorded Maori tribal rites; their movement, on the intense programmed stances of Tsai Chi. For Oedipus, two patches on the eyes

denoted blindness; agony was portrayed by a rigidly open mouth.*

At the end of the tragedy, an imprevu objectif made a totally unexpected appearance: a seven-foot phallus was rolled onstage, and the chorus broke into an abandoned dance and mime which ridiculed the immediately preceding events of the tragedy. Besides recalling the bacchanal which followed Senecan tragedy in its own day, this coup de théâtre was included by Brook in an attempt to involve the audience on the level of communal experience, reminiscent of the participatory identification envisioned in Le théâtre et son double.

Brook's most recent production to date was a radical extension of the search for ritual engendered in his production of Oedipus. For the Shirza-Persepolis Festival of the Arts in Persia in 1971, Brook's International Center for Theatre Research, formed soon after the Oedipus production, presented Orghast: a play, drawing on elements from ancient mythology, which was also a language, invented by Ted Hughes and seeking communication on a direct, non-rational level.

The Orghast language was created as a necessary means of communication between the twenty-five actors, of ten nationalities and cultures, working on the project. Eventually, this invented language became a concerted attempt at answering a question which Brook, like Artaud, sees as central to theatre: "What forms exist or could exist

*Brook's use of rigidly stylized facial masks and movement in Oedipus, as well as the austerely athletic style employed in The Tempest production of the same year, was a direct result of his contact with Jerzy Grotowski, whom Brook invited to conduct an acting workshop at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 1967. The work of Grotowski and his Laboratory Theatre is discussed in Chapter VI.

that can speak quite directly, without going through the known references that social and cultural forms provide to everyone?"⁸²

For three months, the actors trained physically, in Tsai Chi and yogic breathing, for the production of Orghast. Presented at dusk in the massive ruins of Persepolis, Orghast combined chanting language, music, cries and bursts of flame in a barrage of ritualized confrontations, based on the Prometheus myth, Calderon's Life is a Dream, Japanese Samurai fables, African voodoo and the works of Zoroaster, before a small audience, bombarded on all sides and from the cliffs above them.

Brook's production made use of Orghast, along with Greek, Latin and the ancient Zoroastrian ritual language of Avesta, as it made use of percussion instruments and fire: as a physical, concrete language, whose closest parallel is music rather than conventional verbalization.

Hughes emphasizes:

Esperanto is just another language, for everyday, conceptual and intellectual concerns. It's a language for practical life. . . which, as all other languages have begun to do. . . has turned its back on the musical world. We're trying to create a language which is close to the original elements of action and inner life. . . we all share a biological similarity and there could well be a similarly shared common language.⁸³

The close relationship of Orghast to Artaud's hieroglyphical langue concrète (and, more obviously, to his obsessive interjection of tonic and unintelligible incantations into much of his later writing), as well as Orghast's use of a hallowed and ancient locale for the enactment of its cultist rituals, resulted in a more complete realization of the Theatre of Cruelty than Brook's earlier attempts within the physical boundaries of the conventional theatre. Moreover, in

line with Artaud's vision of the ultimate immediacy of true theatre as grounded in nonrepeatability ("le théâtre est le seul endroit au monde où un geste fait ne se recommence pas deux fois" [Td, 91]), Brook limited Orghast, the result of over a year of intense preparation, to four performances, with no allowance for future presentations. Brook states:

The powerful influence that has determined the shape which our play has taken begins and ends with Persepolis. Once done our theatre work is completely wiped away. The influence it has had on our material and the substance of what we have been looking for here, we can take away with us, but after our last performance, we shall certainly never play this material in this form again anywhere else, because the unity we have attempted to achieve here will already have been broken.⁸⁴

As in all of his earlier experimentation, Brook's ultimate concern in Orghast was the audience: "The work we do is based on the belief that an audience is always necessary. Without an audience, no actor's theatre is possible."⁸⁵ However, since Brook's first experimental work at Aldwych, this communion with the audience has been increasingly difficult to achieve. The extremely eclectic nature of Orghast's themes, left even such an aware spectator as Ossia Trilling, who reported on the experiment for Theatre Quarterly, in a state of confusion. Though praising the physical and vocal talents of the cast, she criticized the obscurity of the presentation and interpreted Orghast as "pretentious gibberish."⁸⁶ As the product of a search for a hallowed theatre, the elitist obscurantism of Orghast severely limited popular identification.

As with the Orghast experiment, the attempt at communion was largely unsuccessful in the case of Brook's Oedipus, in which the

audience was suddenly invited to break the frame which was so carefully built up during the unfolding of the tragedy. As Colin Blakely, who played Creon, believes, the attempt at communal celebration at the end of Oedipus failed because of the gap between the onstage actors and their passively captive audience: "We perform, they watch; we need to perform, they don't need to watch. Theatre doesn't spring from a communal need now."⁸⁷

It is with this awareness that Brook concludes:

Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed: betrayed because it is always just a portion of his thought that is exploited, betrayed because it is easier to apply rules to the work of a handful of dedicated actors than to the lives of the unknown spectators who happened by chance to come through the theatre door.⁸⁸

The active involvement of the audience, upon which Artaud's theatre of ecstatic trance is so intrinsically dependent, is the unpredictable variable which Brook sees as limiting much of his conscientious and significant experimentation with the ideals of the Theatre of Cruelty.

CHAPTER IV

JULIAN BECK AND JUDITH MALINA: THE LIVING THEATRE IN EXILE

One of the most intense moments in Peter Brook's production of King Lear occurred during a dress rehearsal. In the middle of a soliloquy and still in character, Scofield, enraged at a photographer's persistent flashes during his speech, flung his cape at the man and growled for him to leave the theatre. According to Marowitz, "the entire auditorium caught its breath. . . . It was so exciting I felt like saying keep it in."¹

This desire for spontaneous confrontation informs the work of the Living Theatre, seen by Jean-Jacques Lebel as "le seul troupe qui a eu jusqu'ici le courage d'appliquer les idées d'Artaud".² Already in existence for a decade prior to Mary Caroline Richard's English translation of Le théâtre et son double in 1958, the Living Theatre began as a small, non-profit theatre, founded by co-directors Julian Beck and his wife, Judith Malina, in 1948, and dedicated to the presentation of European and American avant-garde drama in New York. After seven years of free theatre (Auden, Strindberg, Cocteau, Pirandello, and the first English-language American production of Racine, in 1955), the Becks moved to the Fourteenth Street Theatre, where their two major American plays, The Brig (1959) and The Connection (1963), were produced.

Although critically acclaimed as a focal point for much of New

York's innovative theatre, dance and poetry, the Fourteenth Street Theatre, also a non-profit theatre, became increasingly short of funds until 1964, when it was seized by the Internal Revenue Service for tax arrears. The company staged a protest, for which the Becks were arrested and sentenced to five years in prison. After two months in jail, the Becks were paroled and, along with the seventeen other members of the Living Theatre company, they left the United States in 1964, on a self-imposed exile in Europe.

Four years later, with the financial and legal assistance of Saul Gottlieb's Radical Theatre Repertoire, the Living Theatre (since expanded to include sixty members and several small children) returned to the United States to stage a cross-country tour of their four highly controversial theatre pieces, Mysteries and Smaller Pieces, Frankenstein, Antigone, and Paradise Now, created during four years of nomadic wandering and constant theatrical production throughout Europe. Following this tour, the Living Theatre, financially unstable and totally disenchanted with America, returned to Europe in 1969.

Prior to the European exile of 1964, the Living Theatre's dramatic orientation was already in many ways parallel to the ideals of Artaud. The Connection, a play within a play chronicling the cruel and necessary rituals of heroin addiction; and The Brig, an uncompromising picture of the sadistic rituals of a Marine Corps prison, were presented as attempts at breaking down the boundaries of conventional theatre through an attack on the nerves of the audience. However, both productions portrayed the brutalities of grim realism rather than cruelty on the mystical level preferred by Artaud.

The Artaudian theatre of non-verbal communication first became relevant to the Living Theatre during its travels through the non-English areas of Europe. Moreover, the group's isolation led to a new emphasis on the theatre company as a communal family unit. Their subsequent theatrical productions were necessary, both as a means of support, and also to increase solidarity within the small community while in the midst of unfamiliar circumstances. The Living Theatre's total amalgamation of theatre and lifestyle resulted in a dramaturgy closer to the ideals of the Theatre of Cruelty than during their formative years in New York, a period which, in retrospect, Beck sees as being too bound up by the theatre of intellect:

The point at which Artaud was so dazzlingly right was in his intimation that you have to find a new reality with which to experiment--we had remained within the old framework of the reality of controlled perception, all our theatrical avant-gardism was the product of rational civilization. With the Mysteries and Frankenstein, what became interesting was not what we did, but how we were doing it. The experiments were getting a little uncivilized.³

Mysteries and Smaller Pieces, first performed at the American Students' and Artists' Center in Paris, is, as Beck's short program states, "a public enactment of ritual games".⁴ The eight scenes of the piece, void of textual script, costumes or sets, rely largely upon non-verbal communication of an athletic nature; the resultant quest for a non-naturalistic mystical theatre links Mysteries to many of Artaud's theatrical tenets.

The initial scene opens with a single actor, standing in an immobile position of meditation for ten minutes, followed by a militarized military scene combining furious activity and indecipherable commands,

and ending with a chanted fugue based upon the words printed on a U. S. dollar bill. Subsequent scenes, enacted in near or total darkness, include a long vocal rag^a, chants, movement through accumulated gestures, Yoga breathing exercises, and tableaux vivants of four actors in numerous frozen positions of interaction. The final scene involves the entire company in a state of trance. The actors swarm throughout the entire theatre area in extreme gestures of possession, pain and death by plague. Then, six of them rise and, with mechanical precision, stack the rigid corpses onstage in a pyramidal body pile.

Although the plague sequence itself is somewhat too literal in its interpretation of Artaud's theatrical metaphor, the body pile is recognized by Robert Pasolli as a startlingly effective concrete hieroglyphic or necessary cruelty: ". . .an Artaudian monument--grotesque, larger than life, yet of the utmost simplicity of action, at once metaphysical and everyday."⁵

Frankenstein, premiered in Venice in 1965, is based only slightly on Mary Shelley's novel. The piece opens with an attempt to create magic. As a recorded voice drones in various languages, the actors are deep in a meditative trance, directed towards the levitation of one of the performers: "If the levitation succeeds, the play is consummated."⁶ After a countdown twenty minutes later, the girl fails to levitate; she is captured and crammed, screaming, into a coffin. In the funeral procession which follows, several performers attempt to break away: they too are captured. After being gassed, tortured, hung, shot or crucified, the dissidents are imprisoned in the huge, three-story structure of cages which serves as the centre of action. Dr. Frankenstein

then enters, wiring up the inert creature on his operating table and throwing a switch to light up the network of cages in a twenty-foot silhouette of a human head. The imprisoned performers become parts of this giant creature's brain, divided into phrenological aspects (Concupiscentia, Ego, and so on), and characterized by the stylized action within each of the cages. The revolt of the monster against reason ignites more scenes of terror and cruelty until the final embrace of Dr. Frankenstein and the creature. The play ends in a tableau vivant of erotic positions, reminiscent of the orgy montage in the third scene of Les Cenci.

Looming over the whole piece is the entirely functional set. After serving as prison, ship, television screen, torture chamber, train and the whole contemporary world, it remains, as Saul Gottlieb stresses, "a monster in its own right".⁷ This huge profile with its fiery red eyes is a perfect example of the gigantic effigies of Danger envisioned by Artaud, just as the frenzied unknowns who inhabit the rigid cells of its brain recall the inhuman and preliterate forces with which Artaud's primitive theatre is populated. As Stefan Brecht observes, "the actors do not come across as individual entities, but at best as freaks. . . . When they are not exalted automatons, they are anybodies. They are swallowed by the audio-visual explosion of the spectacle, its running bodies".⁸ For these reasons, Renfreu Neff concludes that Frankenstein is "the closest embodiment of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty that has been attempted in theatre, its impact going so far beyond other attempts--Marat/Sade of course being the first example that comes to mind--that in retrospect they seem just that--attempts".⁹

The Living Theatre's third piece, Antigone, premiered in Krefeld, Germany in 1967, was a largely spontaneous production based on an extremely free adaptation by Judith Malina of Brecht's political and humanistic transformation of Hölderlin's translation, which is in turn based on the religious drama of Sophocles. The Living Theatre retained the theme of civil disobedience but its emphasis on the primitive confrontatory aspects of the Antigone legend led to a radical alteration of form. Thus, Beck interpreted Creon as a witch doctor, who changed, through the successive transformations of stylized facial gesture, from "feather serpent" to demonic "rain god". The body of Polyneices was onstage at all times, the focus of all action and the objectified image of the conflict between Creon and Antigone. All sound effects, sets and props were produced by the extremely stylized movements of the performers. As Beck states: "No one does anything that follows the superficial patterns of quotidian behavior. No one speaks without uniting what is said with an actual physical locality in the body."¹⁰

Like Brook's Marat/Sade, the Living Theatre's Antigone was an attempt to combine Brecht and Artaud. However, though Brook still retained the Brechtian perspective, the Living Theatre was primarily concerned with the Artaudian theatre of total trance. Accordingly, while Brook's actors had to "cultivate an act of possession" to comply with the textual demands of Weiss' play, Malina's Antigone, as a text, was only one variable, with the constant ideal being a state of total trance. As Malina states:

We put twenty-two people on stage for two-and-one-half hours, always doing something different and always in

that state of exaltation which results from any act of existential engagement. They are possessed, not in possession: they sacrifice their grasp of emotion cooled by rationalization.¹¹

With their fourth production, Paradise Now, premiered at the Avignon Festival in 1968, the Living Theatre's emphasis on the state of possession shared by actor and audience, and aiming at a disruption of the existing social order, reached its fullest expression. The play is described by Beck as "a spiritual and political voyage for actors and spectators".¹² The script is in the form of a chart of the human body, divided into eight rungs. Each rung consists of a rite and a vision (performed by the actors), and an action (performed by the spectators with the actors' help). For example, in the first rung of the "voyage", at the Gates of Paradise, the rite of Guerilla Theatre involves the actors mingling with the audience and, in an increasing crescendo of protest, chanting the taboos of Western society ("I am not allowed to smoke marijuana; I am not allowed to take off my clothes," and so on). The vision of the Death and Resurrection of the American Indian is presented as a physical metaphor: human totem poles of actors, inching forward, then enacting the sounds of bullets and the death agonies of slain Indians. The first action is a chant which expands to become a primitive dance in which the audience is invited to participate. Ideally, the "voyage" is to continue for seven more rungs until the final action, in which the audience members, bearing the actors on their shoulders, rush naked from the theatre and into the streets, chanting: "Free the theatre. The theatre of the street. Free the street. Begin."¹³

Throughout Le théâtre et son double, Artaud envisions theatre as a catalytic force which goes beyond sanctioned dramatic catharsis to the instigation of popular upheaval on all levels:

. . .le Théâtre de la Cruauté se propose de recourir au spectacle de masses; de rechercher dans l'agitation de masses importantes, mais jetées l'une contre l'autre et convulsées, un peu de cette poésie qui est dans les fêtes et dans les foules, les jours, aujourd'hui trop rares, où le peuple descend dans la rue. (Td, 102)

Wishing to promote popular revolution, The Living Theatre is driven by a necessary cause which, when linked to an avowed rejection of the mores of Western society, produces a theatre in many ways akin to the Theatre of Cruelty. Beck's introduction to Mysteries emphasizes his belief in the theatre as a medium for social change through direct audience identification:

If our work should succeed at any moment, it is because we on the stage reflect every man on the street; that is, we will have achieved Artaud's vision of the actor "being like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames."¹⁴

Like Artaud, Beck believes in the ability of the theatre to promote change, and in the necessity of relating the theatre to the community which it represents. The crucial difference lies in the Living Theatre's interpretation of the nature of this revolution and of the resultant ideal society. The aim of all four theatre pieces is, as Beck states, "to further the revolution: meaning the Beautiful Nonviolent Anarchist Revolution."¹⁵ The Living Theatre is seen by its members as a communal family, the prototype of this ideal, anarchist society. Stefan Brecht points out: "The Living Theatre performs as though it were the civic theatre of the emergent anarchist community."¹⁶

Beck and Malina see their theatre and their lifestyle as a spearhead of the international countercultural revolution which, in revolt against the System as a System, is consciously anarchistic. The implications for the Living Theatre as a theatre follow accordingly.

Like the Theatre of Cruelty, the Living Theatre focuses on topics of misery and cruelty, but these themes are always connected to the anarchist ideal of evangelical pacificism and nonviolence. Mysteries ends with an ecstatic, "free jazz" celebration; Frankenstein, with the embrace of the antagonists. Paradise Now is the embodiment of the Living Theatre's belief in the positive power of the "Love Zap" in overcoming oppression and cruelty. Thus, Artaud's paranoid vision of absolute control by malevolent forces is replaced by what Raymonde Temkine refers to as "l'anarchie sentimentale" of a theatre based on liberation and optimistic humanism.¹⁷

A revolt against authority on all levels implies the rejection of the absolute creative power of the metteur en scène. Beck believes:

. . . the real work of the director in modern theatre is to eliminate himself, and if he can't do that, then at least to establish inside the acting company a situation in which the actor is both total artist and is able to take more and more control of the total work, rather than being a puppet within some kind of diagram.¹⁸

Accordingly, Mysteries, Frankenstein and Paradise Now are categorized by the company as "collective creations"; Antigone's script is so elastic as to allow total freedom for its actors.

Both as a result of this orientation and because of consistently limited finances, the Living Theatre, with the exception of Frankenstein, is an actor's theatre, rather than a total theatre of mise en scène.

Although Artaud believes that a playwright who is unaware of the requirements of mise en scène "a trahi en réalité sa mission. Et il est juste que l'acteur le remplace", he immediately adds: "Mais alors tant pis pour le théâtre qui ne peut que souffrir de cette usurpation" (Td, 134).

Since all authority is seen as harmfully repressive, the policy of the Living Theatre is that attendance at all work calls, rehearsals, and performances is optional.¹⁹ While the company's actors are adverse to the portrayal of psychologically differentiated characters, they are only minimally concerned with the rigorous techniques inherent to stylized presentation since, as Patrick McDermott points out, "craft is irrelevant to a kind of community which tries to make art a way of life. And style is irrelevant to soul".²⁰ Like the Method style of acting to which they are so opposed, the actors of the Living Theatre emphasize the validity of inner emotional truth to such an extent that their resultant productions, in Beck's words, involve "being nothing but ourselves for two-thirds of the evening".²¹

The rigorous self-denial admired by the author of "Sur le théâtre balinais" is at odds with the Living Theatre's goal of a self-expression so total as to reject the portrayal of a psychologically coherent fictional character in favour of the projection of one's own personal psyche. Judith Malina emphasizes: "I feel I can take bigger trips for myself when I am playing Judith Malina, than if I'm playing Hedda Gabbler."²²

The Living Theatre's rejection of technique in favour of spontaneous sincerity is coherent with their anarchist aim of individual

expression, but is often destructive to the efficacy of their performances as mediums of communication. Stefan Brecht's observations exemplify the most recurrent criticism of the Living Theatre's productions:

Their sabotage of aesthetics is a sabotage of form, obscuring meaning. The development of Antigone is inevident, what the individual prisoners, victims, functions of Frankenstein signify can't be read from the gestures, half the scenes in Paradise Now, even when visible are (in spite of brilliant conception) not only so poorly executed but so poorly thought through as to be meaningless and the same two points so much apply to the Tableaux and the Give and Take in Mysteries that in fact an interpretation opposite to the one I gave is feasible. The intended nuances, in fact most of the meaning, of the Artaudian Plague in the same show is lost through boorish sloth.²³

The spontaneous and unpredictable nature of their four productions is based on the Living Theatre's faith in the positive merits of chance and improvisation, an attitude rejected by Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty:

Mes spectacles n'auront rien à voir avec les improvisations de Copeau. . . ils ne sont pas. . . livrés au caprice de l'inspiration inculte et irréfléchie de l'acteur; surtout de l'acteur moderne qui, sorti du texte, plonge et ne sait plus rien. Je n'aurais garde de livrer à ce hasard le sort de mes spectacles et du théâtre.
Non. (Td, 131)

Both Artaud and the Living Theatre are inextricably connected with hallucinogenic drug experience, but their attitudes towards the function of these drugs reflect their radically different ideologies. Artaud's use of laudanum was based on a personal necessity to minimize the intense abdominal pains which tormented him until his death. His advice to the young actor, Jean-Louis Barrault, was to avoid the use of drugs.²⁴

When Artaud did become involved in the hallucinogenic

experience of the Tarahumara tribe in Mexico, it was only after a long period of initiation that he was allowed to partake in the peyotl ritual, in itself a strictly controlled and intensely meaningful event. Like the Tarahumara ritual, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty seeks to reach "les trances par des méthodes calculées".²⁵ As Virmaux emphasizes, this view is strictly opposed to the idea of trance as to "hystérie incontrôlée, déchaînement aveugle d'un organisme qui ne se maîtrise plus".²⁶

The Living Theatre's reliance on such hallucinogenic drugs as LSD is aimed at the same expansion of mind which Artaud sought in Mexico. Beck believes:

We use only 10% of the brain and we abuse the body by restricting it. To the degree that drugs enable one to begin to associate differently in the head, remember differently, learn time differently--that is, for the brain to function on different wavelengths, in different areas--they are extremely important for man's development.²⁷

The resultant perceptual distortion is valued by the actors as a readily-available means to the hallucinogenic world which much of Artaud's writing depicts. Henry Howard, a central actor with the company, believes that "one of the key things LSD has done for the theatre is to really tune us in on Artaud".²⁸

However, the Living Theatre's use of drugs is largely a statement of protest against social restrictions. As part of the anarchist movement, the company makes use of LSD with a minimum of preparation, commitment or adherence to ritualized regulations, with highly unpredictable results. Roy Harris recalls:

When we did Frankenstein in Venice, I took LSD. In Bremen, just before the Mysteries, someone came from Amsterdam with a whole bottle of LSD and put like 600

mg. in everybody's mouth. I watched "Lee's Piece" and there was great disunity and finally I did the "Plague" and got lost--not lost but very involved in my own images. I was a doctor. When everyone died, it was the end of the world. I was nauseous and sick and had to pile those bodies up. I played being totally lost. It was bad. Diana was flipping out.²⁹

Discarding Artaud's demands for rigorous initiation, the Living Theatre relies on LSD as a source of instantaneous possession. The inherent weakness of this anarchic attitude is emphasized by R. G. Davis in discussing a similar countercultural theatre in San Francisco:

Artaud here becomes an excuse for intense psychological drama and falls into the American jungle of instant improvisation, instant creation and instant coffee: all a bit watery.³⁰

The LSD experience is also seen by the Living Theatre as a means of immediately involving the audience. Peter Hartman, formerly an actor with the company, explains:

They are attempting to establish this liason between the audience and what they are doing on stage. It's as though they want to just stand still on stage and give the audience LSD and let them watch them. They're not interested in demonstrating what a hallucinogenic vision is like; they want to involve the audience ultimately in that vision.³¹

However, as an extremely nonconventional social and theatrical group, the Living Theatre has been the recipient of very little involvement or assistance from the established society which it seeks to counteract and upon which it relies for support. The Living Theatre has a long history of severely limited financial means: the Revenue Service's liquidation of all the marketable materials of the Fourteenth Street Theatre netted the government little more than two hundred dollars. Plagued by an even greater degree of financial hardship in Europe, the

Living Theatre incorporates the elements of spectacle, central to the Theatre of Cruelty, only in Frankenstein. The other three theatre pieces, devoid of any but the most minimal theatrical effects of costume, lighting or music, rely for much of their effect upon a direct and emotionally-charged confrontation with the audience.

The Living Theatre's ultimate designation of the audience as a key performer in their productions is based on a desire for communion which often results in either total indifference or open conflict. In Mysteries, audience response is characteristically extreme. Although spectators sometimes join in the body pile at the end of the plague scene, most responses are violently antagonistic. The initial ten-minute meditation is often interpreted by the audience as an act of aggression. Typically, the audience member shouts, stamps, leaves the theatre, or, as in the New York production, physically attacks the solitary and immobile actor. The reaction to the closing death scene is often equally violent. In an effort to break down her trance of immobility, Judith Malina recalls: "I have been kicked, stomped, tickled, had my fingers bent back and my hair set on fire."³²

Paradise Now is the company's ultimate statement of belief in the ordering power of the audience; Beck's guiding principle is that "whatever the spectator does, whatever the audience-participant does, is perfect".³³ In the opening rite of the production, the actors shout: "Free theatre. The Theatre is yours. Act. Speak. Do whatever you want. You the public can choose your own role and act it out."³⁴ The resultant four or five hours of confrontatory vituperation and ecstatic eroticism are characteristically so chaotic as to obscure much of the

complex pattern of "ritual" which forms the skeletal structure of the play itself. Stefan Brecht relates:

Of course, in the general noise and confusion and as well as the milling crowd of spectators would allow, I frequently noticed some obviously prepared act, often acrobatic, being performed by members of the company on the stage, in the aisles, or both. But generally they were so allegorical and/or so sloppy that they remained incomprehensible even after one had located them on the handout.³⁵

Positive audience responses in Paradise Now, generally involving removal of clothing, group embracing and dancing, are restricted by the obsessional predictability common to spontaneous improvisation. Negative responses are far more common and, in the American tour, often involved actors and audience in intensely verbal polemical debates on the American system, an attitude totally alien to the ideal theatre of Artaud. As Renfreu Neff concludes:

In Europe it had been necessary and possible for the actors to express themselves in a magic-Artaudian nonverbal idiom; in America, language games and intellectual competition were able to develop so that the spectator became an adversary who had to be overcome, beaten down, and shaken up in order to convey a message of truth and honesty.³⁶

For the Living Theatre, theatrical performance is always seen as a means to the end of strengthening their anarchic community while simultaneously breaking down the taboos of social norms. Accordingly, Beck emphasizes: "At any given moment, seventy-five percent of the Living Theatre are involved with living and twenty-five percent with theatre."³⁷ Their four theatrical pieces can be seen as an inevitable odyssey away from formal theatrical considerations and towards the political and social realities of the countercultural revolution. For Beck and his Living Theatre, "our question is not what play we do next,

but how do we get into the streets".³⁸

The Living Theatre's emphasis on nonregimented spontaneity, along with their desire to project a clear message of political and social revolution, increasingly turns the company away from the belief in the power of theatre to transform man. Beck's last writings on the theatre before returning with his communal family to Europe clearly designates the Living Theatre's priorities:

Blam. Actors and critics used to worry about the art of the theatre. Now we are interested only in life. Theatre has to be life. We have reached that point in our development. After the rediscovery of life, the rediscovery of theatre. . . .

 . . . We change the theatre, yes, we avantgardists, ha ha, but we also change ourselves, deliberately, and not according to the power structure's plan, ha ha, we liberate the street. Where the real theatre is.³⁹

Much of Artaud's orientation during his surrealist period, exemplified in his incendiary essay, "Lettre aux recteurs des universités européennes", in 1925,⁴⁰ is far more immediately correspondent to the political activism of the Living Theatre than Le théâtre et son double, which advocates total change in the individual organism through the intense experience of ritual theatre. Although the company's productions make use of primitive, physical imagery in a conscious attempt to realize the Theatre of Cruelty, the Living Theatre stresses the primacy of anarchic spontaneity and a concomitant advocacy of social and political change through increasingly direct and non-theatrical methods of confrontation. Thus, in both principle and practice, the Living Theatre is basically antithetical to Artaud's post-surrealist theatre of disciplined ecstasy and control on all levels of creation.

CHAPTER V

JOHN CAGE, ALLAN KAPROW AND THE HAPPENERS:

HAPPENINGS IN AMERICA

The term Happening encompasses an area of exploration vast enough and contradictory enough to deny categorization as a genre. However, for the purpose of this study, the Happening will be seen as embodying significant and inherent characteristics which, regardless of the particularities of its creator, remain fairly constant. The parallels of these generic constants to the ideals of Artaud lead Jean-Paul Sartre to conclude: "l'aboutissement contemporain du Théâtre de la Cruauté, c'est ce qu'on appelle le happening."¹

Like the Theatre of Cruelty, the Happening is based on direct and largely non-verbal mise en scène, superseding and subsequently minimizing the effective use of a written script. This particular orientation is a result of the fact that most of the originators of the movement are musicians (John Cage, LaMonte Young), painters (Allan Kaprow), sculptors (Claes Oldenburg), or dancers (Anne Halprin, Yvonne Rainer), rather than being connected with the theatre of dramatic literature.

Allan Kaprow's seminal and inclusive attempts in this area elucidate the initial evolution of Happenings in America. Kaprow's Happenings can be seen as the ultimate extension of the Abstract Expressionist movement in painting. Following the giant canvases

of Jackson Pollack, which stretched the conventional frame of painting to its ultimate limits, the work of Kaprow and other New York painters focused on assemblage: collages of real objects, which embodied mediums other than paint and canvas. These assemblages grew in size to become environments, as for example the plastercast environmental settings of George Segal. As a final extension, people were added as objects in the environment, and the whole was set in motion. The result was a mobile, environmental "painting" utilizing a myriad of sensory means, exemplified in Kaprow's initiating attempt, Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts (1959), from which the movement received its name.

Kaprow and the other creators of Happenings, or "happeners", are primarily interested in a totally physical and plastic medium of expression; their use of the human element retains this same emphasis. Kaprow uses people in his Happenings as objects, wrapping them in burlap or plastic, paper or masks, or, as in his Untitled Happening (1962), in which a naked woman lay on a ladder suspended above the playing area, as still-life forms, recalling the inhuman element of Artaud's ideal theatre.

As an extension of Abstract Expressionism, for which the frenzied act of painting is more relevant than the finished work, the Happening is an action rather than a product, just as Artaud's theatre is "le spectacle agissant non seulement comme un reflet mais comme une force" (Td, 97).

Evolving as a total rebellion against the self-perpetuating aloofness and gloss of museum art, assemblages and environments are consciously composed of fragile and readily destructible materials.

Happenings retain this quality of nonrepeatability, since they often involve the consumption or destruction of materials at the culmination of the event. Salvador Dalí's observation that "réaliser un happening, c'est créer une situation qui ne peut reproduire deux fois de suite"² seems in direct accord with Artaud's belief that "le théâtre enseigne justement l'inutilité de l'action qui une fois faite n'est plus à faire" (Td, 99). Moreover, as Susan Sontag points out, within the Happening itself, events occur in the eternally present tense of the dream state, basic to the Theatre of Cruelty: words fly out as physical objects, and actions may be slowed down, accelerated or repeated to the point of obsessional frenzy.³

Artaud's violent antagonism towards the Western aesthetic tradition is both echoed and amplified by the Happening's total disregard for conventional notions of art. Rather, the Happening's choice of materials and inspiration aims at popular identification based on an absolute continuum of life and art. Kaprow believes:

A United States Marine Corps manual on jungle fighting tactics, a tour of a laboratory where polyethylene kidneys are made, the daily traffic jams of the Long Island Expressway, are more useful than Beethoven, Racine or Michelangelo. . . .⁴

Artaud's emphasis on extending the limits of the traditional stage is fully realized in the Happening. As Kaprow points out, the physical limits of Happenings are both fluid and boundless:

A Happening could be composed for a jetliner going from New York to Luxembourg with stopovers at Gander, Newfoundland and Reykjavik, Iceland. Another Happening would take place up and down the elevators of five tall buildings in midtown Chicago.⁵

Although Claes Oldenburg's Moviehouse (1965) did occur within a theatre,

the action took place in the seats, with the audience placed onstage and in the aisles.

Central to both the Theatre of Cruelty and the Happening is the desire to break the boundary between performer and spectator. The inherent antagonism of the Happening towards audience passivity is often expressed in terms analogous to the shock effects advocated by Artaud. LaMonte Young's Composition 1960#7 (1960), for example, involved the production of an electronic chord of maximum sonic vibration, and the retention of that chord until the audience experienced physical pain.

Kaprow's Spring Celebration (1961) exemplifies the Happening's attack on the theatrical stereotype of removed audience observation.

In order to watch the performance, the audience was tightly confined in a freight car frame, forced to peer out through narrow slats while being bombarded with deafening sound effects. Unexpectedly, the freight car construction collapsed and a man operating a power lawn mower literally drove the audience out of the building.

Anne Halprin, along with most other happeners, believes: "The audience has a power too, and if they can be given an opportunity to use it, we could have an encounter that would really send sparks."⁶ However, the experience of both Halprin and Kaprow indicates that the resultant audience response usually varies from half-hearted clichés to vicious destructiveness.* As Kaprow emphasizes, the ideal Happening is not primarily directed at audience response through provocation:

*Halprin's A Series of Compositions for an Audience was brought to an abrupt end by an outraged woman from the audience who smashed the only light in the paper-filled room: a kerosene lantern.

"...to assemble people unprepared for an event and say that they are 'participating' if apples are thrown at them or they are herded about is to ask very little of the whole notion of participation."⁷

Unlike Spring Celebration, Kaprow's later Happenings rely upon committed and willing participants with a clear idea of their functions in the event. Calling (1965) was based entirely upon communal cooperation and participation, and was without an audience. Participants were instructed by mail to meet at a farm in New Jersey. A small number volunteered to be hung upside down in slings from the branches of trees, with others sitting beneath them. Still others, volunteering to be "marauders", came through the woods, calling the names of those suspended in the trees. The people under the trees called back. Slowly approaching the hanging and sitting people, the marauders savagely cut and ripped away all the clothing of the hanging people, leaving them to call to each other until all were tired. Each participant was aware of the sequence of events and all participated in their unfolding, thus communalizing and, in Kaprow's opinion, ritualizing the inherent violence of the action.

From Halprin's Driftwood City (1965), which involved the group construction of a driftwood village on the seashore, to Jean-Jacques Lebel's Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe (1962), which ended in an orgy, Happenings depend for their existence upon communal involvement.

Kaprow explains:

You invite people to play a game in which the rules are explained and the expressive nature is clear. If they want to play, they will respond. Once they've made that commitment, you can play that game to your heart's content. That's why I gave up the audience.⁸

On the basis of this search for audience participation through assault and involvement, as well as in its emphasis on non-verbal and immediate spectacle, the Happening is seen by Susan Sontag as a realization of Artaud's ideal theatre.⁹

However, to equate the Theatre of Cruelty with the Happening, even on the grounds of these similarities, is to disregard the overwhelming differences which separate the two approaches.

Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is a search for new extensions of the language of mise en scène, primarily through the mediums of light, music, dance, sculpture and costume. By definition, a Happening is opposed to spectacle in Artaud's sense of total theatre. Since a Happening is primarily an anti-aesthetic statement, its predilection is for scrap metal, plastic bags and other refuse rather than for the traditional materials and mediums of the arts, simultaneously reducing the manipulation of these materials to the absolute minimum. Kaprow states:

In making a Happening, it is better to approach composition without borrowed form theories, and instead to let the form emerge from what the materials can do. If a horse is part of a work, whatever a horse does gives the "form" to what he does in the Happening: trotting, standing, pulling a cart, eating, defecating, and so forth.¹⁰

While it is an oversimplification to label Happenings as totally random and chaotic events, the script of a Happening is usually sketchy enough to defy any exact replication. Although Kaprow is more obviously the creator of his events than are most other happeners, his ideal Happening would be, in his opinion, "so general that it could be adapted to the basic types of terrain such as oceans, woods, cities,

farms; and to basic kinds of performers such as teenagers, old people, matrons, insects, animals and the weather".¹¹

Since any attempt at manipulation implies aesthetic judgement and a return to the ordering and focusing of pre-packaged art, there can be no absolute metteur en scène in a Happening. John Cage believes:

The less we structure the theatrical occasion and the more it is like unstructured daily life, the greater will be the stimulus to the structuring faculty of the audience. If we have done nothing, then he will have everything to do.¹²

Michael Kirby sees Happenings as being non-matrixed in efficient, material, formal and final causes: the pattern of a Happening, regardless of the detail of its documentation, is ultimately the result of the random selection of chance variables.¹³ Cage consults I Ching; Kaprow tosses coins and dice to determine variables and haphazardly scans the telephone directory for ideas. Oldenburg's Moviehouse, for example, was totally unpredictable, since its performers followed a pack of directional cards (Eat popcorn. Embrace the person next to you), which were distributed at random during the performance.

This characteristic bias of the Happening corresponds more directly to Artaud's Dadaist-surrealist period and his Alfred Jarry Theatre than to the Theatre of Cruelty. John Cage's noise music and Russolo's bruitisme, Duchamp's junkyard ready-mades and the cast-offs of urban mass production which compose Happenings are two of the more obvious parallels.

The origins of the Happening in America are directly traceable to Kaprow's contact with John Cage at Black Mountain College.¹⁴ Cage's Black Mountain production of Silence (1952), heralded as the initiator

of Happenings, can be directly linked to the events of Dada and Futurism. The presentation, involving the non-matrixed use of film, projections, absurd lectures, and dance, is highly reminiscent of the pranks of the Dadaists and of the Futurist Theatre of Variety of Marinetti.

Marinetti's Manifesto of 1909, with its flippant irreverence for the classics (mix together Greek, French, Italian tragedies, play Beethoven backward, reduce all Shakespeare to a single act, play Hernani with the entire cast up to the neck in burlap sacks¹⁵), and its goal of audience participation through provocation (glue on the seats, redundant seat numbers, obscene remarks on the personalities of the audience members, stink bombs¹⁶) finds its recent equivalent in the Happening. LaMonte Young's aesthetic statement is both characteristic of happeners and reminiscent of Marinetti: "Once I had lots of mustard on a raw turnip. I liked it better than any Beethoven I had ever heard."¹⁷

At the time of the Alfred Jarry Theatre, Artaud was still caught up with surrealism and with the belief in chance as a key to creativity. However, the Theatre of Cruelty, formulated in direct opposition to "le culte du hasard", finds its ideal in the rigorous and carefully calculated Balinese theatre, in which "rien n'y est laissé au hasard ou à l'initiative personnelle" (Td, 69). The resultant man~~ifestation~~ Artaud's new theatre is totally adverse to the antecedent attitudes of surrealism and Dada, and to the later position of the Happening.

Je propose de renoncer à cet empirisme de images que l'inconscient apporte au hasard et que l'on lance aussi au hasard. . .

Je propose d'en revenir par le théâtre à une idée de la connaissance physique des images et des moyens de provoquer des trances, comme la médecine

chinoise connaît sur toute l'étendue de l'anatomie humaine les points qu'on pique et qui régissent jusqu'aux plus subtiles fonctions. (Td, 96-97)

As a theatre of messianic necessity, the Theatre of Cruelty seeks to project a densely powerful visceral image; Artaud's obsessional reference to such events as plague, murder and volcanic eruption is based on the extreme dramatic force of these images:

Une action violente et ramassée est une similitude de lyrisme: elle appelle des images surnaturelles, un sang d'images, et un jet sanglant d'images aussi bien dans la tête du poète que dans celle du spectateur. (Td, 98)

In contrast, since a Happening is non-matrixed and thus without priorities, all phenomena are equally suitable. As a result, many Happenings are less often "a celebration of the world's complexity", as Richard Schechner sees them,¹⁸ and more often exercises in sensory deprivation. Cage's musical composition 4'33" (1952), seen by Richard Kostelanetz as his most crucially influential piece,¹⁹ consisted of a pianist sitting motionless at the keyboard for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. LaMonte Young's Composition 1960#5 (1960) involved the release of a butterfly into the concert hall, with the only sound, besides the random noises of the hall itself, being that produced by the friction of the butterfly's wings on air.

James Rosenberg's notion that "a play like Marat/Sade, stripped of many of its debates and soliloquys, resembles nothing so much as an unusually complex and richly-textured Happening"²⁰ betrays a basic misunderstanding. Any staged and repeatable play which makes use of matrixed or role-playing actors is opposed to the nondirectional nature of a Happening. An actor, required to perform an action such as sweeping

a floor, will add the nuances of situation and emotion to this act; in contrast, the performer in a Happening, being non-matrixed and hence adverse to manipulative role-playing, is concerned only with the task of sweeping.

Although expected to participate, the Happening performer is usually given tasks which, as Kirby points out, generally involve a simple and undemanding act: "he walks with boxes on his feet, rides a bicycle, empties a suspended bucket of milk on his head."²¹ George Brecht's events involve such tasks as turning a light switch on and off, or simply putting one foot in front of the other and repeating this action ad libitum.²² Moreover, as mobilized, functional objects, the human performers who are incorporated into a Happening project underplayed and emotionless attitudes which are in direct contrast to the ecstatic possession and exaggerated gestures of cruelty required of the actors in Artaud's athletic theatre of trance.

The Theatre of Cruelty's goal of communion between performer and spectator is primarily dependent upon the shamanic ability of the actor to induce trance in himself and others, a skill which, as Artaud emphasizes, requires rigorous training and careful calculation:

Ce spectateur ce n'est pas assez que la magie du spectacle l'enchaîne, elle ne l'enchaînera pas si on ne sait pas où le prendre. C'est assez d'une magie hasardeuse, d'une poésie qui n'a pas la science pour l'étayer. (Td, 163)

In discussing the characteristic format of the Happening, Peter Brook points out the ultimate result of a non-directional theatre:

Give a child a paintbox, and if he mixes all the colors together the result is always the same, muddy, brownish grey. . . This free form is all too often imprisoned in

the same obsessional symbols; flour, custard pies, rolls of paper, dressing, undressing, dressing-up, undressing again, changing clothes, making water, throwing water, blowing water, hugging, rolling, writhing--you feel that if a Happening became a way of life then by contrast the most humdrum life would seem a fantastic happening.²³

In this context, an immediate parallel can be drawn between such non-matrixed events of the Living Theatre as Paradise Now and the predictable spontaneity of the Happening.*

Both the Theatre of Cruelty and the Happening envision the fusion of art, life, actor, and audience as cause for exaltation. However, Artaud's insistence upon the theatre as the condenser and synthesizer of these elements is at odds with the Happening's adamant refusal to focus events within the compressed world of the theatre. As a representative happenener, Cage rejects the Artaudian belief in the messianic power of theatre:

Those people coming together to see a play come as it were to a salvation: If there is this lack of distinction between art and life, then one could say: Well, why have the arts when we already have it in life? A suitable answer from my point of view is that we thereby celebrate.²⁴

Artaud's theories evolve out of a passionate desire to change "ce monde qui glisse, qui se suicide sans s'en apercevoir" (Td, 39). A Happening is seen by its proponents as effective in the degree to which it cultivates the detached view of life as an endlessly amusing game, to be played out with a minimum expenditure of emotion. As Cage

*The Living Theatre's characteristically radical minimization of ordering form is more readily understandable when one recalls that the company produced several Happenings while still in the Fourteenth Street Theatre. It was here that Jackson Marlowe's Marrying Maiden (1960) was performed: a Happening analogous in its random use of directional cards to Oldenburg's Moviehouse, which it predated by five years.

states, Happenings are "very useful because you often find yourself, in daily life, in irritating circumstances. They won't be irritating if you see them in terms of theatre".²⁵

Even Jean-Jacques Lebel, whose Happenings are often theatrical enough to include aspects of the violence and excess equated with the Theatre of Cruelty, is motivated by this same vision of life as an endlessly satisfying theatrical event:

Faire un happening. . . c'est sortir un fait de son contexte: durant une promenade, voir des voitures non dans leur fonction utilitaire, mais comme un spectacle qui vous est offert. C'EST PRENDRE CONSCIENCE QUE LE MONDE EST UN SPECTACLE À L'INTERIEUR DUQUEL ON EST SOI-MÊME SPECTACLE.²⁶

Yvonne Rainer's manifesto of the dance Happening can be seen as a total rejection of the central tenets of the Theatre of Cruelty, both as theatre and as cruelty as defined by Artaud:

NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of the spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving no to being moved.²⁷

As a total affirmation of life, the Happening advocates a negation of the theatre far more unequivocal than the anti-theatre of the Absurdists, and diametrically opposed to Artaud's affirmative vision of the theatre of salvation.

The deliberate impartiality and lack of intensity of the Happening is far removed from the total commitment and compressed energy which characterizes Artaud's ideal theatre. Jacques Derrida concludes:

Au regard de la fête ainsi appelée par Artaud et de cette menace du "sans fond", le "happening", fait

sourire: il est à l'expérience de la cruauté ce que le carnaval de Nice peut être aux mystères d'Eleusis.²⁸

The Happening's emphasis on audience involvement and popular immediacy, as well as its rejection of the verbal tradition of theatre, results in a realization of many of the more extreme protests within Le théâtre et son double. The theatre of life is the ultimate goal of both the Theatre of Cruelty and the Happening, but Artaud advocates violent change on all levels through exclusive use of a revitalized medium of theatre, and the Happening rejects all theatre in favour of the game of life. The resultant, non-matrixed experiences are characterized by an emphasis on precisely those random and often trivial aspects of everyday reality which Artaud wishes to exclude from his heightened theatre of sacred ritual.

CHAPTER VI

JERZY GROTOWSKI: THE POLISH LABORATORY THEATRE

Although largely unknown to the theatre world until its first major tour in 1966, the Laboratory Theatre, under the direction of Jerzy Grotowski and founded in the small Polish town of Ophole, has, in a short period of time, gained an international reputation. Since assuming the position of director of this tiny, six-man troupe in 1959, Grotowski has been sought out by both Peter Brook and the Living Theatre as the seer-like proponent of a unique style of acting, comparable in its attitudes and aims to the Theatre of Cruelty. After viewing the work of the Theatre Laboratory in its present home in Wroclaw, Poland, and working closely with Grotowski in an Aldwych actors' seminar in 1967, Brook concludes: "Grotowski's theatre is as close as anyone has got to Artaud's ideal."¹

Grotowski's attitude towards the text of dramatic literature strongly resembles Artaud's advocacy of the absolute freedom of the metteur en scène in dealing with the source of his creation:

In the theatre, if you like, the text has the same function as the myth had for the poet of ancient times. . . . I wish to make neither a literary interpretation, nor a literary treatment, for both are beyond my competence, my field being that of theatrical creation. For me, as a creator of theatre, the important thing is not the words but what we do with these words, what gives life to the inanimate words of the text, what transforms them into "the Word".²

His earliest productions were characterized by this liberally adaptive approach to the dramatic text, and by an equally free

experimentation with the scène-salle boundaries. The Laboratory Theatre's first production, based on Byron's Cain (1960), made use of a ramp running the length of the theatre; by his third production, Mickiewicz' Forefathers' Eve (1961), Grotowski succeeded in a total physical integration of acting and audience areas, with the performers surrounding the small clusters of spectators on all sides and making almost unrestricted use of the entire theatre.

Kordian (1962), the first major result of the company's previous experimentation, was based on a play of the same name, written in 1834 by the Polish romantic, Slowacki. Grotowski took the theme of his entire production from a small asylum scene in the original, with all the actors cast either as raving madmen or repressive doctors. The otherwise bare theatre was lined with rows of hospital bed frames, into which the audience, cast as inmates, was tightly jammed, and upon which the entire action of the play proceeded.

Although the original text was largely retained, the expansive individualism and romantic optimism of Slowacki's version was totally undercut by its radically altered setting. To cite one instance, in the original text the hero Kordian vows, atop Mount Blanc, to give his blood for the salvation of all Europe, in a supremely heroic gesture to the universe;³ Grotowski's Kordian was cast as an anonymous inmate of the asylum, who ecstatically screamed the same vow while being bound in a strait-jacket and bled to alleviate his hysterical suffering. The resultant theatrical experience of Kordian not only predicted Peter Brook's similar approach in Marat/Sade, but, by omitting the Brechtian frame of the latter, forced the audience into a more direct

confrontation with the cruel and necessary obsessions of its performers.

The Laboratory Theatre's next production was based on the Polish play Akropolis by Wyspianski, a majestic work, set in the Royal Cathedral at Cracow. On the night of the Resurrection, the elegant figures on the royal tapestries come to life and act out central episodes from the Bible and classical mythology. The play ends with the resurrection of Christ, the new Apollo, who leads a triumphant procession to liberate Europe.⁴

In accord with Artaud's insistence upon theatre which "immédiate, directe, réponde aux façons de sentir actuelles. . ." (Td, 89), Grotowski largely disregarded the text in an attempt to sift the themes of the original through the contemporary filter. "I didn't do Wyspianski's Akropolis," he later emphasizes, "I met it."⁵ Grotowski's Akropolis retained only the ritualistic images of its textual source; the center of action was transferred to the extermination camps of Auschwitz.

The audience, cast as the dead prisoners, are surrounded on all sides by performers involved in the monotonous task of constructing a symbolic oven. Wyspianski's mythical scenes occur when the anonymous prisoners pause from their labour to break into a reverie of the idyllic past of their different homelands. However, in Grotowski's Akropolis, each of Wyspianski's mythical sequences is broken; each act becomes a paradox. Recalling Artaud's obsessional theme of man's manipulation by dark forces, Grotowski's Akropolis is, as the company's literary advisor Ludwik Flaszen explains, a deliberate attempt at extinguishing all the luminous points in Wyspianski's scenes: "The ultimate role of hope is squashed with blasphemous irony."⁶ Thus, a

tender love scene between Paris and Helen becomes the desperate gropings of two homosexuals, punctuated by the jeers and mockery of their fellow prisoners.

The triumphant procession of Wyspianski's finale undergoes a similar metamorphosis. The prisoners discover a headless corpse, represented by a bloated, featureless dummy, which all proclaim as the Savior. In a delirious religious revel, the prisoners, carrying the headless corpse aloft, dance joyously into the huge metal box which once held the pipefittings now filling the theatre, closing the oven door behind them.

To further the non-naturalistic dream element, the performers used intense muscular control to project the rigid facial masks which so profoundly influenced Brook's Oedipus. The costumes, also extremely stylized, with patches of lurid fabric to suggest open wounds, were so uniform as to negate characterization and create a theatre of inhuman forces as envisioned by Artaud. Flaszen states: "Through their similarity, the costumes rob men of their personalities, erase the distinctive signs which indicate sex, age and social class. The actors become completely identical beings. They are nothing but tortured bodies."⁷

Artaud's use of language as a concrete theatrical hieroglyphic was also borne out by Grotowski's Akropolis, in which, as Flaszen points out, the actor's vocal instrument as well as his physical instrument was extended beyond conventional realistic patterns:

Inarticulate groans, animal roars, tender folksongs, liturgical chants, dialects, declamation of poetry: everything is there. The sounds are interwoven in a

complex score. . . mixed in this new Tower of Babel, in the clash of foreign people and foreign languages meeting just before their extinction. The mixture of incompatible elements, combined with the warping of language, brings out elementary reflexes. Remnants of sophistication are juxtaposed to animal behavior. . . ⁸

Grotowski's next production, Dr. Faustus (1963), was based on a montage rearrangement of Marlowe's text, with new scenes created and some of the original omitted. The theatre was set as the dining hall of a medieval monastery, with the audience, seated at two long banquet tables, cast as the invited guests of Faustus.

The piece begins with the second scene in the final act of Marlowe's play, the argument of Faustus with the scholars. Faustus then recalls for his guests his initiation into the powers of darkness, through a series of flashbacks performed on, under and between the two long tables. In a manner reminiscent of Artaud's expressive use of objectified imagery in La conquête du Mexique, much of the imagery in Grotowski's Dr. Faustus is defined in entirely physical terms: the androgynous Mephistopheles is played by a man and a woman, both alternatively and simultaneously.

When the midnight bell sounds, the performers cast as the spectres of Satan rise up from their positions, interspersed among the guests at the table, to take Faustus to his final damnation. At this point, Faustus' state of ecstasy, existent throughout, expands to become his own martyrdom. Flaszen's description of Faustus' final moments reveals the affiliation between Artaud's search for a non-verbal poetry of excessive and primitive gesture, and Grotowski's intensely physical approach to the themes in Marlowe's text:

He is in rapture, his body is shaken by spasms. The ecstatic failure of his voice becomes at the moment of his Passion a series of inarticulate cries--the piercing pitiable shrieks of an animal caught in a trap. His body shudders, and then all is silence. . . . Faustus is no longer a man, but a panting animal, an unclaimed once-human wreck moaning without dignity.⁹

By constantly emphasizing the physical action of a play whose own essential conflicts, like those of Artaud's Elizabethan examples, evolve out of a supreme gesture of absolute defiance leading to the "temps du mal" and ultimate annihilation, Grotowski's production of Dr. Faustus creates from these existent themes a powerful visceral assault, seen by Michael Kustow as "la réalisation la plus complète et la plus bouleversante des rêves d'Artaud".¹⁰

The Laboratory Theatre's definitive production, The Constant Prince (1965), retained little more than the title of Slowacki's adaptation of Calderon de Barca's El principe constante. With Grotowski's emphasis being on vocalization as a concrete force adjacent to physical action, the dialogue of Slowacki's text was either replaced by extremely stylized moans, chants and cries, or else recited in a manner so rapid and distorted as to be virtually unintelligible. Moreover, Grotowski's one-hour production retained little of the attitudes of optimism and the belief in Christian inspiration basic to both antecedent versions. After a close study of all three variations, Raymonde Temkine concludes: "il n'y a pas intérêt à lire le Prince constant de Calderon avant d'assister à la représentation du Théâtre-Laboratoire. Cela n'aide pas à y réagir mieux, déroute au contraire, car l'univers mental est très différent."¹¹

Grotowski's Constant Prince is an intense ritual exploration

of the sadomasochistic relationship of tortured victim to tormentor, a recurrent theme in Artaud's dramatic examples of the Theatre of Cruelty. To objectify this orientation, the playing area represented a combination of bullfight arena and operating theatre, centered by a stark, sacrificial platform and surrounded by a wooden wall, over which the audience observed the events as if witnesses at a forbidden act.

The production, performed at breakneck speed throughout, begins with the interrogation of the first prisoner by the four persecutors. He quickly collaborates and, after being symbolically castrated on the platform, is dressed in the tormentors' characteristic black robes and high boots to become one with his persecutors. The second prisoner, the Prince (always played by Ryszard Cieslak, Grotowski's central actor) is then brought into the arena. In their attempt to break down his attitude of passivity and kindness, the tormentors embrace, cajole, torture, murder and ultimately worship the Prince, who remains "constant" to his nature until his death.

As Grotowski explains, the entire production serves to further Cieslak's attempt at realization of "a psychological peak like ecstasy, but at the same time to reach and hold this consciously, in his own way, with all the consequences of self-control, an ecstasy of acting".¹² The final death agonies of the Prince build to an intense trancelike state only envisioned by the ecstatic theatre of Artaud. The ritual ends suddenly and unexpectedly with Cieslak's final collapse: the glaring spotlight blackens for an instant and, when light is restored, the Prince is revealed, covered only with a red cloth, lying motionless and alone on the sacrificial platform.

Like the shamanic actors of the Theatre of Cruelty, who must be "comme des suppliciés que l'on brûle et qui font des signes sur leur bûchers" (Td, 18), Grotowski's ideal "holy actor" must burn away all social masks to expose the innermost core of his personality, sacrificing himself with an honesty so painfully pure as to overcome the characteristic stance of the "courtesan actor" of Western theatre, who exhibits only a mask of false revelation.¹³ As the program notes to the Constant Prince clarify, Grotowski's actors, like those of the Living Theatre, seek the "total act" of theatre by means of an intensely committed performance:

Detached acting assumes the supremacy of intellectual reasoning, the supremacy of the discursive layers of the actor's personality over the rest. Grotowski, on the other hand, probes the layers of spontaneity which lie deeply concealed, regarding the intellect as a tool of false rationalization and an excuse for half-hearted participation in the game.¹⁴

However, to achieve this heightened state of ecstasy, Grotowski, as absolute controlling director, demands a degree of precision and obedience from his actors which is entirely adverse to the improvisational and spontaneous drug experience of the Living Theatre. Grotowski believes:

Creativity in the theatre does not exist if there is no score, no line of fixed elements. Without these there is only amateurism. . . One cannot achieve spontaneity in art without a structuring of detail. Without this, one searches but never finds because too much freedom is a lack of freedom.¹⁵

Grotowski is convinced that the achievement of a state of intense and ecstatic trance is only possible as the result of a rigor so extreme as to transcend physical fatigue and thus extend both the physical and the psychological limits of the actor. This attitude is immediately

correspondent⁴ to Artaud's rejection of improvisational spontaneity and his subsequent definition of the theatre as cruelty: "La cruauté est avant tout lucide, c'est une sorte de direction rigide, la soumission à la nécessité" (Td. 121).

Like Artaud's visionary theatre, Grotowski's theatrical experimentation is defined by a constant search for valid means of uniting rigor and spontaneity, emotional commitment⁵ and technical prowess in the actor:

...the decisive principle remains the following: the more we become absorbed in what is hidden inside us, in the excess, in the exposure, in the self-penetration, the more rigid must be the external discipline; that is to say the form, the artificiality, the ideogram, the sign. Here lies the whole principle of expressiveness.¹⁶

For the actors of the Laboratory Theatre, this external discipline involves a total commitment to work. Long hours of rehearsal each day are supervised by Grotowski in an atmosphere of strict silence and total absorption unknown to most Western theatres, but central to the Eastern tradition of intense training admired by the author of "Sur le théâtre balinais", and equally central to Artaud's definition of theatre:

... "cruauté", quand j'ai prononcé ce mot, a tout de suite voulu dire "sang" pour tout le monde. Mais théâtre de la cruauté veut dire théâtre difficile et cruel d'abord pour moi-même. (Td, 95)

Much rehearsal time is devoted to Grotowski's unique exercices plastiques. Based on Yoga, Meyerhold's bio-mechanics and Kathkali actor training, the exercices plastiques are, to begin with, difficult acrobatic exercises. However, Grotowski stresses that his method is a "via⁶ negativa--not a collection of skills, but an eradication of blocks."¹⁷

Thus, his actors are continually instructed to relate these exercises to inner psychological exploration, aiming at a degree of inner ecstasy communicated through the highly-trained physical instrument, yet intense enough to transcend the mechanical aspects of gymnastics.

The rigorous training of the "holy actor" lies at the core of Grotowski's search for what he envisions as a theatre of secular holiness:

The disappearance of the sacred and of its ritual function in the theatre is the result of the obvious and inevitable decline of religion. What we are talking about is the possibility of creating a secular sacrum in the theatre.¹⁸

The Laboratory Theatre is, like the Theatre of Cruelty, an attempt to elevate European theatre from its debased role of diversionary entertainment and restore "l'équivalent naturel et magique des dogmes auxquels nous ne croyons plus" (Td, 39).

In the light of the multileveled correspondence between the practical realizations of Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre and the visionary theatre of Artaud, it is ironic to note that, for the period of his creative work analysed in this study, Grotowski remained largely unaware of Le théâtre et son double. Apart from a short reading of Artaud's abstract, metaphysical essay, "Le théâtre alchimique" (Td, 58-64) for a seminar in 1960, Grotowski did not read Le théâtre et son double until late in 1964.¹⁹ Subsequent to this reading, and in reply to the constant critical equations between the Laboratory Theatre and the Theatre of Cruelty, Grotowski devoted an essay, "He Wasn't Entirely Himself" (1967), to a clarification of the impact of Artaud's writings upon him.

While admiring the visionary ideas of Artaud concerning the necessary combination of physical rigor and emotional commitment in the ideal "athlète du coeur", Grotowski rejects Artaud's methodology of breathing exercises (Td, 157-63) as misreadings of Oriental texts, and sees his ideas of mise en scène, although innovative in the context of French theatrical theories, as being of little practical value when compared to the methodologies of Meyerhold and Reinhardt. Grotowski concludes: "Artaud left no concrete technique behind him, indicated no method. He left visions, metaphors. . .explains the unknown by the unknown, the magic by the magic."²⁰

Rather than being the result of any direct confrontation with the writings of Artaud, the striking confluence of their theatrical orientations can be more readily understood as the result of Grotowski's unique theatrical training and the equally unique influence of his native milieu.

The dramatic ideals of Grotowski which most directly recall the tenets of the Theatre of Cruelty stem from the theories of Stanislaw Witkiewicz (1895-1939), a Polish visionary of the theatre, until recently largely unknown outside of Poland, whose prophetic theories, as well as the record of his tormented life, are strikingly similar, although in no way apprehended, by the theatrical visions and defeats of Artaud. Witkiewicz proposed a theatre of Pure Form which is directly analogous to Artaud's physical theatre of mise en scène. Like Artaud, he damned the self-analytical and naturalistic tendencies of "civilized" theatre in favour of an experiential theatre of mysticism and passionate release, advocating methods of visceral attack similar to those of the

Theatre of Cruelty. Both Witkiewicz and Artaud found their model in Eastern theatre: the Polish theorist's travels throughout Ceylon, Malaya and Australia resulted in the incorporation of non-European philosophy and methodology into much of his dramaturgy.²¹ As Raymonde Temkine records, Grotowski owes much of his theory of the theatre as secular sacrum to the aesthetics of Witkiewicz, rather than to the visions of Artaud: "C'est plutôt envers son compatriote que Grotowski aurait une dette. Il m'a déclaré lui devoir une idée qu'il considère comme essentielle: le théâtre peut être une religion sans la religion."²²

Both the Laboratory Theatre and the Theatre of Cruelty are deliberate reactions to their contemporary milieu, but Grotowski's theatre was founded in a period of exuberant theatrical activity in Poland: an avant-garde movement with defining principles totally adverse to the dominant dramatic forms existing in pre-war France. Jan Klossowicz explains:

Grotowski's programme did not come into being "in the provinces", for in Poland, as in very few other countries, it is impossible to speak of a theatrical metropolis and provinces. What is more, as it can be seen, it was not born out of the opposition to an outmoded "bourgeois" theatre, staging boulevard plays and pièces bien faites, but to the theatre engaged at that time most earnestly in the renovation of the achievements of the Great Reform, of the avant-garde and Soviet theatre of the 'thirties, where the world premières of Brecht, Dürrenmatt, Różewicz and Mrozek were presented, and where Ionesco was being staged more frequently than in France.²³

The great flourishing of the avant-garde in Poland after 1955 was based on a stance of anti-naturalism which rejected the psychological approach of Stanislavski. As a graduate of the Moscow State Institute of Theatrical Art, highly trained in the techniques of Stanislavski's Art Theatre, Grotowski founded his laboratory as a reaction against the

national trend towards mannerism and cabaret absurdism.

Jan Kobrowicz, writing with an awareness of Polish theatrical tradition and innovation, recognizes the total commitment of Grotowski's actors as an intensely deepened return to Stanislavski:

It is no longer psychological acting, but psychophysical acting, involving psychological depth. The floor of the Laboratory Theatre, soaked with sweat and tears, constitutes a challenge for an intellectual actor, a reaction against the ingenuine contemporary acting.²⁴

However, Grotowski is also well trained in the stylized artistry of Chinese opera and the Kathkali theatre, having studied extensively in the formal theatres of the East during his summer breaks from the Moscow Institute. The acting style of his resultant theatre incorporates enough of the acrobatic formalism of the Orient to be interpreted by such Western critics as Michael Smith as a style totally opposed to the interiorized ruminations of the Method School.²⁵

Thus, it is the Laboratory Theatre's unique blend of East European and Asiatic acting techniques which results in a style analogous to, although basically unaware of the "athlétisme affectif" envisioned in Le théâtre et son double.

Although less often the subject of critical analysis, the unrelated developments of Artaud and Grotowski also result in differences between the ensuing approaches of equal relevance to an understanding of their unique theatrical ideals.

Although he accepts the idea of theatre based on myth, Grotowski denies the power of theatre to create new myths, seeing Artaud's ideal of audience identification as impossible: "Theatre cannot possibly identify itself with myth, because there is no single faith. Only a

Confrontation is possible."²⁶

Moreover, these myths upon which the Laboratory Theatre's productions focus are largely drawn from the particularly European themes and rituals of Catholicism. Such iconic imagery as the pietà, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and other New Testament scenes occur in all of Grotowski's major productions with obsessional frequency. His most recent production to date, Apocalypsis cum Figuris (1968) is a collage based entirely upon the rituals of Christian pilgrimage and the imagery of the Catholic mass: a tradition entirely rejected by Artaud in favour of the pagan theatre of Seneca and the primitive cult religions of Mexico.

The Laboratory Theatre's reaction against the contemporary avant-garde in Poland is also defined by a rejection of what Kłossowicz calls "the new baroque" in Polish theatre: spectacles which stress the total power of the director and the physical bombardment of mise en scène to an extent only fantasized by Artaud.²⁷ Grotowski criticizes the resultant extravaganzas of total theatre as inferior imitations of film and television which neglect the one element unique to theatre and impossible for film to achieve: the physical closeness of the living actor. As a deliberate reaction to the "artistic kleptomania" of total theatre, and in order to reinstate the primacy of the actor in theatre, Grotowski follows a process of elimination to arrive at a "poor theatre", which

...challenges the notion of theatre as a synthesis of disparate creative disciplines--literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting, acting (under the direction of a metteur en scène). This "synthetic theatre" is the contemporary theatre, which we readily call the "Rich Theatre"--rich in flaws.²⁸

By focusing his attention on the actor's development "in a poor manner, using only his body and his craft",²⁹ Grotowski arrives by choice at the same minimal theatre to which the Living Theatre turns from financial necessity, and which is diametrically opposed to Artaud's goal of full exploitation of mise en scène.

Though in agreement with Grotowski's rejection of film as a distancing medium, Artaud wished to incorporate the wealth of technical means available to film studios in order to make his ideal theatrical productions unsurpassable exemplifications of rich, total theatre:

Nous voulons disposer, pour un spectacle de théâtre, des mêmes moyens matériels qui, en éclairage, en figuration, en richesses de toutes sortes, sont journellement gaspillés pour des bandes, sur lesquelles tout ce qu'il y a d'actif, de magique dans un pareil déploiement, est à jamais perdu. (Td, 151)

Artaud's insistence on the spectacular use of lighting, music and costume, like his choice of immediately recognizable themes of physical cruelty and violence, follows from his conviction that the Theatre of Cruelty must reach a popular audience on the most basic levels of awareness:

Il ne peut que s'adresser aux foules. Il n'a de raison d'être que s'il agit sur les masses, des masses importantes. Ce n'est pas un théâtre d'esthètes. Les moyens d'action physique et technique dont il disposerait, s'adressant avant tout aux nerfs, et non à l'entendement-- sont inéluctables. Ils ne peuvent pas rater leur coup. Car il faut compter sur la beauté visuelle et plastique et sur l'ampleur du spectacle que ce théâtre présenterait. ³⁰

In contrast, any of the seductive effects of spectacle are rejected by Grotowski as pandering and flirtation with the audience, since he believes that a cloistered theatre of intense commitment demands an equally aware and committed audience: "We are not concerned

with just any audience, but a special one."³¹ The uncompromising attitude of the Laboratory Theatre is based on the belief that "theatre for the masses is now taken care of by television and the movies".³² Thus, the Laboratory Theatre is, by choice, elitist.

Moreover, Grotowski instructs his actors not to work for themselves, which is narcissism, nor for the audience, which is exhibitionistic "public tropism", but rather for imaginary partners known only to themselves: "The actor must give himself and not play for himself or for the spectator. His search must be directed from within himself to the outside; but not for the outside."³³

In a manner similar to that employed by the Living Theatre, Grotowski's first major production, Kordian, experimented with direct confrontation: the spectators were cast in the comparatively active roles of patients, and were, at times, incorporated into the action. However, Grotowski later rejects this approach on the basis of the low level of interaction between actors and audience:

One can stimulate external phenomena and make the audience sing with the actors--feeling a certain rhythm as when they are listening to jazz--but it's not a deep, authentic participation. It's only the participation of the common mask.³⁴

In subsequent productions, Grotowski cast the spectators in progressively more alienated roles: the invited "guests" of Dr. Faustus, the invisible "dead prisoners" of Akropolis and, ultimately, the uninvited "voyeurs" at the secret rituals of The Constant Prince.

The quest of the Laboratory Theatre for an ever-increasing level of concentration by its actors precludes any involvement with the unpredictable and undisciplined variable of the audience. Grotowski

confides to Peter Brook: "My search is based on the director and the actor. You base yours on the director, actor and audience. I accept that this is possible, but for me it is too indirect."³⁵

By focusing their attention on the opposite end of the continuum of director, actor and audience, Grotowski's "holy actors" attain levels of pure ecstasy and rigorous control far beyond that achieved by the audience-oriented experiences of the Happening and the Living Theatre. However, Grotowski's uncompromising goal of purity results in a "poor theatre" which is both elitist and esoteric. By the very nature of its intense level of commitment, the Laboratory Theatre increases the traditional theatrical boundary between the art of the actor and the life of the spectator. It is precisely this boundary which Artaud passionately disavows, in favour of an intensely immediate theatre whose raison d'être is the active involvement of each individual spectator, and whose double is essentially life itself.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the theatrical productions considered in this study attain a remarkably successful realization of certain aspects of Artaud's ideal theatre. However, this realization is achieved only by neglecting or negating other, equally intrinsic aspects of this same ideal.

Many of the specifically theatrical visions of the Theatre of Cruelty are incorporated by Peter Brook into his productions so effectively as to result in a radical shift in emphasis within the encompassing framework of popular legitimate theatre. Working with the relatively expansive resources of a subsidized company, he manages to achieve the spectacular effects envisioned by Artaud's theatre of overpowering mise en scène, but Brook's greater resources involve a greater necessity for compromise, as well as a professional eclecticism and pursuit of trends which inevitably dilutes commitment and total effect.

On the other hand, the Living Theatre's realization of Artaud's ideal of incorporated theatre and lifestyle results in a microcosmic community which devotes most of its time to survival in a hostile environment. Artaud's own experience exemplifies the chimeric aspects of a theatre which depends for financial and moral support upon a society which it rejects and vows to destroy. His faith in the ability of theatre to promote change is tested by the Living Theatre, but their

constant search for relevance leads to political activism, spontaneous confrontation and, ultimately, a denial of the theatrical concerns upon which the rigorously heightened Theatre of Cruelty is based.

The Happening, founded in a belief in total and immediate involvement, is a rejection of conventional forms as unequivocal as the most vituperative of Artaud's censures. However, as the product of an age significantly lacking in traditional unifying beliefs and in any but the most basic and mundane rituals, the Happening neglects rigor and self-denial, along with deep commitment on the intense level demanded by Artaud's ideal of ritual theatre. The hunger and thirst for salvation which drove Artaud to the theatre is difficult to insist upon from either a director or actor, and largely unknown to a contemporary audience, for whom theatre, whether based on attack or celebration, remains an expendable appendage to the business and pleasure of life.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the high levels of athletic training and all-pervading ecstasy achieved by the holy actors of Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre ultimately lead to a reaffirmation of the traditional role of the spectator: a mute and invisible voyeur at an esoteric ritual which denies his existence. The intense commitment of Grotowski and his actors is the key to their own purification: the popular audience must seek elsewhere.

The fact that two such antithetical modes of expression as the Happening and Grotowski's theatre are seen as exemplifications of Artaud's ideal can be taken as an indication of the impossible and conflicting nature of Le théâtre et son double. Indeed, the theory of the Theatre of Cruelty is mainly definable in terms of its own

contradictions: a theatre of contemporary relevance and immediacy, involving the total exploitation of all the modern mediums of mise en scène in order to achieve the most essential functions of primitive theatre; a theatre stressing absolute freedom in revolt as the exemplification of absolute control, rejecting form in favour of a rigid submission to form, and denying the notion of tradition in favour of an ideal based on an even more rigid and static tradition; an apolitical theatre of mystery and catharsis seeking total social upheaval; a popular and immediate theatre of life demanding total commitment to sacred and heightened rituals; a participatory theatre of active identification requiring an audience willing to open itself totally to a sensual attack upon the subconscious.

Like Grotowski, Jacques Derrida follows a via negativa, attempting to define Artaud's ideal theatre by that which it is not: all non-sacred theatre, all abstract theatre which excludes some aspect of mise en scène, all theatre of words, whether didactic or absurdist, all distancing theatre which does not involve the absolute participation of audience, actor and director, all theatre unrelated to social and popular concerns, and all ideological theatre which seeks to communicate and interpret a "message" is seen as equally foreign to the Theatre of Cruelty. One can readily conclude from this formidable list of exceptions, and from the equally formidable list of contradictions within Le théâtre et son double, that Artaud is only too correct when he states: ". . . il ne peut y avoir théâtre qu'à partir du moment où commence réellement l'impossible. . ." (Td, 34)

Two years before his death, Artaud lamented the hypocrisy of

popular appreciation of the paintings of Van Gogh, a man driven to suicide by the very society which later pays him homage. Yet, ironically, only two decades later the tortured writings of the poète maudit Antonin Artaud, like the painfully necessary paintings of his persona, have become public property: a mass-produced collection of theatrical catch-phrases. Grotowski's critical denial of Le théâtre et son double is largely an overreaction to the contemporary tendency to relate the expansive ideals of the Theatre of Cruelty to as many "avant-garde" approaches to theatre as possible, from the venomous domestic parlor games of Edward Albee to the militant transvestite camping of the Theatre of the Ridiculous. "We are entering the age of Artaud", Grotowski states. "The Theatre of Cruelty has been canonized, i.e. --made trivial, swapped for trinkets, tortured in various ways. . ."²

Popular appeal is characteristically accompanied by a dilution of impact and by the primacy of a concordance of cliché misinterpretations. Yet, despite their popularization, the essays of Le théâtre et son double retain the same intense visceral energy with which Artaud himself was confronted at the 1946 Van Gogh exhibition at l'Orangerie:

Maintenant la haine a été oubliée comme les expurgations nocturnes qui s'en suivirent et les mêmes qui à tant de reprises montrèrent à nu et à la face de tous leurs âmes de bas pourceaux, défilent maintenant devant Van Gogh à qui, de son vivant, eux ou leurs pères et mères ont si bien tordu le cou.

Mais n'est-il pas, l'un des soirs dont je parle, tombé boulevard de la Madeleine, à l'angle de la rue des Mathurins, une énorme pierre blanche comme sortie d'une éruption volcanique récente du volcan Popocatepetl.³

Artaud never believed his own theory to be totally coherent.

The obvious inconsistencies within Le théâtre et son double were recognized as such by their author:

Pour tout dire, la dialectique de ce Manifeste est faible. Je saute sans transition d'une idée à l'autre. Aucune nécessité intérieure ne justifie la disposition adoptée. (Td, 137)

Yet, rather than being a testament to the failure of Artaud as a theoretician of the theatre, the widespread examples in this study of the misinterpretation and contradiction of Artaud's own fantastic and seemingly impossible ideals can also be seen as a testimony to the far-reaching impact and visionary nature of Le théâtre et son double. As Virmaux concludes, the dynamic force of Artaud is also measured in the deviations and heresies which he engenders:

Artaud faussé, déformé, méconnu, trahi par des interprétations hâtives ou simplistes, révèle la vraie mesure d'Artaud. Légitimes ou non, ses descendants nous aident à dessiner son vrai visage et à lui donner sa dimension la plus juste.⁴

Ultimately, it is the elusive and incendiary power of Artaud's vision, rather than the coherence of its technical explications, which serves as the catalytic force igniting so many of the radical theatrical attempts analysed in this study. If any conclusion can be reached, it may be that Le théâtre et son double is Artaud's own best example of the limits of verbal language as a means of communicating a state of physical ecstasy. As Grotowski concludes:

Artaud was a great theatre-poet, which means a poet of the possibilities of theatre and not of dramatic literature. Like the mythical prophet Isaiah, he predicts for the theatre something definitive, a new meaning, a new possible incarnation. "Then Emmanuel was born." Like Isaiah, Artaud knew of Emmanuel's coming and what it promised. He saw the image of it through a glass, darkly.⁵

The work of the directors examined in this study can be understood as an attempt to clarify that vision in the only manner acceptable to Artaud: through the direct, physical medium of theatre.

Their priorities are divergent, but all are united in their violent denial of the established theatre of discursive and analytic verbalization, and in their search for an immediate, experiential theatre of action.

The resultant productions examined in this study, although revolutionary and innovative in their own right, are both envisioned and exemplified in the hallucinogenic writings of Antonin Artaud, a visionary madman who, in a time of fragmentation, alienation and irony, sought communion and salvation through total commitment to a Theatre of Cruelty.

FOOTNOTES

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³Antonin Artaud, Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société (Paris: K éditeur, 1947), p. 71.

⁴Virmaux, p. 199.

⁵Grotowski, "He Wasn't Entirely Himself", p. 125.

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