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## Artaud's Nietzsche: Examining Manifestations of the Dionysian in *The Theatre and Its Double*

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Cheyanne Noel Leonardo entitled "Artaud's Nietzsche: Examining Manifestations of the Dionysian in *The Theatre and Its Double*." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in French.

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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**Artaud's Nietzsche:**  
**Examining Manifestations of the Dionysian in *The Theatre and Its Double***

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Cheyenne Noel Leonardo

August 2018

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## Abstract

This project examines the influence of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche on French theatre visionary Antonin Artaud with a specific focus on the Dionysian as established in Nietzsche's inaugural work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), and further developed throughout Nietzsche's career. With an insistence upon an appropriate treatment of, first, the types of texts being examined as well as, of course, their larger goals and implications, we can see where overlaps exist between them and, just as importantly, where they don't. The overlaps primarily occur (and don't occur) in the context of the Dionysian, a complex and multifaceted philosophical concept that is theatricalized in both ancient Greek theatre, and, to a large extent, in Artaud's theatre of cruelty. A comprehensive and holistic understanding of the Dionysian – defined throughout Nietzsche's work by a preservation of ancient pessimistic wisdom, a facilitation of depersonalization in artistic production, and a doctrine of passionate life-affirmation – will subsequently allow a more developed and accurate understanding of Artaud's goals in *The Theatre and its Double* (1938). This inquiry will reveal that Artaud applies selected elements of the Dionysian to his theory while neglecting or even purposefully rejecting others. Artaud utilizes Nietzsche's conceptualization of the Dionysian to the extent that it requires relinquishing individual subjectivity in theatrical practice, but he does not accept the dimension of life-affirmation, characterized by a constructive/creative response to pessimism, that the Dionysian represents.

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## Introduction

This inquiry seeks to answer the following question: Who was “Artaud’s Nietzsche” and how did the philosophy of the latter help shape the theatrical system of the former? In order to answer this question, I will deal largely with Antonin Artaud’s *The Theatre and Its Double* (*Le Théâtre et son double*), published in 1938 and with Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*), originally published in 1872. To begin, one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed concerning the relationship of Artaud’s work to Nietzsche’s is the fact that, although they possessed parallel motivations, their target audiences and chief goals differed in significant ways. It is much too easy, when comparing *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Theatre and Its Double*, to be negligent with regard to interpreting their larger implications and intended impact. Both Nietzsche and Artaud used theatre as a vehicle to “translate” life, and they certainly had overlapping interests in redefining what they perceived as a failing modern culture. However, in my opinion, *The Birth of Tragedy* has been clumsily classified as “theatre theory”<sup>1</sup> by some and (in referring to some idea of “dramaturgical differences” between Nietzsche and Artaud) implicitly treated as such by others.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Nietzsche’s inaugural work has been compared to Artaud’s manifestos on the theatre of cruelty in a way that suggests Nietzsche’s aim was also to reform theatrical practice. I disagree with this notion. Nietzsche was not interested in reviving ancient Greek tragedy; rather, he used it to develop a philosophical argument to explain how human beings can revitalize modern culture and go back to living fulfilling lives. He was, first, providing a historical account (albeit with a large degree of speculation) of how tragic Greek theatre worked and what purpose it served for the spectator, and, second, using these conclusions to establish key philosophical concepts that he would dedicate his career to

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, “Nietzsche, Artaud, and Tragic Politics.”

<sup>2</sup> Dumoulié, *Nietzsche et Artaud: Pour une éthique de la cruauté*.

exploring. Artaud, on the other hand, was hell-bent on reforming modern theatrical practice, actively rewriting the language of the stage, and instrumentalizing the theatre as a way to force human beings to confront the reality and truth of their lives. He theorized how modern theatre should be restructured in order to accomplish what he saw as the theatre's divine purpose. Both Nietzsche and Artaud found theatre not only relevant but central to human life, yet their objectives differed on a fundamental level: Artaud's goals were ultimately artistic in nature, Nietzsche's philosophical. The two certainly flirted with the other discipline in their pursuit of achieving these goals. After all, Nietzsche devoted much time to analyzing the role of art and ruminating on how the artist should go about creating her work, and Artaud employed philosophical terms and concepts in forging the theatre of cruelty. Yet their aspirations for their work cannot and should not be categorized as one in the same.

Once we recognize this initial divergence between *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Theatre and Its Double*, we can analyze the relationship between these two texts in a way that more accurately identifies the import of the connections between them. Instead of employing a leveling field that compares Artaudian theatre with some conception of "Nietzschean theatre," I will go about my project working under the assumption that there is, in fact, no Nietzschean theatre, as Nietzsche was not a dramatic theorist and did not intend to create a new theatrical system that would actually influence dramatic production. His allegiance to Richard Wagner at the time he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* did, of course, inspire him to provide some commentary and theorize about performance arts, particularly music, but this text cannot be compared to *The Theatre and Its Double* as if it serves the same purpose. Instead, I will endeavor to examine how these texts are speaking to each other while insisting upon a recognition of the authors' respective audiences, communities, and purposes for writing. I also want to address the tendency

to see Nietzsche and Artaud as bookends, the philosopher and the theatre-maker that, although with their different methods of analysis, espoused identical worldviews and dedicated themselves to actualizing the same changes in society. It is certainly abundantly clear that Nietzsche's writings about theatre and about life more generally influenced Artaud's theatre of cruelty; yet to conclude that they both subscribed to the same perspective is to ignore both the nuance in their writing and the historical and socio-cultural contexts in which they found themselves. Nietzsche is often misjudged to be a pessimist, even a nihilist, who insisted upon the unfortunate state of humanity, condemned to godlessness and lack of direction. Of course, there are pessimistic moments throughout Nietzsche's writings, but stopping here, with a focus only on the negative sides of human existence, does a major disservice to Nietzsche, as the rest of his philosophy is, in fact, brimming with unbridled optimism (or, at least, with anti-pessimism). The pessimism found in his earlier works has clear roots in his admiration for Schopenhauer, the quintessential philosopher of pessimism. However, even in maintaining an appreciation for Schopenhauer throughout his career, Nietzsche quickly felt the need to break away from this dismal view of the world and human existence in favor of a philosophy that could *affirm* life. In my reading of Nietzsche, this passionate affirmation of the world and of human life comprises the core of his philosophy. Why resurrect Dionysos in the form of Zarathustra, the gentle monster whose motivation to help humans overcome drove him down and back down the mountain, if the death of God was the end of hope? And even if one only or primarily deals with *The Birth of Tragedy* (such as in the context of this paper), Nietzsche's life-affirmation is already clear in this inaugural work. In other words, we don't need a comprehensive, complete knowledge of every single aphorism over the course of Nietzsche's career to understand that his goal was really to embrace human life. Artaud, on the other hand, saw pessimism out to its bitter end. His

unflinching acceptance of the inherent cruelty of life and the plague that is human existence ensured that he would never move beyond an ancient, pessimistic wisdom as Nietzsche was able to do. Even though Artaud's writings and the theatrical system he developed have been applied toward furthering the goals of political (particularly leftist) movements that aimed to improve problems in society, Artaud himself never alluded to the possibility of escaping or relieving the horror of life. To be alive in this world as a human being is necessarily to be subjected to cruelty, violence and atrocity: the goal of the theatre should not be to help us overcome this basic fact of existence but to force us to confront it.

The point is, Artaud was clearly influenced by Nietzsche – as were most of Artaud's contemporaries in the interwar period in Europe<sup>3</sup> – and there are distinct examples of Artaud borrowing Nietzschean concepts from *The Birth of Tragedy* and beyond. Both figures were motivated by a desire to change European culture and introduce an extreme revaluation in society. Yet, they were writing for different audiences, had different goals for their works and legacies, and maintained disparate worldviews. To arrive at this conclusion, my methodology in this paper will be, first, to thoroughly examine Artaud's theatrical system (including its philosophical underpinnings and its actual application to the stage) with a concentrated focus on what will be most relevant in identifying instances of Nietzschean influence. I will then look at Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly as it begins its journey in *The Birth of Tragedy* in a way that will help make better sense of Artaud's theatre of cruelty. I will use my analysis of the connections between their writings to inform my conclusions about the most significant areas of overlap and why it is important not to conflate their objectives and worldviews. As much as possible, I will focus my argument on what is found explicitly in the key primary texts of these two figures and not in their sensationalized biographies. Essentially my aim is this: 1) to explain

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<sup>3</sup> Jannarone, *Artaud and His Doubles*, 62.

why Artaud's theatrical vision cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of Nietzsche's conception of tragedy, which implies a recognition of how this conception influenced Artaud's own project, and 2) to discuss why, in analyzing the theatre of cruelty, we see Nietzsche through a particularly Artaudian lens, as he adapts and transforms elements of Nietzsche's philosophy to his own project. Further, as I examine the texts of each of these authors, I will maintain a rigid commitment to exploring their various and complex intersections in a way that does not conflate their ultimate goals or worldviews.

## Ch. 1: Dissecting the Foundations, Images, and Intentions of the Theatre of Cruelty

In 1938 Artaud published *The Theatre and Its Double*, which outlined the theoretical foundations of and provided performance instructions for his theatrical system, the theatre of cruelty (*le théâtre de la cruauté*). In this section, I will analyze Artaud's theatrical system, with a particular attention to those elements that will be revealed in the next section to have a special connection with Nietzsche's philosophy and especially with *The Birth of Tragedy*. My analysis follows *The Theatre and Its Double* more or less chronologically in order to examine not only a summary of Artaud's ideas, but also the process by which they are developed and explained. I will first contextualize *The Theatre and Its Double* in the socio-historical and artistic climate of interwar France, and then move carefully through this foundational text for the theatre of cruelty by interpreting Artaud's metaphors and discussing his intentions. I will describe the philosophical and artistic influences that manifest themselves in Artaud's writings as well as explain how Artaud envisions all of this coming alive in a theatrical space. This in-depth analysis of Artaud's project will provide insight into his overall worldview as well as allow for an accurate examination of the intertextuality at play. Ultimately, we will see that Artaud's ideas for revitalizing the theatre are parallel to his disillusionment with and critique of modern European culture, and that his endgame is to enlist the former as a proposed solution for the latter. After establishing a comprehensive understanding of the theatre of cruelty and its purpose, I will be able to illuminate how and why we see many allusions to Nietzsche when discussing Artaud, and I will also be able to better assess the precision of these claims.

To begin, the theatre of cruelty embodies a total redefinition of theatre – or, rather, a return to what Artaud believes to be a pure/original definition of theatre. It completely overhauls the trajectory of theatrical practice, even during the modernist, avant-garde climate of the

interwar period in which Artaud began theorizing.<sup>4</sup> What he proposes for theatre is so radical that, counterintuitively, it actually annihilates the theatre, rendering it (the double of) life itself. An actualized theatre of cruelty would not only challenge (as with other modernist/avant-garde theatres), but indeed mark the end of theatre as representation or mimesis,<sup>5</sup> as well as abolish any preservation of elements of psychological realism<sup>6</sup> in theatrical practice. In *The Theatre and Its Double* Artaud presents his theory in chapters that progress from defining what he sees as pure theatre via striking metaphors and comparisons to demanding the end of theatre as we have known it and cultivating the theatre of cruelty on the basis of his forceful manifestos. Although Artaud does not fully define “cruelty” (*la cruauté*) as he conceives it until later in the book, I

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<sup>4</sup> Modernism has been defined as “la tendance à se détacher de la tradition pour adopter des idées modernes” (*Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française. Huitième Édition*, “modernisme”). But in looking at this term and the context it arose in more deeply, modernism can be defined as a philosophical and artistic movement, influenced by extreme changes in modern society (such as industrialization and urbanization) and by emotional and artistic reactions to/against the first world war, Enlightenment ideals, and religion (Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, “modernism”). Avant-garde art was a product of this spirit of modernism that characterized artistic production in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and France was in many ways the epicenter of the avant-garde. The avant-garde is then rooted in, of course, the aforementioned “tendency to detach from tradition in order to adopt modern ideas.” There are many distinct and overlapping movements that comprise the avant-garde, such as Dadaism, cubism, expressionism, and surrealism, but the most important feature of this type of art is that it aims to provoke a reaction in the spectator. Avant-garde artists wanted the spectator to engage in a more profound way with the art they were presenting, as they believed the consumption of art should no longer be a passive activity. The same social changes that contributed to modernism often became central themes in provocative avant-garde artwork, which added an inherently political dimension to the avant-garde (Kennedy, *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, “avant-garde”).

<sup>5</sup> *Mimesis* was originally an Aristotelian term that became popular in the twentieth century as a way to refer to realist theatre that seeks to imitate everyday life and society as it really exists. This term was largely employed by avant-garde or highly political artists (such as Brecht) who saw themselves in stark opposition to theatre practices characterized by mimesis/imitation (Pavis, *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*, “brechtien,” 35 and “mimesis,” 206-7). Such dramatists saw mimesis as a tool for encouraging acceptance of or conformity to the social order, whereas they wished to enlist theatre as a cultural mechanism to fight against these social norms (Kennedy, *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, “mimesis”). For the purposes of this project, the term *mimesis* can be considered interchangeable with the ideas of imitation and realist representation in the theatrical context.

<sup>6</sup> By “psychological realism” I am referring mainly to modern, realist drama in which a special emphasis is placed on character development, especially in terms of motivation and justification for thoughts and actions. In general, this term invokes the realist tradition established by the likes of Ibsen and Chekhov (although it can be identified in earlier dramatic representations), and it implies that the dramatist attempts to “represent ordinary details in order to capture both the texture of material life and the subtextual pulse of the characters' lives—their psychological, social, economic, and moral beings.” And further, “By representing the illusion of actual experience, realistic drama aimed to reveal not only the social registers of contemporary life but also the sordid, empty, and even tragic nature of modern society” (Kennedy, *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, “realism and reality”).

would like to start by clarifying his idea of cruelty before delving into the substance of his argument.

Cruelty, in the context of Artaud's theatrical system, is not meant to be taken entirely in a literal sense; Artaud looks to a more philosophical (more specifically, Gnostic)<sup>7</sup> conceptualization of this term as he establishes his system. He explains in a letter about cruelty included in *The Theatre and Its Double* that cruelty is not a synonym of "spilled blood," but is rather, a type of rigidity, discipline, and submission to necessity: "Cruauté n'est pas en effet un synonyme de sang versé... c'est une sorte de direction rigide, la soumission à la nécessité" (158-9). Further, he writes, "L'effort est une cruauté, l'existence par l'effort est une cruauté" (160), invoking the difficult nature of existence and equating it with an innate cruelty that forms the basis of existence. Another detailed explanation of Artaud's conception of cruelty is found in a chapter in which Artaud calls for the end of masterpieces in the theatre. He writes,

Quand j'ai prononcé ce mot [cruauté], 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. Et, 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... 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. (123)

Once again, we see in this explanation that Artaud has no intention of equating cruelty with blood or with physically harming one another in the context of a theatre event. He views cruelty as something darker and deeper, something "terrible and necessary," that the universe can unleash against us. Because of life's underlying cruelty and our necessary submission to it, Artaud believes that we are not free, that the world as we know it could be ripped apart at the

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<sup>7</sup> In her book, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Jane Goodall explains the relationship between Artaud's theatrical system and the philosophy of the Gnostics, who were an ancient heretical people with Judeo-Christian origins. They purportedly maintained that life was inherently cruel and, much like the Buddhists, practiced a culture of asceticism and restriction as a way to fight against the inevitable suffering that existence entails. This means that Gnostic philosophy is associated with ideas of control, rigidity, and necessity. These same ideas appear in a similar way in Artaud's conceptualization of cruelty; thus, we can consider some initial definitions for the theatre of cruelty in the context of Gnostic ideas.

seems to destroy us, and that we are helpless to save ourselves in the face of these superior forces. The point of theatre, in Artaud's vision, is to teach us this unfortunate reality and force us as spectators to acknowledge and confront it. Therefore, Artaud proposes a theatrical system via the theatre of cruelty in which violent images "disturb and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator," and in which "a whirlwind of superior forces" becomes the theatrical space: "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" (128). Jacques Derrida provides clarification for Artaud's conception of cruelty (which also echoes a Gnostic conceptualization) in an essay he wrote about Artaud in *L'Écriture et la différance*. He explains,

On entrevoit ainsi le sens de la *cruauté* comme *nécessité* et *rigueur*. Artaud nous invite certes à ne penser sous le mot de cruauté que *rigueur, application et décision implacable, détermination irréversible, déterminisme, soumission à la nécessité*, etc., et non nécessairement *sadisme, horreur, sang versé, ennemi crucifié*, etc. (350)

This "necessity named cruelty" (*la nécessité nommée cruauté*, 350), as Derrida writes, is the key to Artaud's theatrical system, as it illuminates Artaud's purpose in developing a theatrical system based on this very idea. Furthermore, according to Artaud, this basis of cruelty is not only essential to his theatrical system, but to theatre in general: "sans un élément de cruauté à la base de tout spectacle, le théâtre n'est pas possible" (153). With this conception of cruelty as the foundation, Artaud passionately and forcefully cultivates his theatrical system and uses it as a diagnostic for the quality and success of all other theatre practices.

To initiate his project, Artaud provides a rather graphic and bold comparison of the theatre to the plague in the second chapter, "Le théâtre et la peste" ("The Theatre and the Plague"). After several pages of describing horrific images of people swollen, bleeding, suffering, and dying, he writes,

Si le théâtre essentiel est comme la peste, ce n'est pas parce qu'il est contagieux, mais parce que comme la peste il est la révélation, la mise en avant, la poussée vers l'extérieur d'un fond de cruauté latente par lequel se localisent sur un individu ou sur un peuple toutes les possibilités perverses de l'esprit. (44)

And, further,

Le théâtre, comme la peste, est à l'image de ce carnage, de cette essentielle séparation. Il dénoue des conflits, il dégage des forces, il déclenche des possibilités, et si ces possibilités et ces forces sont noires, c'est la faute non pas de la peste ou du théâtre, mais de la vie. (45)

Artaud thus sees pure theatre as an exteriorization of the “cruelty” that is inherent in life.

Theatre, when properly practiced, is the “image of carnage” in the sense that it pushes intense conflicts and very powerful, potentially dark, forces to the surface and demands that the spectator confront them. Once again, this darkness and cruelty are not the property of the theatre, but of life itself. The theatre is initially employed as a vehicle to draw these properties out of their hiding places, but, when done correctly according to Artaud’s vision, the element of theatre is destroyed: the spectacle ceases to be a representation of life and becomes, in fact, the double of life. As Kimberly Jannarone explains in the preface to *Artaud and His Doubles*: “Artaud’s writings reflect an implacable belief that every material thing, every undifferentiated object and every force compelling them is cruel, corrupt, sick, evil. [...] The force animating Artaud’s œuvre [...] is the desire to expose the underlying foundation of *le mal* [...]” (x), to show the malignant and hideous face of life for what it truly is. And considering the social climate during which this comparison was developed, it is not surprising that Artaud came to equate life with destruction. Jannarone writes in her first chapter, “The Invocation of the Plague,”

Artaud’s images of comprehensive devastation, of new life equated with torment, come hard on the heels of World War I, whose aftermath left much of Western Europe feeling that the new world just arrived had originated in horror and was very clearly heading back into it. [...]

In the early 1930s, when Western Europe was still reeling from the damage of World War I, Artaud chose the plague as the central metaphor for his ideal theatre. [...]

[...] written in the aftermath of a nearly worldwide self-destruction, *The Theatre and Its Double* dwells, with intense concentration, on cataclysms, on moments of suffering, on abjection and terror, on annihilation and gratuitous violence, on the dark nature of mankind and life and the forces that regulate them.” (32-3)

It seems entirely logical that these disturbing images would become a defining aspect of Artaud's radical theatrical vision after a period of such extensive wreckage and ruin.<sup>8</sup> The plague is simultaneously a symbol of this sweeping loss of life and societal stability as well as a concept that invokes the evil forces behind the curtain, controlling our world and occasionally creeping up to remind us of our place. After all, the plague as a metaphor for destructive or unsettling forces/truths is not unique to Artaud's work during and after the world wars; Albert Camus, for example, also used the plague as a symbol of the absurd – or, essentially, the universe's overwhelming indifference towards the human quest for meaning – with his 1947 novel *La Peste* (*The Plague*).<sup>9</sup> In *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud proposes the theatre of cruelty as a tool to confront these unfortunate facts, and he begins his proposition with a reminder of the death and carnage that will inevitably return with the most devastating of intentions.

How, then, does Artaud translate this violent conception of theatre into an actual theatrical system to apply to the stage? Despite a reliance on graphic and disturbing images to explain his project, he does not, as previously discussed, suggest that spectators should become victims of actual physical harm during a theatre event, nor does he advocate the production of actual bloodshed as a way to confront life's inherent cruelty. Instead, he insists upon the development of a new stage language capable of communicating these eternally important concepts to the spectator and thus revives the true purpose of the theatre. To develop this new stage language, Artaud seeks to abolish the reliance on spoken language and dialogue and to replace it with a stage poetry, or “a poetry in space” (*une poésie dans l'espace*, 57), that is based

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<sup>8</sup> Jannarone will go on to argue throughout *Artaud and His Doubles* that Artaud, in a sense, anticipated the political problems that Europe would face in the coming years, and his theatre of cruelty was actually inspired by and fed into proto-fascist and fascist ideals. Although I find her argument convincing on many levels, it is not my aim to present my own argument here that either supports or opposes her unique conclusions. However, I find her presentation of the historical context in which Artaud was writing and her identification of the connections between Artaud and other creators and writers very well-developed and helpful, and I will rely on her work for these reasons without engaging with her final verdict that Artaud's theatre advanced fascist ideology.

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, “theatre of the absurd.”

primarily in gesticulation and sound. After his initial comparison of the theatre to the plague, Artaud moves on in the next chapter, “La mise en scène et la métaphysique” (“Staging and Metaphysics”) to discuss why and how this stage poetry should be developed. He first questions why everything that is truly theatrical about the theatre seems to be regarded as merely an afterthought in European theatre traditions. He asks,

Comment se fait-il qu’au théâtre, au théâtre du moins tel que nous le connaissons en Europe ou mieux en Occident, tout ce qui est spécifiquement théâtral, c’est-à-dire tout ce qui n’obéit pas à l’expression par la parole, par les mots, ou si l’on veut tout ce qui n’est pas contenu dans le dialogue (et le dialogue lui-même considéré en fonction de ses possibilités de sonorisation sur la scène, et des exigences de cette sonorisation) soit laissé à l’arrière-plan ?  
[...] comment se fait-il que le théâtre occidental ne voie pas le théâtre sous un autre aspect que celui du théâtre dialogué ? (55)

We see here that for Artaud, European and Western theatre in general relies too heavily on dialogue while neglecting to explore the actual theatrical aspects of theatre. Dialogue, after all, is not solely a property of theatre in the same way that movement and sound are, for example. Dialogue, which can be written or spoken, is also a property of books and literature – or, in other words, things that were meant to be read and to remain on the page. In contrast, the stage begs to be filled with something more concrete. Artaud continues:

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.  
Je dis que ce langage concret, destiné aux sens et indépendant de la parole, doit satisfaire d’abord les sens, qu’il y a une poésie pour les sens comme il y en a une pour le langage, et que ce langage physique et concret auquel je fais allusion n’est vraiment théâtral que dans la mesure où les pensées qu’il exprime échappent au langage articulé.  
[...] Le plus urgent me paraît être de déterminer en quoi consiste ce langage physique, ce langage matériel et solide par lequel le théâtre peut se différencier de la parole.  
Il consiste dans tout ce qui occupe la scène, dans tout ce qui peut se manifester et exprimer matériellement sur une scène, et qui s’adresse d’abord au sens au lieu de s’adresser d’abord à l’esprit comme le langage de la parole. (55-6)

Therefore, in order to remain truly faithful to the theatre in theatrical practice, it is necessary to let go of the idea that theatre is somehow married to dialogue and to fill the stage with a type of language that is independent from spoken language. A concrete stage language would speak first to the senses (rather than to the mind or intellectual faculties of the spectator) and express itself

materially/physically on the stage. Artaud seeks to remind theatre makers that the staging always takes priority over written and spoken language in theatrical production: “c’est la mise en scène qui est le théâtre beaucoup plus que la pièce écrite et parlée” (60). It is a language of movement and sound that must take precedence on the stage.

Artaud’s vision of a pure theatrical language involves, of course, a very specific conceptualization of what the theatre is and how it should function. In minimizing spoken language, theatrical practice moves away from psychological realism, effectively rejecting realism and establishing anti-realism. Artaud recognizes this re-definition of theatre (although he sees it more as returning to the authentic/original definition that modernity has drawn us away from), and he questions why European/Western society has become so obsessed with turning theatre into some type of psychoanalysis.<sup>10</sup> He presents his question as follows:

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 ? (61-2)

That a language based on movement and sound is not really capable of revealing the deep and personal psychological characteristics of a specific character should not matter – because the theatre should not be restricted to exploring the psychological properties of a fictional human being purportedly displaying universal human qualities. This is not the true purpose of theatre according to Artaud, and any deviation away from this wrong turn in theatrical practice should thus not be criticized. Artaud submits that his vision is not taking anything away from theatre; rather, his vision provokes a journey toward the (re-)development of pure theatre, which is by no means defined by the psychological elucidation of a character’s personality, actions, and

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<sup>10</sup> I understand that this is a highly specific Freudian term that references the techniques used to study the unconscious mind. However, Artaud himself employs this term (*la psychanalyse moderne*) later on in *The Theatre and Its Double* (124), likely to be purposefully provocative about his views on what the theatre has become.

passions. Again, the theatre should not be reduced to mimesis or an attempt at the realistic representation of daily human life. When practiced correctly, the theatre becomes the double of life itself, of the one true reality, however dangerous and frightening it may be: “le théâtre aussi doit être considéré comme le Double non pas de cette réalité quotidienne et directe dont il s’est peu à peu réduit à n’être que l’inerte copie, aussi vaine qu’édulcorée, mais d’une autre réalité dangereuse et typique” (73-4).

In *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage: The Theatre of Samuel Beckett and His Generation*, Les Essif writes extensively about Artaud’s intentions when it came to “de-emphasizing the semiotic and linguistic in theatrical practice” (14) in the context of avant-garde theatre production in the early to mid-twentieth century. Essif argues in his analysis of the theatre of cruelty that Artaud, like other theatre practitioners of his time, was looking to establish a more direct line of communication between the stage and the human psyche, one that bypassed the intellectual faculties dependent on receiving meaning via language. There was something about the empty space of the stage that could reach deeper, as it mirrored something that existed deep within us. Essif thus examines the “theatricality of the ‘space’ of the human psyche – an unstructured, empty space that creates meaning” (38) in conjunction with the literally theatrical space of the empty stage. Artaud’s goal was to use these properties of emptiness to discover that direct line of communication, thereby giving spectators the opportunity to immediately confront the harsh reality of their existence, without depending on dialogue and psychological realism to communicate the underlying idea. Essif concludes that Artaud was interested in “connecting the void of space with the void of the mind” and, even more specifically, in “the connection between the power of the void within the space of the theatrical stage and the void that dwells within the space of our mind, at the core of our being” (62). Artaud’s pure, theatrical stage language would

be the tool to accomplish this connection, as the focus is on how to effectively fill an empty space with a truly theatrical – that is material, tangible, physical – communication of meaning. Whereas “language and words obstruct the void” (83), images, created via movement-based theatrical stage poetry, could utilize the void and reach a more natural, primal layer of the mind. This natural power of images over words is why Artaud searched for an “image to provoke in the spectator an awareness of the void” that would “connect the extended extralinguistic regions of the mind of the spectator with an extended theatrical space” (63). It is precisely, according to Essif, “the extra-physical, metaphysical, extralinguistic dimension of the visual image” that is “the crucial component of Artaud’s poetry in space” (66). Essif summarizes this interpretation and connects it back to Artaud’s aforementioned criticism of the focus on the psychological in theatre with the following remarks:

Artaud’s condemnation of what he referred to as the ‘psychological’ theatre that dominated the stage of his time and up to his time implies that readers have become more readers of text than true theatrical ‘spectators.’ [...] The one powerful image that Artaud thought necessary for the stage had to be constructed around a dramatic body rather than a dramatic character, a paradoxical human icon emptied of psychology, a powerful empty envelope. (172)

Thus, Artaud’s “primary dramaturgical goal was to rediscover a spatial language” based in image and gesture (42). Realism and the “realist illusion” stand in direct contradiction to Artaud’s belief in “the presence of an extra-linguistic mind-space in opposition to a language space” (65), and the troubling reality and truth that Artaud was seeking to expose was simply not translatable into written or spoken language.

Because Artaud found that the European/Western theatre, with its insistence upon dialogue-driven psychological analysis of characters, fell short of providing a way of communicating on a necessarily primal, image-driven level, he looked elsewhere for guidance and inspiration in developing his stage language. Artaud was drawn to what he described as oriental theatres, as he found that Eastern theatre practices were closer to his vision of a pure

theatre, one that maintained a reverence for and an inclusion of ancient rituals, customs, and myths. In particular, Artaud was fascinated by Balinese theatre. He dedicated an entire chapter to praising and interpreting this theatre tradition, and he employed specific elements of Balinese theatre in his own theatrical system. Although Artaud respected these foreign cultures for what he believed to be their invaluable insight into the truth, it is important to note that his perspective on them is not exactly representative of their unique and distinct locations, contexts, and histories. His appropriation of elements of Balinese theatre to his own theory is an example of orientalism, or the fascination with Eastern cultures that typically devolves into “othering” human beings of disparate backgrounds via a failure to understand the historical, cultural, and perhaps religious significance of their traditions and customs. After all, Artaud fixates upon the value of this cultural practice whilst superimposing his own impression of meaning on top of it. Jannarone also calls attention to this in her analysis of Artaud’s work in a chapter entitled “Reactionary Modern” that outlines Artaud’s resistance to the Enlightenment ideals of Western Europe and his subsequent infatuation with foreign, primitive, and often oriental cultures. She also explains how, in general, Artaud perceives the role of myths in history and society and how he makes assumptions about their value and significance. She observes that Artaud’s fascination with ‘primitive,’ occult, and Eastern cultures is evident everywhere in his writing.

Works like ‘On the Balinese Theatre’ [...] are classic examples of orientalism, fetishizing the other precisely because Artaud does not – and does not attempt to – understand them. The glory of not knowing how to decode the Balinese dancers’ gestures... demonstrate[s] that Artaud sought something beyond embodiment, beyond time and place. He was in search of Myth – with a capital ‘M’ – and the indecipherability of these gestures, traditions, and codes could, he believed, bring him closer to it. *The Theatre and Its Double* draws on generalized conceptions of the mythic in its quest for essences. For Artaud, ‘Myths’ reach toward the universal. They suggest a meaning beyond particulars: the stories in which they find themselves transmitted are merely functional. Myths exist as a truth that is more a force than a fact, an impulse rather than an object, a becoming. Artaud is not particular about the provenance of the stories he uses, as long as they have a pre-modern or non-Western point of origin. The wide variety of myths that *The Theatre and Its Double* embraces demonstrates an attachment to the idea rather than the form of myth and a complete disinterest in their historical or cultural contexts... Artaud embraces myths for what they appear to reveal about humanity’s essence, for what he believes are the eternal truths manifest in them. (59)

From this description, it is clear that Artaud looked to Eastern ways of life and artistic practices to recover something essential that he felt was missing from art and theatre in the West. He saw in Balinese theatre, for example, a certain preservation of ritual and ceremony that allowed the transmission of the universal truths buried in ancient Myth. He believed in this ability of the Balinese theatre because this theatre tradition utilized a stage language that prioritized dance, movement, gesture, music, and sound; and, to Artaud, the incomprehensibility of this language signaled that it was rich with another type of meaning, deeper and more profound, that was connected to the divine and to eternity. In Artaud's view, the meaning of words cannot reach as far into the void or the *abyme* as can the underlying, cryptic meaning of ritualistic and theatrical movement and sound. He admires Balinese theatre, then, because it displays a density in space (*une densité dans l'espace*, 86) by employing a type of stage language completely independent of spoken language and thereby providing an experience for the spectator that is truly theatrical and stage-oriented (*cette sorte de langage théâtral extérieur à toute langue parlée [...] où il semble que se retrouve une immense expérience scénique*, 87). This "spiritual architecture" (*architecture spirituelle*, 84) includes a vocabulary of gesture and mime that can speak to any circumstance of life (*les Balinais... ont des gestes et une variété de mimiques pour toutes les circonstances de la vie*) – including the truths that are only accessible by bridging the here and now with Myth – and, most importantly, give us an impression of the divine and of the superior, omnipotent forces that rule our lives (*cette impression de Vie Supérieure et dictée*, 89).

Artaud clearly sees the Balinese theatre as a theatre that stands in direct opposition to the theatre traditions of Europe and the West. In fact, in his introduction to the chapter "Sur le théâtre balinais" ("On the Balinese Theatre"), he begins with a deliberate defining of one as the antithesis of the other. He submits that,

Le premier spectacle du Théâtre Balinais qui tient de la danse, du chant, de la pantomime, de la musique, – et excessivement peu du théâtre psychologique tel que nous l’entendons ici en Europe, remet le théâtre à son plan de création autonome et pure, sous l’angle de l’hallucination et de la peur. (81)

And further,

Le drame n’évolue pas entre des sentiments, mais entre des états d’esprit, eux-mêmes ossifiés et réduits à des gestes – des schémas. En somme, les Balinais réalisent, avec la plus extrême rigueur, l’idée du théâtre pur, où tout, conception comme réalisation, ne vaut, n’a d’existence que par son degré d’objectification *sur la scène*. Ils démontrent victorieusement la prépondérance absolue du metteur en scène dont le pouvoir de création *élimine les mots*. Les thèmes sont vagues, abstraits, extrêmement généraux. (82)

Because Balinese theatre does not focus on the psychological elucidation of a character in the same way that European and western theatre does and instead utilizes dance, chanting, pantomime, and music, Artaud believes in its theatrical purity, in the fact that it is inherently a better vehicle for transmitting the fear-inducing cruelty he sees as the basis of reality. He seeks an elimination of words and feelings in theatre, advocating for a focus on themes that are more enduring, universal, general, and abstract. In order to address these universal, mythic themes, Artaud finds it necessary that a pure theatre make use of Balinese-inspired styles of movement and *sonorisation*. He describes in detail what exactly it is about this stage language that he finds so intriguing:

Ce qu’il y a en effet de curieux dans tous ces gestes, dans ces attitudes anguleuses et brutalement coupées, dans ces modulations syncopées de l’arrière-gorge, dans ces phrases musicales qui tournent court, dans ces vols d’élytres, ces bruissements de branches, ces sons de caisses creuses, ces grincements d’automates, ces danses de mannequins animés, c’est: qu’à travers leur dédale de gestes, d’attitudes et des courbes qui ne laissent aucune portion de l’espace scénique inutilisée, se dégage le sens d’un nouveau langage physique à base de signes et non plus de mots. Ces acteurs avec leurs robes géométriques semblent des hiéroglyphes animés. Et il n’est pas jusqu’à la forme de leurs robes qui, déplaçant l’axe de la taille humaine, ne crée à côté des vêtements de ces guerriers en état de transe et de guerre perpétuelle, des sortes de vêtements symboliques, des vêtements seconds, qui n’inspirent, ces robes, une idée intellectuelle, et ne se relie par tous les entrecroisements des perspectives de l’air. Ces signes spirituels ont un sens précis, qui ne nous frappe plus qu’intuitivement, mais avec assez de violence pour rendre inutile toute traduction dans un langage logique et discursif. Et pour des amateurs de réalisme à tout prix, qui se fatigueraient de ces allusions perpétuelles à des attitudes secrètes et détournées de la pensée, il reste le jeu éminemment réaliste du Double qui s’effare des apparitions de l’Au-delà. Ces tremblements, ces glapissements puérils, ce talon qui heurte le sol en cadence suivant l’automatisme même de l’inconscient déchaîné, ce Double qui, à un moment donné, se cache derrière sa propre réalité, voilà une description de la peur qui vaut pour toutes les latitudes et qui montre qu’aussi bien dans l’humain que dans le surhumain les Orientaux peuvent nous rendre des points en matière de réalité. (82-3)

In describing the use of gestures and physical movements that feature sharp and angular motions; the implementations of rhythmic, fragmented noises from the back of the throat as well as of fluid, musical phrases; the application of a distinct soundscape filled not only with voices but also with a large variety of naturally-produced sound effects – Artaud creates key images from which he can begin to develop his own stage language. All of these physical and sound elements, taken together, completely fill the theatrical space and, when performed in specific combinations, communicate meaning on the basis of signs/symbols rather than with language/words. When coupled with costumes/dresses that have geometric designs, Artaud remarks that this use of movement in Balinese stage language turns the actors into “animated hieroglyphs” and even symbolic, “spiritual signs” with a precise meaning. And, what’s more, these actors not only resemble but indeed become warriors that are engaged in a “perpetual war,” and they strike us in a way that, “with enough violence,” circumvents our intellectual faculties and renders useless any attempt at translating their message into a logical, discursive language. Here, we see clearly that Artaud does not intend his theatre of cruelty to be physically violent and harmful to the spectator, but he seeks rather to use actors as vehicles to transmit cruelty in such a way that their message of truth can be delivered directly to that more primal layer of our minds (or to what Essif refers to as *the void*). It is at this point that the Double – that is, the double of life that results from the production of pure theatre or a true theatrical event – becomes visible, even though it is using the sound and movement of the space-filling stage language to hide itself. The presence of truth/reality speaks to humans, and oriental theatre provides the tools with which we can bring this Double out and confront it. According to Artaud, European theatre, with its insistence upon realism, has no chance of creating a space in which we can confront this Double. Confrontation with reality is, instead, thanks to a stage language comprised of the tight

and subtle weaving of gestures (*la trame serrée et subtile des gestes*), the infinitely varied intonations of the voice (*les modulations infiniment variées de la voix*), the “rainstorm” of sound experience (*la pluie sonore*), and the interlaced design of sound and movement (*l’entrelacs lui aussi sonore des mouvements*, 87). With all of these elements working together, there is no real difference between gesture and sound, no passage between the two, and all communication between theatre and spectator occurs instantaneously through channels connected directly to the mind/spirit: “D’un geste à un cri ou à un son, il n’y a pas de passage: tout correspond comme à travers de bizarres canaux creusés à même l’esprit!” (87).

The most important aspect of this stage language that Artaud so greatly admires in the Balinese theatre, and the reason why it acts as a communication device between human beings and the void, is that it facilitates a phenomenon that Artaud calls “depersonalization” or “de-individuation” (*dépersonnalisation*). Essif discusses the role of depersonalization in Artaud’s theatrical vision, explaining that, in emphasizing participation in this experience, “the notion of creating and evoking the ‘zero degree’ of the character, is taken to its vacuous extreme: depersonalization led to (metaphysical) de-socialization, an artistically antagonistic form of metatheatricalization” (175).<sup>11</sup> Jannarone also defines this phenomenon as “an emphasis on annihilation of self and union with a primitive, universal, or national spirit” (51).<sup>12</sup> She provides a detailed explanation of how de-individuation functions in Artaud’s work:

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<sup>11</sup> In this instance, the term ‘metatheatricalization’ refers to a forced self-referentiality in the theatre of cruelty, which supports Artaud’s position against psychological realism and, in general, representation/mimesis. The theatre of cruelty is reflective of the theatrical medium in the sense that it prioritizes the *mise-en-scène* (or that which Artaud sees as truly theatrical) over written/spoken language (which Artaud sees as a property of literature rather than of theatre). However, the theatre of cruelty is reflective of the medium in a way that seeks to abolish the performative aspects of theatre rather than, as is customary with other avant-garde theatre practices, highlight or call attention to them as, for example, Brecht does with his notion of epic theatre.

<sup>12</sup> Jannarone links this phenomenon to fascism, as she recounts examples in which depersonalization was used both in fascist argumentation to convince people to subsume themselves within the interest of the state as well as in theatre practices that supported fascist aims (67, 102). Again, I will avoid engaging with these conclusions and utilize her work solely for its clarity in explaining depersonalization as, in this case, a theatrical phenomenon.

The theatre of cruelty, appealing to ‘collectivities of men,’ embraces de-individuation, asking the spectator to dissolve into something bigger than the self, to think in generalities and essences, to return to a ‘fragile, fluctuating center’ beyond or before civilization. The spectators Artaud imagines are liberated from the ‘tyranny’ of logic and encouraged to give themselves over entirely to emotion and impulse. [...] Their capacities for thought are short-circuited by the spectacle around them. They are, in this sense, members of a crowd... To call forth an event such as this reveals the desire to push people past reason and into a state initiated – and orchestrated – by something literally outside of their own minds. (49)

This element of depersonalization is perhaps the most central component of the theatre of cruelty (and the one that will connect it most profoundly to Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*), as it distinguishes this theatrical system from other systems – such as the theatre of the absurd – that also seek to redefine the role of spoken language in the theatre and prioritize the *mise-en-scène*.<sup>13</sup>

Artaud says about the Balinese,

Tout chez eux est ainsi réglé, impersonnel; pas un jeu de muscle, pas un roulement d’œil qui ne semble appartenir à une sorte de mathématique réfléchie qui mène tout et par laquelle tout passe. Et l’étrange est que dans cette dépersonnalisation systématique, dans ces jeux de physionomie purement musculaires, appliqués sur les visages comme des masques, tout porte, tout rend l’effet maximum. Une espèce de terreur nous prend à considérer ces êtres mécanisés, à qui ni leurs joies ni leurs douleurs ne semblent appartenir en propre, mais obéir à des rites éprouvés et comme dictés par des intelligences supérieures. (89)

In Artaud’s view, the almost mathematical movements of the body, movements of muscular precision that when applied to the face produce the effect of wearing a mask, create a systematic depersonalization within Balinese theatrical practice. This disintegration of the individual into the larger world of the theatre event causes the spectator to be overtaken by a certain kind of terror. The forced confrontation between the spectator and these mechanized beings provokes a realization in the spectator concerning the feelings of and between joy and pain that the performers exhibit. These emotions are, in fact, not their own; rather, they are dictated by superior, intelligent forces. A true theatre event thus removes individual agency and effectively

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Whether or not Artaud’s brand of de-individuation influenced fascist ideology in the mid-twentieth century is not the focus of my discussion in this project.

<sup>13</sup> Born out of a tradition of modernism and French avant-garde theatre, the theatre of the absurd refers to what has been referred to as “the theatricalization of existentialism.” The characteristics of absurdist theatre are typically as follows: “No character discusses the philosophy; characters exist within it and embody it. Absurd things happen and they know not why. They desire to escape but know they cannot. They sometimes talk of death but it is usually denied them. They exist in a perpetual state of meaninglessness.” (Kennedy, *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, “theatre of the absurd”).

strips the performance of anything actually performative. The participants – both actor and spectator – become subject to a dissolution of their individual identities as they enter a space of communication with the omnipotent, necessarily cruel forces that regulate life and reality. Later in this same chapter, Artaud describes this theatre as a space that is ready to throw itself into chaos (*tout prêt à se précipiter en chaos*, 97), as a space in which every fragment of perception is ready to return to its origin (*chaque perception fragmentaire [...] prête à retourner à son principe*, 99). The performers, who, having relinquished their own individuality, behave as though they are in a trance. They transform the theatre into a space of “profound intoxication” that leads us back to a long-forgotten state of nature: “Tout cela baigne dans une intoxication profonde qui nous restitue les éléments mêmes de l’extase, et dans l’extase nous retrouvons le bouillonnement sec et le froissement minéral des plantes, des vestiges, des ruines d’arbres éclairés sur leurs frontons” (100). In the dissolution of individual specificity, we are led to return to a natural, pure state in which we are capable of communicating with and receiving messages from the forces that govern us.

Artaud’s stance, in stark opposition to psychological realism in the theatre (which he continues discussing in even greater detail in the next chapter that very purposefully juxtaposes oriental and occidental theatres), becomes even clearer upon consideration of this aspect of depersonalization. Artaud explains,

Le domaine du théâtre n’est pas psychologique mais plastique et physique, il faut le dire. Tout vrai sentiment est en réalité intraduisible. L’exprimer c’est le trahir. [...] C’est pourquoi une image, une allégorie, une figure qui masque ce qu’elle voudrait révéler ont plus de signification pour l’esprit que les clartés apportées par les analyses de la parole. (109-10)

Artaud believes that the domain of theatre is plastic/physical rather than psychological, and, further, that “all true feeling” is *untranslatable*. To try to express it, or to attempt to make known what is inevitably unknown, is ultimately to betray or contaminate it. For this reason, an image

or an allegory expressed by a masked/theatrical figure that, in turn, masks/theatricalizes the message via the means of communication, has more true meaning than that which can be gained from the intellectual analysis of spoken language. Therefore, in surrendering one's identity (and, additionally, all attempts to represent/recreate individual identity on the basis of psychological realism) to the greater experience of the theatre event, participants generate a space in which the naked, uncontaminated truth can be exposed, confronted, and better understood. In a later chapter, "Lettres sur le langage" ("Letters on Language"), Artaud collects letters he had written to others in response to their questions about his stage language, including questions about how it would work and what its actual purpose would be. In one example, Artaud answers an acquaintance's question by returning to the idea of depersonalization as a way of forcing the theatrical focus onto truths found in the presence of Myth, rather than keeping the focus on the psychological state of individual characters:

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. Créer des Mythes voilà le véritable objet du théâtre, traduire la vie sous son aspect universel, immense, et extraire de cette vie des images où nous aimerions à nous retrouver. [...] Que [le théâtre] nous libère, nous, dans un Mythe ayant sacrifié notre petite individualité humaine, tels des Personnages venus du Passé, avec des forces retrouvées dans le Passé. (180-1)

Artaud argues that theatre should equate itself to life as a whole – as a complete concept – rather than limit itself to the exploration of separate, individual lives. Individual characters should no longer be the focus in theatre; as Jannarone describes it, Artaud seeks the "dissolution of individual particulars" (108) in theatrical practice. Instead, theatre should take a "mythic approach to [characterization]" (109) and be a space that reaches toward a greater experience, a fully liberated life, in which human individuality is swept away, and all that remains of the human being is her reflection – her theatrical double, if you will, as an integral component of the larger forces/energies at play. Jannarone explains: "A 'liberated life' is one whose specificity has been annihilated, one that surrenders itself to dissolve into a higher state of being" (108). The

creation/revitalization of Myths that reveal immanent and abstract universal truths is thus the true goal of theatrical practice. In order to arrive at the appropriate state to extract Myth (and therefore truth) from its hiding place, participants in a theatre event must sacrifice their individuality, submit themselves to be absorbed into the energy of the spectacle, a higher power, however cruel and terrifying it may be. Because Artaud “appeals to a desire to be free of the isolation of individuation” (124) and allow the spectators a chance to become immersed in something much larger and more powerful than themselves, his theatre empowers and liberates the participants, the spectators and performers alike, by facilitating a connection to the forceful and enduring ancient energies that, mobilized by pure theatre, come to visit us from the past. The result is that the spectator is “reduced to a being with no agency, but who feels enormously powerful” (124). We see, then, that Artaud maintains there is truth, freedom, and power to be gained from this extreme letting-go, from surrendering specificity to the ancient, mythic forces that constitute history and reality, and from confronting head-on their ugly and frightening faces.

Once we have accepted all of this as the new standard for theatrical practice, Artaud says in the following chapter we must call for “No More Masterpieces” (“En finir avec les chefs-d’œuvre”). With this statement, Artaud insists upon a full renunciation of conventional theatre, including that which we value as our society and culture’s highest achievements, such as the tragedies of Shakespeare and Racine. He says that masterpieces are and should be a thing of the past because they are not good or useful for modern humans: “Les chefs-œuvre du passé sont bons pour le passé: ils ne sont pas bons pour nous” (115). Further, he proactively responds to the potential criticism of people who simply are not intellectually capable of understanding masterpieces as the reason why they do not get anything significant out of them. Artaud claims that a lack of understanding is not the fault of the “everyday fool,” rather, it is the result of the

great literary works being too fixed in the past and unable to respond relevantly to the needs of modern society: “Si la foule ne vient pas aux chefs-d’œuvre littéraires c’est que ces chefs-d’œuvre sont littéraires, c’est-à-dire fixés; et fixés en des formes qui ne répondent plus aux besoins du temps” (117). In taking this position, Artaud pits himself against an ideology of bourgeois conformism (*conformisme bourgeois*, 118) that would dictate what society should value and, as a result, *who* should be valued, based on one’s ability to navigate what has been deemed valuable. After establishing this framework, Artaud moves quickly into a criticism of Shakespeare, whom he feels is responsible for turning the theatre into a space that trivializes true art by highlighting psychological motivations for romanticized actions and by reducing the spectators to mere voyeurs who take pleasure in seeing the exploits and suffering of other people, but do not engage critically with the theatre event. He laments:

Des histoires d’argent, d’angoisses pour de l’argent, d’arrivisme social, d’affaires amoureuses où l’altruisme n’intervient jamais, de sexualités saupoudrées d’un érotisme sans mystère, ne sont pas du théâtre si elles sont de la psychologie. Ces angoisses, ce stupre, ces ruts devant quoi nous ne sommes plus que des voyeurs qui se délectent, tournent à la révolution et à l’aigre: il faut que l’on se rende compte de cela.

Mais le plus grave n’est pas là.

Si Shakespeare et ses imitateurs nous ont insinué à la longue une idée de l’art pour l’art, avec l’art d’un côté et la vie de l’autre, on pouvait se reposer sur cette idée inefficace et paresseuse tant que la vie au dehors tenait. Mais on voit tout de même à trop de signes que tout ce qui nous faisait vivre ne tient plus, que nous sommes tous fous, désespérés et malades. Et je *nous* invite à réagir. (120)

According to Artaud, Shakespeare, as well as all those who have imitated him, have caused the widespread failure of theatre to address and therefore transmit the real issues we should be facing. And as a response, he invites us to react by, presumably, adopting a form of theatre that will do the job right. He returns to an insistence upon the need for depersonalization in the theatre, as he calls for the end of individualism (*il faut que [cesse] cet individualism*, 122) and claims that this will lead to a greater realization and an encounter with the dominant forces that direct everything (*arriver à une prise de conscience et aussi de possession de certaines forces dominantes, de certaines notions qui dirigent tout*, 124). In the precise context of reinforcing the

necessity of depersonalization in theatre (and the necessity of banishing Shakespeare and Racine<sup>14</sup> and so on from the theatre), Artaud makes a pointed reference to ancient tragedy, as he claims that the “poetry of theatre” lies behind the Myths that were retold by these original tragedians: “la poésie du théâtre qui est derrière les Mythes racontés par les grands tragiques anciens” (124). This reference (along with its crucial position in the text) will serve as a highly important connection to *The Birth of Tragedy*, as Nietzsche’s entire philosophical argument is based on this idea.

With this in mind, Artaud moves on to make a couple of propositions about how we should go about approaching theatre in the wake of “no more masterpieces.” He proposes:

Je propose d’en revenir au théâtre à cette idée élémentaire magique, reprise par la psychanalyse moderne. [...] Je propose d’en revenir par le théâtre à une idée de la connaissance physique des images et des moyens de provoquer des trances. [...] Faire de l’art c’est priver un geste de son retentissement dans l’organisme, et ce retentissement, si le geste est fait dans les conditions et avec la force requises, invite l’organisme et, par lui, l’individualité entière, à prendre des attitudes conformes au geste qui est fait. (124-5)

Artaud once again expresses a desire to return to a more primitive, “magical” idea of theatre that had been destroyed with the focus on “psychoanalysis” in theatre. He wishes to return to a theatre that focuses on images and the provocation of trances, which references his idea for a gesture-based stage language and the facilitation of deindividuation. To further illustrate these ideas, Artaud uses the metaphor of a snake charmer playing music to a snake. Because of the snake’s long body lying in its totality along the ground, the snake feels the vibrations that are “subtle and long,” just as is his body, which causes him to react with a trance-induced dance based on the purely physical/sensation stimuli it receives. Artaud writes,

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<sup>14</sup> Artaud also references Racine specifically in a following chapter and provides a nearly identical criticism to the one he submits against Shakespeare: “Il est certain que nous avons besoin avant tout d’un théâtre qui nous réveille: nerfs et cœur. [...] Les méfaits du théâtre psychologique venu de Racine nous ont déshabitués de cette action immédiate et violente que le théâtre doit posséder” (131). Once again, he uses a celebrated and influential theatrical figure, known specifically for his tragedies, to make a bold claim about what the theatre is missing. Because of the focus on psychological aspects of characters, we are denied access to a spectacle that speaks directly to our senses and provides us with the essential “immediate and violent” action.

Si la musique agit sur les serpents ce n'est pas par les notions spirituelles qu'elle leur apporte, mais parce que les serpents sont longs, qu'ils s'enroulent longuement sur la terre, que leur corps touche à la terre par sa presque totalité ; et les vibrations musicales qui se communiquent à la terre l'atteignent comme un massage très subtil et très long ; eh bien, je propose d'en agir avec les spectateurs comme avec les serpents qu'on charme et de les faire revenir par l'organisme jusqu'aux plus subtiles notions. (126)

Artaud wishes to apply this same concept of purely physical stimuli to the theatre, which he believes would induce the same type of submission to trance in the spectator. This metaphor gives us a precise idea of how Artaud pictures depersonalization in the theatre and how he imagines it can be achieved by fully bypassing the intellectual faculties of the spectator, avoiding any appeals to psychology/character analysis, and insisting upon the overload of theatrical elements that produce uncontrollable physical sensations in the spectator. This specific focus should produce “sublimation,” as Artaud says (*produit la sublimation*, 128), which implies that those participating in the theatre event will be so affected that they will lose all individual distinctions and be immediately and wholly absorbed by the spectacle. In a space that is “brimming with images” and “gorged with sound” (*l'espace tonnante d'images, gorgé de sons*, 135), the mass and submission to it has priority over the individual. This is the necessary state for the spectator to create a space of communication with the pure forces that hold the power of Myth/truth in all its inherent cruelty.

Finally, Artaud gives us ideas about how all of this theory should be applied to the stage in ways that work with the advent of a new stage language. How exactly do we facilitate this depersonalization that is central to pure theatre and re-opens the line of communication with Myth? An understanding of how all the elements in Artaud's theatrical system might work together to communicate more directly with the spectator and generate a space of the necessary de-individuation for the theatre of cruelty to function allows Artaud's insistence upon the *mise en scène* over the text to become much clearer. According to Artaud, “C'est autour de la *mise en scène*, considérée non comme le simple degré de réfraction d'un texte sur la scène, mais comme

le point de départ de toute création théâtrale, que se constituera le langage type du théâtre” (144). Shakespeare and Racine, the great producers of theatrical text, have not actually produced anything theatrical, as they began with and prioritized language rather than the staging and plastic elements of theatre. In pure theatre, there is no more representation of written plays; rather, the actors will use the theatre of cruelty to circumvent essential themes: “nous ne jouerons pas de pièce écrite mais autour de thèmes” (151). To begin, Artaud insists upon a provocative and complete utilization of the space in theatre (*exige l’expression dans l’espace*, 137), one which, if done according to his propositions, it will root within the spectator the idea of perpetual conflict, the very idea that defines life itself (*manifeste et ancrer inoubliablement en nous l’idée d’un conflit perpétuel*, 142). Before moving on to the first manifesto (“Le théâtre de la cruauté: Premier manifeste”), in which he presents detailed and specific plans for staging the theatre of cruelty, Artaud hints at a couple of important general aspects of the *mise en scène*. First, he uses the aforementioned snake metaphor to explain why he feels the actual configuration of the theatre should be changed. He says that in order to make the spectator react in the way that the charmed snake does, her attention has to be captured immediately and held for the duration of the event. Therefore, the spectator will actually be *surrounded by* the spectacle, rather than watching it as it plays out on the stage, from a comfortable distance: “C’est pourquoi dans le théâtre de la cruauté le spectateur est au milieu tandis que le spectacle l’entoure” (126). Later he adds: “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” (134).

He continues explaining the importance of this configuration in the first manifesto,

writing:

Nous supprimons la scène et la salle qui sont remplacées par une sorte de lieu unique, sans cloisonnement, ni barrière d'aucune sorte, et qui deviendra le théâtre même de l'action. Une communication directe sera rétablie entre le spectateur et le spectacle, entre l'acteur et spectateur, du fait que le spectateur placé au milieu de l'action est enveloppé et sillonné par elle. Cet enveloppement provient de la configuration même de la salle. [...]

La salle sera close de quatre murs, sans aucune espèce d'ornement, et le public assis au milieu de la salle, en bas, sur des chaises mobiles qui lui permettront de suivre le spectacle qui se passera tout autour de lui. En effet, l'absence de scène, dans le sens ordinaire du mot, invitera l'action à se déployer aux quatre coins de la salle. (148-9)

This drastic reconfiguration of the theatre represents the biggest change that Artaud proposes for staging the theatre of cruelty. Like other avant-garde theatre practitioners of the early twentieth century, Artaud felt it necessary to produce theatre that would engage the spectator and force a more pronounced relationship with or reaction to the theatre event. Whereas Bertolt Brecht (German playwright and director most known for his work in the avant-garde theatre scene of the 1920s and 1930s) had goals that were highly political, as his ideas for epic theatre were designed to engage the spectator on an intellectual level and force an individual perspective on the performance of a political theme, Artaud saw himself as apolitical and, as we have seen, was adamant against intellectual communication in the theatre. Instead, in order to engage the spectator in a new and purely physical way, Artaud implements a radical yet purposeful design for the theatre itself. With the spectacle literally holding her captive, the spectator has no choice but to submit to its influence and engage more deeply with her surroundings. Further, the line between spectator and player is blurred, as they are sharing the theatrical space much more intimately and are not separated by a line or platform demarcating the actual stage. Additionally, this configuration enhances the physical experience equally for both player and spectator, and it increases the emotional reaction to the spectacle, as the spectator cannot predict from which direction the next physical stimulus (whether it be noise, a lighting effect, or being touched by

another spectator or player) will come, which undoubtedly causes a feeling of uneasiness and perhaps even fear that Artaud associates with a recognition of reality. Essentially, imagining the theatrical space as shared, communal, chaotic, and undifferentiated destroys all notions of decorum usually associated with the theatre and, obviously, contributes to the anticipation and, more importantly, the deindividuation necessary for the theatre of cruelty to do its job.

After the configuration of the space, Artaud addresses other key plastic elements of the theatre, including the sound, lighting, costumes, and the set. He begins by explaining that sound should be constant and prioritized first by the physical sensation of vibration it produces and second by what it actually represents: “Dans ce spectacle la sonorisation est constante: les sons, les bruits, les cris sont cherchés d’abord pour leur qualité vibratoire, ensuite pour ce qu’ils représentent” (126). Instead of spoken words, Artaud suggests the use of voices to produce shouting as well as the beauty of incantation (*la beauté incantatoire des voix*, 144). He expects a variety of unconventional and disruptive rhythms and music to fill the theatrical space. Next, the purposeful use of lighting will fill the space on another level and act as both a visual and sensational stimulus for the participants. Artaud explains: “Dans ces moyens qui se subtilisent la lumière intervient à son tour. La lumière qui n’est pas faite seulement pour colorer, ou pour éclairer, et qui porte avec elle sa force, son influence, ses suggestions” (126-7). Light is more than a feature used to simply color a space in a certain way; as Artaud points out, it is powerful and suggestive and thus can forcefully influence the emotional and physical experience of the spectator during the theatre event. Artaud envisions quick and frequent changes of the lighting (*changements brusques de la lumière*, 144) that will reflect the intensity of the cruelty at the base of the spectacle and help to transmit it to the spectators. He seeks to utilize the lighting to produce certain tones that can provoke specific physical and emotional reactions in the spectator,

such as feeling cold, hot, angry, or frightened: “pour produire des qualités de tons particulières, on doit réintroduire dans la lumière un élément de ténuité, de densité, d’opacité en vue de produire le chaud, le froid, la colère, la peur, etc.” (147). After lighting, Artaud discusses the importance of avoiding realistic or modern costumes (*on évitera le plus possible le costume moderne*) in favor of costumes that have an ancient, ritualistic, ceremonial and suggestive quality. He believes it is important to preserve this element of the theatre from the ancient tradition that gave theatre life: “Il apparaît comme absolument évident que certains costumes millénaires, à destination rituelle, bien qu’ils aient été à un moment donné d’époque, conservent une beauté et une apparence révélatrices, du fait de leur rapprochement avec les traditions qui leur donnèrent naissance” (148). Once again, Artaud associates the theatre of cruelty with ancient theatres (presumably including that of the Greeks), and we also notice that such costumes would prevent any differentiation of individual characters, working as another element to contribute to de-individuation in the theatre. Next, he briefly notes the use of props, including expressive masks and enormous mannequins, in the theatre of cruelty. These objects are to be of “strange proportions” (*aux proportions singulières*, 150), are to serve as bearers of images, and are not to be used in any realistic way that would reflect preconceived notions of their purpose. Finally, Artaud discusses the set in the theatre of cruelty: there is no set (*il n’y aura pas de décor*, 151). He intends for the theatre event to occur in an unknown, unrecognizable space (*à destination inconnue*, 151), which ensures that there are no prior associations that would form expectations about the plot or the characters. Artaud’s insistence on this type of empty, obscure space supports Essif’s aforementioned idea of how emptiness functions in Artaud’s system. As Essif explains, an empty stage acts as a reflection of an “empty mental space,” or “the dead center of space through which the mind must pass” (87), and this emptiness serves to remind the

spectator of the void. Artaud hoped the void would “awaken a primal psychic organ in the spectator” (173), forcing him to become absorbed in the spectacle and the atmosphere of cruelty it creates. Modeling the theatrical space after this conception of the void would facilitate the primal, psychic awakening that Artaud strove for by providing the right setting for the theatre event.

In conclusion, we see that Artaud establishes a theatrical system in which a philosophy of cruelty – of necessity and rigidity – underpins the practical applications of his theory to the stage. He begins his project by invoking grotesque images of sickness, death, and destruction, and he insists that the theatre’s true purpose is to burn these images permanently into our consciousness. The first step in enacting Artaud’s vision of theatre is to renounce our dependence on the theatrical text in favor of a stage language based on gesture, movement, and sound. This new language also entails a focus on the *mise en scène* (including sound, props, lighting, costumes, and the set/theatrical space) over dialogue among individual, believable characters. Because Artaud perceived these crucial characteristics as lacking in modern/Western theatre, he looked to ancient/Eastern theatrical traditions (or at least, to his own interpretation of them) for guidance on how to implement a stage language that would meet these criteria. His critique of European theatre underscores a larger critique of European society, in which people are, according to Artaud, out of touch with their present and immanent reality and, by extension, out of touch with the superior forces of nature that control our lives. However, Artaud believes that if the appropriate stage language is implemented and an effective configuration of the theatrical space is established, the theatre will allow the spectator to communicate with the dark, primal forces regulating our lives. It is precisely in re-opening this line of communication, accessible only by relinquishing one’s individual subjectivity to the overpowering energy of the spectacle, that the

spectator can again confront the reality of her existence. The process of producing (or, rather, facilitating) this “pure theatre” renders the theatre the Double of life itself, as it aims to destroy anything performative, representative, or imitative about the spectacle. With all of this in mind, the next question we have to address is where and how there are parallels between this radical theatrical system and Nietzsche’s philosophy.

## Ch. 2: Exploring the Presence and Absence of the Dionysian in the Theatre of Cruelty

### *Pt. 1: Identifying Connections on the Basis of the Primary Texts*

The basis for Artaud's theatrical system is an inherently philosophical one. His writings and manifestos put him in direct discourse with philosophers and philosophical history as much as with theatre artists. In particular, as many scholars have suggested, there is a special link between Artaud's theatre theory and Nietzsche's philosophy. In this section, I will focus on the most important of those links and respond in more detail to the claims of other scholars concerning this connection, most notably, Camille Dumoulié and Jacques Derrida. I will recall the most important points of my analysis of *The Theatre and Its Double* and show that, not only are many of Artaud's ideas rooted in Nietzschean interpretations of tragic theatre, but that an understanding of these Nietzschean interpretations is a crucial tool for developing a deeper and more functional understanding of the theatre of cruelty. Basically, I will attempt to understand *The Birth of Tragedy* as theory (without treating the work as theatre theory in-and-of itself) in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of Artaud's system. As noted in the previous chapter, the most important point of comparison will be a recognition of how Artaud shared Nietzsche's insistence upon looking to theatre as a way to achieve a state of de-individuation and thus unite with a primal, powerful energy that can communicate with us on a more fundamental level. Essentially, I will argue that to arrive at a full understanding of Artaud's theatrical system and his intentions, a recognition of intertextuality is necessary, as one should endeavor to discover, appreciate, and comprehend the links to Nietzsche's body of work, beginning with *The Birth of Tragedy*. Most importantly, I will focus on where these two figures diverge in their arguments and subsequent worldviews, and I will conclude by assessing what that means in terms of how Nietzsche and Artaud relate to each other on a more complex level.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche introduces us to a key figure that will continue to hold an important position in the trajectory of Nietzsche's philosophical thought. This figure is, of course, Dionysos, the Greek god of wine, revelry, and religious ecstasy. Nietzsche's relationship with this figure and with his ever-evolving concept of the Dionysian is central to his entire body of work. In this first published work, we see both how Dionysos functions in the creation of Greek tragic theatre and how the Dionysian becomes the backbone of Nietzsche's philosophical argument. It is, in fact, the Dionysian that we modern humans are missing, rendering us unable to live our best possible lives. And, perhaps most importantly, the Dionysian is not laid to rest at the end of *The Birth of Tragedy*. On the contrary, Nietzsche develops and modifies this idea, bringing it back to life over and over again as he builds upon his body of work. In order to understand these ever-evolving layers and dimensions of the Dionysian, we can refer to Del Caro's essay, "Nietzschean Self-Transformation and the Transformation of the Dionysian."

According to Del Caro:

The Dionysian as a principle, and as a symbol infused with new meaning at various stages of Nietzsche's writing, is in fact quite constant, so that one might say the Dionysian transformed along with Nietzsche, and he was helped in his own transformation from a philologist to a philosopher to the extent that he was steered by the Dionysian. [...] The Dionysian undercurrent remains as the sustaining matrix of the philosophy of life affirmation. [...] The eternal recurrence of the same, the so-called 'Dionysian pessimism,' *amor fati*, and the critique of Christianity as a nihilistic force all have their origins and outcomes in the Dionysian. [...] The orgiastic, anti-individuation, and resurrective features of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy* were the ones Nietzsche adapted later on, because they embodied the tension and suffering that he needed to espouse a life-affirming doctrine of self-overcoming. (70-1)

This introduction to the Dionysian reveals the complexity of a concept embodied by a poignant mythological figure that develops and transforms throughout Nietzsche's body of work. Clearly, there are multiple dimensions to this re-imagined figure that need to be unpacked; but the most important features of the Dionysian to be examined for my analysis of Artaud's theatrical system include the "orgiastic, anti-individuation," the embodiment of "tension and suffering," and the "life-affirming doctrine of self-overcoming." From these extractions, we can already see where

Artaud's theatre of cruelty seems to construct itself around distinct elements of the Dionysian while completely and purposefully rejecting others. Del Caro breaks these elements down even further into three different stages, a categorization which is also very useful for understanding the complexity of the Dionysian in Nietzsche's work and later, of course, in Artaud's. The earliest stage, according to Del Caro, is the aesthetic stage, in which the Dionysian is defined as the "artistic principle of disruption whose direct opposite is the Apollonian principle of individuation." Juxtaposed with Apollo, whose characteristics are also inextricable from the process of artistic production, the unique and important properties of the Dionysian can be accurately identified. As Del Caro further explains, "When the Dionysian is used in this sense, it applies to the aesthetic characteristics associated primarily with the emergence of tragedy, namely, the primordial unity, mask, the lyrical, Dionysian festivals, and tragedy from Aeschylus to Euripides" (73). We have certainly seen in Artaud's writings a reverence and respect for ancient theatre traditions, including tragedy, but the most essential element of the Dionysian to be identified in this phase is the *primordial unity* (*das Ur-Eine*), which is more or less synonymous with the depersonalization/de-individuation that is the key to the theatre of cruelty. This point of convergence forms precisely the crux of the argument for comparing Nietzsche and Artaud, but in order to arrive at an understanding of how the Dionysian facilitates primordial unity, we have to examine the role of Dionysos in *The Birth of Tragedy* and more generally in what Del Caro identifies as the earliest, aesthetic stage.

In "The Dionysiac Worldview" ("Die dionysische Weltanschauung"), written in 1870 but published posthumously, Nietzsche elaborates on the function of Dionysos in the creation of tragic theatre and art more generally. This text, coupled with *The Birth of Tragedy*, allows us not only to understand Nietzsche's conceptualization of the Dionysian, but also to identify how it

influences and takes on a new life in other works, namely, in Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*. In this essay, Nietzsche first addresses the necessary balance between two ancient Greek deities, Dionysos and Apollo, reiterating the nuanced relationship between these two figures and breaking it down in a more direct way. He reminds us what exactly each member of the pair represents, and we are confronted with just how complex this duality really is. At the core, Apollo is connected to the world of individual subjectivity and a kind of spiritual discipline whereas Dionysos is the embodiment of intoxication, whose presence is the gateway to the collective primordial unity. And, of course, the development of these two gods as an inseparable pair who compete with each other yet flourish together is, according to Nietzsche, the foundational element of tragic theatre. In the introduction to the definitive English translation of *The Birth of Tragedy* (Cambridge UP, 1999), Raymond Geuss introduces the relationship between these two figures, noting that Nietzsche "describes the origin of tragedy in ancient Greece as the outcome of a struggle between two forces, principles, or drives," and that these drives, embodied by Apollo and Dionysos, "can be thought of as imaginatively representing the drive in question in an especially intense and pure way" (xii). Geuss elaborates with the following description:

Apollo embodies the drive toward distinction, discreteness and individuality, toward the drawing and respecting of boundaries and limits; he teaches an ethic of moderation and self-control. The Apolline artist glorifies individuality by presenting attractive images of individual persons, things, and events. In literature the purest and most intense expression of the Apolline is Greek epic poetry (especially Homer). The other contestant in the struggle for the soul of ancient Greece was Dionysos. The Dionysiac is the drive towards the transgression of limits, the dissolution of boundaries, the destruction of individuality and excess. The purest artistic expression of the Dionysiac was quasi-orgiastic forms of music, especially of choral singing and dancing. [...] Although these two impulses are in some sense opposed to each other, they generally coexist in any given human soul, institution, work of art, etc. (although one will usually also be dominant). It is precisely the tension between the two of them that is particularly creative. The task is to get them into a productive relation to each other. (xii)

Immediately, then, we see a purposeful differentiation between distinction/individuality and the "dissolution of boundaries," and it is precisely this differentiation (and the paradoxical necessity

of a never-ending battle between the two sides) that will comprise a large part of Nietzsche's observations and argument about tragic theatre.

However, in order to fully understand the function of this essential duo, we have to look even closer at its origins and examine the purpose of the religious system in which they exist. Dionysos and Apollo are simply two figures in an endless collection of Greek gods, yet their existence and relationship as fruitful rivals is deeply rooted in the creation of the entire system of Greek mythology. As Nietzsche explains in the beginning of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the grave wisdom of Silenus, demon of the woods, served to remind the ancient Greeks that the best outcomes for human life included, first, never being born and second, dying as soon as possible (BT 3, 23). In order to endure existence's inherent pessimism, the Greeks "deified" everything, "regardless of whether it [was] good or evil" (*alles Vorhandene [ist] vergöttlicht [...], gleichviel ob es gut oder böse ist*, BT 3, 22),<sup>15</sup> thereby creating a panorama of relatable gods. The "Olympians" that they derived from a pessimistic wisdom allowed humans to feel "worthy of glorification" (*verherrlichenswerth*) as they could now "recognize a reflection of themselves in a higher sphere" (*sich in einer höheren Sphäre wiedersehn*, BT 3, 25). As a result, humans not only subsisted in spite of Silenus's fatal pessimism; they thrived. Thus, Greek religion acts as both a coping mechanism in response to the pessimistic wisdom of the wood-god and an affirmation of human life. The creation of the gods was out of necessity, as the glorification/deification of everything present in human existence allowed the Greeks to bear the burden of existence. Dionysos arguably plays the most special role in this panorama of gods

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<sup>15</sup> From this point forward, all English translations of Nietzsche's works will be marked with title identification, section number, and page number. The original German text comes from the Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Digital version of the German critical edition of the complete works of Nietzsche, at [www.nietzschesource.org](http://www.nietzschesource.org)) and will remain unmarked as they can be identified using the same book title and section number. *The Birth of Tragedy* = BT, "The Dionysiac Worldview" = DW, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" = SC. These English translations are all included under the title of *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (Cambridge UP, 1999), but I have marked each title individually as to ensure clarity in identifying the exact source of each citation.

because he preserves the wood-god's pessimistic wisdom and keeps it present in the artistic outlet that becomes a celebration of life. The recognition of inevitable death is inextricably tangled with the drive to exist, yet Dionysos renders this absurd nature of existence not only palatable but worthy of celebration. The Dionysian brings the darker side of life into play along with ecstasy, ensuring that human beings constantly confront the reality of their existence as they affirm and celebrate it. Whereas Apollo represents the side of artistic production characterized by the pure expression of dreams, there are limits attached to purely Apollonian art. Dream-reality and the expression thereof can only ever be a semblance – and then only a semblance of a semblance – which implies that Apollonian art is merely an illusion, with no grounding in truth or reality. However, the Dionysian entails a rupture in these boundaries, as his spirit of intoxication and communal ecstasy is anchored in excess. As Nietzsche explains (and as we have seen in Geuss's analysis), the Dionysian state breaks down the spiritual walls that we have grown accustomed to and leads us to experience the truth beyond mere semblance. In turn, it is the Apollonian who translates this rupture and submission to excess into something communicable, providing a means to articulate what we have discovered after basking for a few moments in the basic/primitive truth attained via Dionysian ecstasy and excess. As such, Apollo, “woven into the Dionysiac view of the world” (*hineingeflochten in die dionysische Weltanschauung*) is a necessary and integral feature of Dionysos' function (DW 3, 132). In tragic art, then, we can move beyond mere semblance, as the Dionysian turns Apollonian semblance into symbols, which, as Nietzsche explains are “[signs] of truth” (*Zeichen der Wahrheit*, DW 3, 133). The transformation of semblance (illusion) into symbols (truth) occurs only when Apollonian semblance is absorbed by Dionysian glorification. As Geuss effectively and concisely states,

“The synthesis of Apollo and Dionysos in tragedy... is part of a complex defense against the pessimism and despair which is the natural existential lot of humans” (xi).

To understand this layered conceptualization of pessimism, we have to look briefly at the philosophical system of Arthur Schopenhauer and the influence he had on Nietzsche. In the introduction to Schopenhauer’s second volume of *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Christopher Janaway discusses some of the central doctrines of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, including “vehement atheism,” “refusal of optimism,” and an “account of human beings as living, striving parts of nature, whose own existence [is] problematic to themselves.” Schopenhauer is known as the philosopher of pessimism, as “his central concept of *the Will (der Wille)* leads him to regard human beings as striving irrationally and suffering in a world that has no purpose” (xxxiii). In short, he sees life as a punishment that entails endless and inevitable suffering, motivated in the universe and imposed upon human beings by the Will. This description of the Will and the torment and misery it inflicts obviously sounds a lot like the pessimistic wisdom Nietzsche attributes to Silenus (and also like the concept of cruelty that Artaud employs to define his theatrical system). After all, as Geuss reminds us, Nietzsche had “an enthusiasm for the philosophical pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer,” who insisted that “the very nature of the universe precluded the possibility of any continuing human happiness. The best we could hope for, Schopenhauer argued, was momentary respite from the continual flux of willing and frustration through the contemplation of art” (vii). Once again, we see a central aspect of Schopenhauer’s philosophy and worldview that will come to play an important role in Nietzsche’s work: a reverence and deep appreciation for the healing power of art. However, Nietzsche did not want to settle for an overwhelmingly pessimistic outlook on human life and strove tirelessly to discover a philosophical justification for shameless life-affirmation. As Geuss

writes, Nietzsche “had eventually overcome [this] youthful enthusiasm” and had “[exchanged] Schopenhauerian pessimism for a fully affirmative attitude towards life” (viii). The beginnings of this “fully affirmative attitude” are embodied by Nietzsche’s resurrection of Dionysos in *The Birth of Tragedy* – a figure that forces us to, first, confront the cruel nature of life and then to accept and become empowered by our own humanity. Where Schopenhauer’s philosophical convictions come from a place of pessimism and “[saying] *No* to life” (*er [sagte] zum Leben... Nein*, GM, 5, 211),<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche’s come from a place of life-affirmation, of seeking an effective way, as Geuss says, to “remedy the ills of modern society” (x). To conclude this idea, Geuss leaves us with the following thoughts: “To admit the existence of a life-enhancing form of pessimism (if such a form did exist) would seem to mean at least that ‘pessimism’ must be a much more highly ambiguous phenomenon than had previously been thought.” Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche thinks that “what is finally significant in philosophy is whether or not it contributes to an affirmation of this world” (xxvi). This conclusion certainly has an interesting impact on our inquiry into the connection between Nietzsche and Artaud. Although Artaud borrows elements of the Dionysian as Nietzsche describes them in *The Birth of Tragedy* for his own theatrical system, it seems Artaud shares a worldview in some ways more akin to Schopenhauer’s, because his theory stops short of reaching the stage of passionate life-affirmation that we see so clearly in Nietzsche’s work.

Before reaching a point at which we can assess where Artaud seems to reject elements of the Dionysian, we first have to develop a deeper understanding of how the Dionysian manifests in and influences the theatre of cruelty. In focusing even more intently on the Dionysian and the Dionysiac artist that Nietzsche describes in the aforementioned essay, “The Dionysiac Worldview,” we are introduced to ideas about art and its relationship with truth/reality that

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<sup>16</sup> GM = *On the Genealogy of Morality*

clearly manifest themselves in Artaud's theatre theory. First, Nietzsche refers to the Dionysiac artist as someone who "presents the essence of everything that appears in a way that is immediately intelligible" (*der dionysische Künstler [wird] das Wesen des Erscheinenden unmittelbar verständlich darlegen*) because "he has command over the chaos of the Will before it has assumed individual shape, and from it he can bring a new world into being at each creative moment, but also the old world with which we are already familiar as a phenomenon" (*er gebietet ja über das Chaos des noch nicht Gestalt gewordenen Willens und kann aus ihm in jedem schöpferischen Moment eine neue Welt, aber auch die alte, als Erscheinung bekannte erschaffen*, DW 1, 122). This explanation of Dionysian artistic production seems directly applicable to Artaud's project; Artaud, appealing to the expression of essences and underlying truths, seeks to develop a new theatrical stage language that bypasses the intellectual faculties of the spectator and communicates with him in a more direct/immediate way. Additionally, the Dionysiac artist, or, in Artaud's case, the practitioner of pure theatre, has found a way to access the Will – consisting of the hidden forces that regulate life – and render it communicable while it is still flexible and undefined, which directly contributes to the fabrication of new, creative worlds that are once again based on and related to the forces of the ancient world, compelling us to recognize our reality. Artaud echoes Nietzsche's idea that the only possibility to reopen these direct/immediate lines of communication is via submission to the primordial unity, that which "binds individual creatures together again" (*schließt die Einzelwesen wieder aneinander*, DW 1, 122), as the spectator must relinquish her individual subjectivity and become absorbed by the superior forces in control. In Nietzsche's view, at least in the context of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the *principium individuationis* (or, simply, individuation/individual subjectivity) is equal to "a perpetual state of weakness of the Will" (*das principium individuationis [erscheint] gleichsam*

*als andauernder Schwächezustand des Willens*, DW 1, 123), and it is only by connecting with the primordial unity that we can strengthen ourselves, communally and with nature, enough to learn the truth. Further, as we have seen in the theatre of cruelty, this Dionysian intoxication achieved by depersonalization and by “[destroying] the usual barriers and limits of existence” (*die Verzückung des dionysischen Zustandes mit seiner Vernichtung der gewöhnlichen Schranken und Grenzen des Daseins*, DW 3, 129) entails a recognition of suffering. According to Nietzsche, art not only addresses but celebrates this recognition, as Dionysos keeps Silenus’s pessimistic wisdom present in a celebration of life. Even though this aspect of celebration and affirmation seems to be the point at which Artaud begins rejecting the additional layers to the Dionysian, there are still crucial overlaps in the idea of employing the Dionysian to address and confront the inevitable suffering that characterizes life. According to Nietzsche, “In the consciousness that follows his awakening from intoxication he sees the terrible and absurd aspects of human existence wherever he looks; it disgusts him. Now he understands the wisdom of the wood-god” (*In der Bewußtheit des Erwachens vom Rausche sieht er überall das Entsetzliche oder Absurde des Menschenseins: es ekelt ihn. Jetzt versteht er die Weisheit des Waldgottes*, DW 3, 130). In this sense, it seems that Dionysos “transmits” cruelty, forcing humans/the spectator to recognize the inherent absurdity and dark reality of life. In fact, Nietzsche elaborates on how the presence of Dionysos changed artistic production in a way that led directly to this crucial recognition. He explains that, “the new art-world... rested on a different view of the gods and the world than the older art world of beautiful semblance,” which was both a result and catalyst of the “recognition of the terrors and absurdities of existence, of the disturbed order and the unreasonable but planned nature of events, indeed the most enormous suffering throughout the whole of nature...” (*die Erkenntniß der Schrecken und Absurditäten des*

*Daseins, der gestörten Ordnung und der unvernünftigen Planmäßigkeit, überhaupt des ungeheuersten Leidens in der ganzen Natur*, DW 3, 131). And even further, “All that is real is dissolved in semblance, and behind it the unified nature of the Will manifests itself, completely cloaked in the glory of wisdom and truth and in blinding radiance” (*Alles Wirkliche löst sich in Schein auf, und hinter ihm thut sich die einheitliche Willensnatur kund, ganz in die Glorie der Weisheit und Wahrheit, in blendenden Glanz gehüllt*, DW 3, 133). Although Artaud probably would not refer to the cruel reality of existence as something to be glorified or that possesses “blinding radiance” (because, again, Artaud does not accept the fervent anti-pessimistic element of affirmation in Nietzsche’s conception of Dionysos), there are some important parallels between his argument and Nietzsche’s argument in terms of art and, even more significantly, the idea of “semblance.” Here, we can infer the term “semblance” to be synonymous with the concept of mimesis as imitation or representation. Allowing the Dionysian spirit to penetrate the processes of artistic production ensures the destruction of mere imitation or representation of a subject by means of realism. Rather than rendering mere semblances, an artist influenced by the Dionysian will discover the underlying truth (that which is “dissolved in semblance” or in appearances), and then be able to communicate that truth in a way that appeals directly to the human psyche. This multi-layered concept of semblance is expanded upon a little bit later as Nietzsche discusses the relationship between “symbol” and “semblance.” In artistic/theatrical production, even in movements characterized by anti-realism, there must be some element of semblance in the sense that something has to be drawn, painted, performed, etc. to refer back to something else, even if it is via more abstract or suggestive techniques (as opposed to being purely and intuitively representative). This brings up an important point that will become even more central as we move through a comparison of Nietzsche’s and Artaud’s ideas about art and

theatre: although the Dionysian provides access to the truth, the role of the Apollonian in artistic production cannot be erased or ignored. This is the nature of the craft, as the concept/idea/subject/truth in question does have to be rendered communicable on some level. Even if the intention is not to *create* art, but rather to reveal it as the double of an underlying truth, the process of *rendering* is inevitable. We can choose means that favor one type of communication over another (for example, gesture over spoken language) in an effort to make the form of communication more immediate, immanent, Dionysian; however, the paradox persists in that we cannot do away with rendering/communicating/producing on some level, even on the most primitive one. This is why Nietzsche equates semblance with *medium* and symbol with *meaning*, explaining that understanding a symbol (via some form of semblance) means we “understand the reality it alludes to” (*wir [...] verstehen das damit angedeutete Wirkliche*, DW 4, 135). In other words, Nietzsche sees semblances or appearances (*der Schein*) as copies of the Will, or of individual elements within the Will, as correspondents to a specific purpose. The Dionysian artist should ask, “By what symbol are the stirrings of the Will itself conveyed to us?” (*unter welchem Symbol werden uns die Regungen des Willens selbst zum Verständniß mitgeteilt?*, DW 4, 135). This seems to be precisely the question that Artaud seeks to answer with the creation of a new stage language for the theatre of cruelty. He even uses similar language by insisting that we have to learn to elevate gestures, sounds, and objects (employed in the right combinations) to the status of “signs” so that the stage becomes filled with symbols that communicate more directly with the spectator (*les objets ordinaires, ou même le corps humains, élevés à la dignité de signes... pour composer sur la scène des symboles précis et lisibles directement*, 145). Nietzsche’s reverence for music as the highest form of art and the best “stage language,” as he found it the least representative and the most expressive in terms of

communicating with and about the Will, reverberates throughout Artaud's work. It reveals a recognition of the limits of language as an effective means of expressing concepts, specifically with regard to performance art. Artaud's prioritizing of gesture and sound mirrors Nietzsche's prioritizing of music and is even described using very similar language. Nietzsche writes that "the language of gesture consists of generally intelligible symbols" (*die Geberdensprache besteht aus allgemein verständlichen Symbolen*, DW 4, 134) and that "there is a sound parallel to every gesture; but its intensification to pure musical sound can only be achieved through the intoxication of feeling" (*jeder Geberde [ist] ein Ton parallel: zum reinen Klange ihn zu steigern gelingt nur dem Rausche des Gefühls*, DW 4, 137). Artaud relies less heavily on music (although music is still an important element in his theory), but he essentially seeks the same result in building his new stage language, searching for the most effective combinations of sounds and gestures to be read by the spectator as divine symbols as well as lead the spectator to abandon her individual subjectivity to the intoxicating atmosphere of the spectacle. Nietzsche actually ends this essay by referring once again to this crucial component of this Dionysian intoxication and de-individuation in artistic production. He writes,

Im dionysischen Dithyrambus aber wird der dionysische Schwärmer zur höchsten Steigerung aller seiner symbolischen Vermögen gereizt: etwas Nie-empfundenes drängt sich zur Äußerung, die Vernichtung der Individuatio, das Einssein im Genius der Gattung, ja der Natur. Jetzt soll sich das Wesen der Natur ausdrücken: eine neue Welt der Symbole ist nöthig, die begleitenden Vorstellungen kommen in Bildern eines gesteigerten Menschenwesens zum Symbol, sie werden mit der höchsten physischen Energie durch die ganze leibliche Symbolik, durch die Tanzgeberde dargestellt. Aber auch die Welt des Willens verlangt einen unerhörten symbolischen Ausdruck, die Gewalten der Harmonie der Dynamik der Rhythmik wachsen plötzlich ungestüm. [...] Um diese Gesamtentfesselung aller symbolischen Kräfte zu fassen, gehört dieselbe Steigerung des Wesens, die sie schuf: der dithyrambische Dionysosdiener wird nur von Seinesgleichen verstanden...<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "In the Dionysiac dithyramb the Dionysiac enthusiast is stimulated to the utmost intensity of all his symbolic powers; something never felt before demands to be expressed: the annihilation of *individuatio*, one-ness in the genius of the species, indeed of nature. Now the essence of nature is to be expressed; a new world of symbols is needed; the accompanying representations acquire a symbol in the images of an intensified human being; they are represented with supreme physical energy by the whole symbolism of the body, in the gesture of dance. But the world of the Will, too, demands to be expressed symbolically in an unheard-of manner, the powers of harmony, dynamics, and rhythm suddenly grow tempestuously. [...] To grasp this complete unleashing of all

In this conclusion, Nietzsche summarizes the same ideas about art that Artaud will apply to his theatre theory in an attempt to reform theatrical production and the modern conceptualization of the stage. By employing images, gesture, dance, and rhythm, and by combining them harmoniously to form intelligible symbols, we can put ourselves in communication with the underlying energies and essences of the truths we are trying to access in our artistic endeavors. And, most importantly, we have to allow ourselves a space of depersonalization and submission to, first, become subsumed by and then to understand the Dionysian forces at play in the production of pure art/theatre.

But Dionysos actually has an opponent beyond the one found in his necessary opposite (Apollo), and this other opponent is actually purely destructive to the Dionysian cause. Nietzsche accuses “tragic” writer Euripides of enabling rational thought – via the teachings of Socrates – to infiltrate and dismantle the fragile dualism of tragedy. As Geuss puts it: “Tragedy consoles us and seduces us to continue to live, but the synthesis it represents is a fragile one” (xi). Reinhold Grimm also explains the Socrates-induced collapse of tragedy in his article “Dionysos and Socrates: Nietzsche and the Concept of a New Political Theatre.” He writes:

The notions really opposed to each other in *The Birth of Tragedy* are not, as almost everybody holds, the Apollonian vs. the Dionysian, but the Dionysian – the decisive force in tragedy, according to Nietzsche – vs. the Socratic. Socrates and his philosophy, as they manifest themselves in the plays of Euripides, served to destroy Greek tragedy, and thus the finest work of art ever created. (157)

And, indeed, we see that Nietzsche laments this unfortunate destruction in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

Dionysus war bereits von der tragischen Bühne verscheucht und zwar durch eine aus Euripides redende dämonische Macht. Auch Euripides war in gewissem Sinne nur Maske: die Gottheit, die aus ihm redete, war nicht Dionysus, auch nicht Apollo, sondern ein ganz neugeborner Dämon, genannt Sokrates. Dies ist

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symbolic energies, the same intensification of the essence which created them is needed; the servant of Dionysos can be understood only by those who are like him...” (DW 4, 138)

der neue Gegensatz: das Dionysische und das Sokratische, und das Kunstwerk der griechischen Tragödie ging an ihm zu Grunde... Der herrlichste Tempel liegt in Trümmern...<sup>18</sup>

And further:

Sokrates aber war jener zweite Zuschauer, der die ältere Tragödie nicht begriff und deshalb nicht achtete; mit ihm im Bunde wagte Euripides, der Herold eines neuen Kunstschaffens zu sein. Wenn an diesem die ältere Tragödie zu Grunde ging, so ist also der ästhetische Sokratismus das mörderische Princip: insofern aber der Kampf gegen das Dionysische der älteren Kunst gerichtet war, erkennen wir in Sokrates den Gegner des Dionysus...<sup>19</sup>

Needless to say, Nietzsche criticizes “that bold application of reason” (*jen[e] verwegen[e] Verständigkeit*, BT 12, 62) to pure artistic pursuits, namely, to tragedy, because it wholly defeats the purpose of art. Without the eternal balance upon which artistic production depends – and especially without the Dionysian element – we lose our portal to access the primordial unity, learn the pessimistic truth that is the foundation of our lives, and not only accept but celebrate our imperfect place in the universe and our human condition. Instead, in Socratic “art,” or what Nietzsche refers to as *aesthetic Socratism*, “In order to be beautiful, everything must be reasonable,” and “only he who knows is virtuous.” Nietzsche explains that “with this canon in his hand Euripides measured every single element – language, characters, dramatic construction, choral music – and rectified it in accordance with this principle” (*mit diesem Kanon in der Hand maass Euripides alles Einzelne und rectificirte es gemäss diesem Princip: die Sprache, die Charaktere, den dramaturgischen Aufbau, die Chormusik*, BT 12, 62). Furthermore, Nietzsche’s critique of Euripides’ “non-Dionysiac... and un-artistic” (*undionysische... unkünstlerische*, BT 12, 62) system sounds a lot like Artaud’s critique of Shakespeare, Racine, and all

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<sup>18</sup> “Dionysos had been chased from the tragic stage, and, what is more, by a daemonic power speaking out of the mouth of Euripides. In a certain sense Euripides, too, was merely a mask; the deity who spoke out of him was not Dionysos, nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn daemon called *Socrates*. This is the new opposition: the Dionysiac versus the Socratic, and the work of art that once was Greek tragedy was destroyed by it... The most glorious temple lies in ruins.” (BT 12, 60)

<sup>19</sup> “Socrates, however, was that *second spectator* who did not understand the older tragedy and therefore did not respect it; in league with Socrates, Euripides dared to be the herald of a new kind of artistic creation. If this caused the older tragedy to perish, then aesthetic Socratism is the murderous principle; but insofar as the fight was directed against the Dionysiac nature of the older art, we may identify Socrates as the opponent of Dionysos...” (BT 12, 64)

modern/Western theatre traditions that prioritize language/dialogue and promote psychological realism. Just as Artaud came to detest what he viewed as dialogue-based perversions of pure theatre driven by examining the psychological motivations of individual characters, Nietzsche had an extreme distaste for theatre based on the following Socratic statements: “‘virtue is knowledge; sin is only committed out of ignorance; the virtuous man is a happy man.’” Nietzsche claims that “in these three basic forms of optimism lies the death of tragedy. For the virtuous hero must now be a dialectician; there must now be a necessary, visible connection between virtue and knowledge, faith and morality” (*in diesen drei Grundformen des Optimismus liegt der Tod der Tragödie. Denn jetzt muss der tugendhafte Held Dialektiker sein, jetzt muss zwischen Tugend und Wissen, Glaube und Moral ein nothwendiger sichtbarer Verband sein*, BT 14, 70). In both Nietzsche’s and Artaud’s view of a theatre contaminated by the application of rationality, we see a parallel criticism of the need for a dogmatic moral-to-the-story and the reliance on logical reasons for what happens. Geuss summarizes Nietzsche’s disagreement with these Socratic principles by referencing their catastrophic effects on humanity. He says that “Socratic rationalism upsets the delicate balance on which tragedy depends, by encouraging people not to strive for wisdom in the face of the necessary unsatisfactoriness of human life, but to attempt to use knowledge to get control of their fate,” which, in turn, leads to the problems modern humans experience today; “‘modern culture’ arises in direct continuity out of such Socratism” (xii). This idea of ‘modern culture’ – of being out of touch with nature, reality, and the underlying superior, primal forces that regulate it all – is obviously something we see Artaud criticize as well. His whole theory outlining pure theatrical practice seems to be founded on such a criticism. Perhaps this explains, then, why Artaud seems drawn to certain aspects of Nietzsche’s interpretation of the Dionysian, applying them to his theatre of cruelty as a way to

combat these issues in modern culture, born out of Socratism. In fact, Grimm observes this link as well, noting that both Nietzsche and Artaud evoke concepts meant to resist and fight back against the rationality and optimism that have overtaken modern culture and especially art.

Grimm writes,

The Dionysian, at any rate, is associated by Nietzsche with frenzy, ecstasy, and cruelty as well as an irrational, indeed mystical union of actors and spectators alike, *i.e.*, with the Artaudian concept of theatre as a 'plague' and a communal 'festival' – whereas the Socratic is defined by him as a scientific attitude, as theory and criticism rooted in a rational worldview, and as the optimistic belief in man's perfectibility, in progress, and social change. (158)

Thus, Nietzsche and Artaud both look to the state of art/theatre as evidence that something has gone wrong in modern society and culture, and they employ similar (if not in some ways identical) concepts in an attempt to remedy this problem and get humans back on track.

This link between Nietzsche's writings about ancient theatre and Artaud's theory pushing for the development of a new theatre is deepened by their clear agreement on the prioritization of the body, including instinct and nature, over the intellect. To be sure, Nietzsche believes that the mind and body are intimately connected and, further, that the mind is not superior to the body in any way. This belief manifests itself more fully throughout Nietzsche's body of work, especially in his critique of Christianity and of monotheistic religions more generally, but it begins by taking a rather prominent position in his inaugural work and adding a new dimension to his relentless criticism of Socrates.<sup>20</sup> Artaud writes in *The Theatre and Its Double* that the body is

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<sup>20</sup> In 1886, Nietzsche made an addition to *The Birth of Tragedy*, including "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" ("Versuch einer Selbstkritik") at the beginning of the text. This small essay and self-critique was used to reframe some important elements of this inaugural text in his larger project that had developed over the course of his career as a philosophical writer. He explains in detail in this short text how his distaste for Christianity and especially Christian morality influenced his lifelong goal of philosophical life-affirmation. He writes, "Hinter einer derartigen Denk- und Werthungsweise, welche kunstfeindlich sein muss, so lange sie irgendwie ächt ist, empfang ich von jeher auch das Lebensfeindliche, den ingrimmigen rachsüchtigen Widerwillen gegen das Leben selbst: denn alles Leben ruht auf Schein, Kunst, Täuschung, Optik, Nothwendigkeit des Perspektivischen und des Irrthums. Christenthum war von Anfang an, wesentlich und gründlich, Ekel und Ueberdruß des Lebens am Leben, welcher sich unter dem Glauben an ein „anderes“ oder „besseres“ Leben nur verkleidete, nur versteckte, nur aufputzte. Der Hass auf die „Welt“, der Fluch auf die Affekte, die Furcht vor der Schönheit und Sinnlichkeit, ein Jenseits, erfunden, um das Diesseits besser zu verleumden, im Grunde ein Verlangen in's Nichts, an's Ende, in's Ausruhen, hin zum „Sabbat der Sabbate“ — dies Alles dünkte mich, ebenso wie der unbedingte Wille des

not separated from the mind/spirit, and the senses are not separated from intelligence/intellect (*on ne sépare pas le corps de l'esprit, ni les sens de l'intelligence*, 134-5), and, indeed, we see this same idea taking on a central role in *The Birth of Tragedy* and beyond in Nietzsche's work. One of Nietzsche's strongest attacks on Socrates was due to Socrates' lack of respect for the body and, especially, for natural instinct. Socrates criticizes those who perform tasks based on instinct rather than on acquired knowledge. Nietzsche observes:

'Nur aus Instinct': mit diesem Ausdruck berühren wir Herz und Mittelpunkt der sokratischen Tendenz. Mit ihm verurtheilt der Sokratismus eben so die bestehende Kunst wie die bestehende Ethik: wohin er seine prüfenden Blicke richtet, sieht er den Mangel der Einsicht und die Macht des Wahns und schliesst aus diesem Mangel auf die innerliche Verkehrtheit und Verwerflichkeit des Vorhandenen. Von diesem einen Punkte aus glaubte Sokrates das Dasein corrigieren zu müssen: er, der Einzelne, tritt mit der Miene der Nichtachtung und der Ueberlegenheit, als der Vorläufer einer ganz anders gearteten Cultur, Kunst und Moral, in eine Welt hinein, deren Zipfel mit Ehrfurcht zu erhaschen wir uns zum grössten Glücke rechnen würden.<sup>21</sup>

And, what's more, Nietzsche remarks (or perhaps jests) that this Socratic tendency is a direct result of an abnormality within Socrates' biological/physiological makeup. Whereas most people

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Christenthums, nur moralische Werthe gelten zu lassen, immer wie die gefährlichste und unheimlichste Form aller möglichen Formen eines „Willens zum Untergang“, zum Mindesten ein Zeichen tiefster Erkrankung, Müdigkeit, Missmuthigkeit, Erschöpfung, Verarmung an Leben, — denn vor der Moral (in Sonderheit christlichen, das heisst unbedingten Moral) muss das Leben beständig und unvermeidlich Unrecht bekommen, weil Leben etwas essentiell Unmoralisches ist, — muss endlich das Leben, erdrückt unter dem Gewichte der Verachtung und des ewigen Nein's, als begehrens-unwürdig, als unwerth an sich empfunden werden.” And in translation: “Behind this way of thinking and evaluating, which is bound to be hostile to art if it is at all genuine, I had always felt its hostility to life, a furious, vengeful enmity towards life itself; for all life rests on semblance, art, deception, prismatic effects, the necessity of perspectivism and error. From the very outset Christianity was essentially and pervasively the feeling of disgust and weariness which life felt for life, a feeling which merely disguised, hid and decked itself out in its belief in ‘another’ or ‘better’ life. Hatred of the ‘world’, a curse on the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a Beyond, invented in order better to defame the Here-and-Now, fundamentally a desire for nothingness, for the end, for rest, for the ‘Sabbath of Sabbaths’ - all this, together with the determination of Christianity to sanction only moral values, seemed to be the most dangerous and uncanny of all possible forms of a ‘will to decline’, at the very least a sign of the most profound sickness, tiredness, distemper, exhaustion, impoverishment of life - for before the court of morality (especially Christian, which is to say unconditional, morality) life must constantly and inevitably be proved wrong because life is essentially something amoral; life must eventually, crushed by the weight of contempt and the eternal ‘no!’, be felt to be inherently unworthy, undeserving of our desire” (SC 5, 9).

<sup>21</sup> “‘Only by instinct’: the phrase goes to the heart and center of the Socratic tendency. With these words Socratism condemns existing art and existing ethics in equal measure; wherever it directs its probing gaze, it sees a lack of insight and the power of delusion, and it concludes from this lack of what exists is inwardly wrong and objectionable. Socrates believed that he was obliged to correct existence, starting from this single point; he, the individual, the forerunner of a completely different culture, art, and morality, steps with a look of disrespect and superiority into a world where we would count ourselves supremely happy if we could even touch the hem of its cloak in awe.” (BT 13, 66)

(or at least creatively productive ones) rely on and listen to instinct – which would be comprised of the internal and inexplicable “voices,” gut-feelings, and compulsions we experience that not only preserve life but aid in decision-making – Socrates has subsisted by tuning out his instinct and becoming a slave to fallible consciousness and intellect. Nietzsche writes, “Whereas in the case of all productive people instinct is precisely the creative-affirmation force and consciousness makes critical and warning gestures, in the case of Socrates, by contrast, instinct becomes the critic and consciousness the creator – a true monstrosity *per defectum!*” (*Während doch bei allen productiven Menschen der Instinct gerade die schöpferisch-affirmative Kraft ist, und das Bewusstsein kritisch und abmahnend sich gebärdet: wird bei Sokrates der Instinct zum Kritiker, das Bewusstsein zum Schöpfer — eine wahre Monstrosität per defectum!*, BT 13, 66). In this instance, Nietzsche’s argument against Socrates and in favor of instinct comes from his belief that instinct is older, wiser, in a sense, more developed, and thus more attuned to nature and the superior forces regulating it. In comparison, consciousness is newer, flawed, often unreliable, and deceptive, and as such, it can only be relied on to caution us to re-evaluate if our instinct seems to be leading us astray. With these critiques, Nietzsche saves the body from Socratic scrutiny, reminding humans that their bodies and the internal, perhaps even primal instincts that come with it are to be embraced rather than shamed. Divine intoxication and submission to the primordial unity as facilitated by the Dionysian in Greek tragedy is pleasurable for this very reason; the Dionysian transports us to a place in which our bodies and the signals we receive from them are returned to a natural, communal state where they are to be honored and respected. Artaud’s body-focused stage language (in which gesture, movement, sound, and voice dominate over the spoken word) theatricalizes this Nietzschean idea, emphasizing the body over the intellect as the vehicle for the transmission and communication of primal, eternal, immanent,

universal truths. Essif actually unknowingly supports this connection between Artaud and the Dionysian in his analysis of Artaud's stage language by claiming that "Artaud's metaphysical vision of theatre endowed the human body with new power" (63) and that Artaud saw "the mind as the body itself" (179). Even more importantly, Essif submits that "the body on Artaud's stage represents not so much an exterior as an interior, not so much an expressive anatomy as a psychic space," and, furthermore, that "psychological human 'texts' on stage were to yield to the construction of an image of body as an empty human icon" (63). We can see from these interpretations that Artaud's stage language prioritizes movement and gesture (realms of the body) as a way to more effectively penetrate the mind and provide a pathway (via depersonalization and submission to the spectacle) to that psychic space, enabling the spectator to communicate with the ancient energies and essences theatre of cruelty strives to channel. Essif concludes this idea by relating Artaud's concept of artistic meaning to an extremely Dionysian/Nietzschean idea: "Artaud resists referentiality... For Artaud, artistic meaning is life itself; organically produced by the body-mind's symbiotic relationship with the primal world, it is not so much meaning as a vital awareness" (174). In this conclusion, we see a clear parallel between Nietzsche's and Artaud's motivations for championing the body and using or referring to the theatre to restore its power. The human body, in all its natural, primal glory, is intimately connected to the mind because the mind is simply a part of the body, just like any other organ. But the mind is by no means the ruling feature of our bodies, especially when dealing with creative pursuits that lead to the recognition of a universal human condition. Important truths can therefore be more effectively communicated by appealing to the stronger and more-developed features of our bodies – the instinctual, "psychic," and communal – and bypassing the intellect. However, as previously stated, Nietzsche's prioritization of the body and instinct ultimately leads

to an affirmation of life and the human condition, whereas Artaud's seems limited to serving his own theatre system. Artaud certainly endeavors with his theatrical practice to develop a stage language that is more effective in communicating immanent and eternal truths about the cruelty underscoring our lives, and he employs some elements of the Dionysian in order to do so, but he does not challenge the pessimistic implications of his theory with any notion of affirming life and the human condition. Artaud simply sees the latter as limiting our knowledge of the former, and his theatre of cruelty seeks to force us to confront our condition, perhaps even to accept it, but absolutely never to enjoy or appreciate it.

*Pt. 2: Applying Ideas from Key Secondary Literature*

As previously stated, there is no lack of scholarship that addresses this important connection between Artaud and Nietzsche. In just about any monograph on Artaud, there is at least a note to acknowledge the most important points of overlap and to suggest that Artaud was inspired by Nietzsche's ideas, particularly (and not surprisingly) those that involved a discussion of theatrical practice. Some writers and philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida in an essay from *L'Écriture et la différence* and Camille Dumoulié in his book *Nietzsche et Artaud*, concentrate more intently or even exclusively on the relationship between Artaud and Nietzsche. Certainly, these arguments will make the case for how Artaud seems to have been heavily influenced by Nietzsche's writings about ancient theatrical practice in developing his own theatre theory, but there are often even more complex interpretations of the intertextuality at play. There are often instances in which Artaud is credited with illuminating deeper aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy, creating an actual dialogue between texts that are separated by over sixty years. For example, in *Nietzsche et Artaud*, Dumoulié begins by making the case there is a certain lineage that links

them and their perspectives. According to Dumoulié, Nietzsche possesses the ability to look directly into the soul of humanity, decipher and break down human nature, and see the simple truth hidden behind the facades we put forth (*ce regard à déshabiller l'âme... à mettre à nu le corps de l'homme*), and Artaud inherited this from him, which proves how the former profoundly influenced the latter (*Artaud l'a hérité de lui... une marque sûre de parenté, 7-8*). Dumoulié elaborates on these connections with the following description:

C'est plutôt une vision de l'homme et du monde, une réflexion sur notre civilisation considérée comme celle de la décadence, un refus de la métaphysique et de l'ontologie traditionnelles, de la religion et de la morale, la volonté de trouver dans l'art, et dans le théâtre en particulier, le remède à nos maux, c'est enfin une pratique originale de l'écriture, que sont entre Artaud et Nietzsche des points de convergence. (10)

According to Dumoulié, then, Artaud and Nietzsche share a radical criticism of modern society, including those cultural aspects such as religion or morality that define the most important values in (specifically Western) society. Additionally, they both look to art and especially theatre to find a cure for the evil, cultural sickness that plagues us, and they both communicate their findings through an original and provocative style of writing. Further, because Dumoulié recognizes that Nietzsche and Artaud were seeking to answer the same questions and provide solutions to the same problems in the modern world, he is able to begin an analysis of the relationship between them from a point of comparison that invokes their seemingly kindred spirits. Dumoulié's central argument shapes out to assert that Nietzsche and Artaud share a unique conception of cruelty so much so that Artaud actually illuminates the thematic of cruelty present in Nietzsche's philosophy (*Artaud illumine la thématique de la cruauté dans la philosophie de Nietzsche, 17*), which implies that Artaud's writings can actually be used a tool for understanding Nietzsche.

Although I can clearly appreciate this approach – as it resembles mine from a different angle – I do not fully accept Dumoulié's definition of “cruelty” with respect to how he identifies

it in Artaud and especially in Nietzsche.<sup>22</sup> Dumoulié interprets “cruelty” as something inherent to human nature, influencing humans to exhibit cruel and savage behavior (*la bestialité*, 12), rather than as a property of life and of the superior forces that regulate it. This means that, in Dumoulié’s view, Artaud and Nietzsche both create a system based on the idea that humans are innately flawed and even evil. He then expands upon this idea: “la cruauté, comme métaphore de la vie, souligne l’impossibilité de l’homme à être en accord avec le monde et avec lui-même. Si la vie est cruauté, c’est que dans sa volonté (de puissance), dans la rigueur de son désir, l’homme veut ce qui le blesse” (27). In this description, Dumoulié does connect the concept of cruelty to life; however, he draws the conclusion that human beings are condemned to be out of sync with the world around them, and they subsequently respond to this feeling of being out of control by hyperfocusing their will on inflicting harm upon themselves. I find Dumoulié’s idea to be an unnecessary over-complication of Artaud’s conceptualization of cruelty, and, further, I find it to be completely contrary to anything Nietzsche intended with his criticisms of the modern human. As Dumoulié points out, Artaud and Nietzsche both maintained that there needed to be a reconciliation between nature and culture (*la reconciliation entre la nature et la culture*, 28). Both of these figures were critical of modern society largely because of a lack of recognition and even a denial of a human beings’ essential connection to nature and natural forces. Therefore, if Nietzsche and Artaud found it truly impossible for humans to be in sync with nature and combat

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<sup>22</sup> We do see a dimension of cruelty in *The Birth of Tragedy* that refers to why watching a piece of tragic theatre is enjoyable for the spectator. Geuss explains in his introduction that we appreciate watching other people struggle and suffer through often extraordinary circumstances (rather than experiencing it ourselves) because it allows us to “gain insight into the fundamental human condition” (xviii). Of course, the knowledge that we gain from watching Oedipus or someone of the like suffer cannot save us from the fate Silenus has prescribed for us, so the enjoyment we get from watching these tragic scenarios could perhaps be viewed as masochistic. Nietzsche returns to this idea in *Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse)*, section 229, even stating that “what constitutes the painful delight in tragedy is cruelty” (*was die schmerzliche Wollust der Tragödie ausmacht, ist Grausamkeit*), applying the same idea (concerning this relationship between spectator and spectacle) beyond the stage and to history, class, and culture. But the implication that Nietzsche, or Artaud for that matter, sees humans (rather than life itself) as inherently cruel seems unjustified.

the modernity-induced discord between them, they would not be writing essays and books suggesting solutions to this problem. Finally, there is no mention in *The Theatre and Its Double*, as far as I can tell, of “human nature,” and certainly not that human beings are cruel by nature. If anything, Artaud suggests humans are victims of an innately cruel world, and the point of the theatrical system he proposes is to give them a means to confront this fact. In Nietzsche’s case, much of his critique of universalizing, monotheistic religions (namely, Christianity) and of optimistic Socratic values stems from his vehement disagreement with the notion that humans are innately “sinful” or flawed. He argues passionately against this accusation; in fact, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he insists that “one also finds a profound *delusion*” (*eine tiefsinnige Wahnvorstellung*) which occurred for the first time in Socrates. This “delusion” consisted of “the imperturbable belief that thought, as it follows the thread of causality, reaches down into the deepest abysses of being, and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of correcting it” (*jener unerschütterliche Glaube, dass das Denken, an dem Leitfaden der Causalität, bis in die tiefsten Abgründe des Seins reiche, und dass das Denken das Sein nicht nur zu erkennen, sondern sogar zu corrigieren im Stande sei*, BT 15, 73). In other words, there is nothing in human existence that needs to be corrected. The spirit that runs through Nietzsche’s entire body of work is simultaneously a critique of humanity’s weaknesses and a celebration of the human condition, as his major goal is to dissolve any feelings of shame associated with being a flawed, imperfect human being and, from a position of self-acceptance, encourage us to work on improving and challenging ourselves as individuals. This is also the point in which we notice a divergence between the writings and supporting worldviews of the two figures in question, and, despite an interpretation of Nietzschean and Artaudian “cruelty” which might suggest otherwise, Dumoulié recognizes and discusses this crucial point of contrast as well. He remarks that the

ecstasy associated with submission to the Dionysian is actually a source of pleasure (*le sentiment de l'extase dionysiaque est une source de plaisir*, 53), and he contrasts this with the theatre of cruelty, which promotes a contraction of a type of sickness in the spectator that ruins her social body and thrusts her into ideas of violence (*tous les effets d'une maladie qui gangrene le corps social et livre l'individu à ses pulsions violentes*, 53). Dumoulié concludes this thought with the following statement: “Tel qu’Artaud l’imagine, le théâtre doit libérer une sorte de tragique à l’était pur et ne saurait donc provoquer ni plaisir, ni jouissance, mais uniquement douleur et malaise... C’est, en effet, contre les spectateurs et malgré eux que se fera le théâtre de la cruauté” (53). And later, he writes, “Ce tragique supérieur et joyeux, Artaud semble ne pas y croire” (73). Essentially, although Dumoulié will go on to discuss the most important philosophical commonalities between the writings of Artaud and Nietzsche, he does recognize that there is a very crucial divergence between their perspectives. He sees that Artaudian theatre is not meant to provoke pleasure or joy, as its true purpose is to cause the spectator to confront the pain and misfortune of living a life that will inevitably inflict cruelty upon her. Unlike in tragic theatre as Nietzsche interprets it, the theatre of cruelty is not developed for the benefit of the spectator, rather, in spite of her. Artaud clearly does not subscribe to the potentially joyous elements of the tragic as Nietzsche so passionately describes them in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Dumoulié thus sees the error in making claims about the perfect alignment of the overall worldviews and goals of Nietzsche and Artaud.

Jacques Derrida, the father of a philosophical reading strategy known as “deconstruction,” also identified crucial overlaps between Nietzsche’s philosophy and Artaud’s theatrical vision in his essay, “The Theatre of Cruelty and the Limit of Representation” (“Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation”), especially concerning their

dissatisfaction with art as mere imitation or representation of everyday life, their parallel critiques of modern western society, and their intense connection to a theatrical space that houses tragedy and the forces of its origins. The goal of deconstruction is, essentially, to dismantle the meaning of a philosophical argument by “[demonstrating] that every philosophical position, irrespective of how coherent it seems on the surface, contains within it the means of its own self-undermining.” In terms of process, “the first move consists in reversing the hierarchy of a particular philosophical opposition, while the second move amounts to a displacement of the very system in which the hierarchy operates.” In focusing on the oppositions – especially between presence and absence – that are at play within a text, Derrida identifies contradictions and thus challenges, destabilizes, and renders meaningless the argument in question.<sup>23</sup> This method is particularly interesting in relation to Artaud because what Artaud does in theorizing the theatre of cruelty is essentially deconstruct the theatre itself and appropriate it for (or, as Artaud would argue, return it to) a purpose that actually annihilates the theatre. Derrida would certainly, then, be fascinated with a theatrical theory that is necessarily self-undermining while at the same time going as far as possible to redefine (or, rather, insist upon the true definition of) the medium itself. This theatre is thus a sister to his own philosophical method. According to Derrida, the theatre of cruelty announces the limit of representation (*énonce la limite de la représentation*) and, simultaneously, aims to avoid being a representation. Instead, it embodies the essence of life, as life itself is impossible to represent: “C’est la vie elle-même en ce qu’elle a d’irreprésentable” (363). It is precisely here, with Artaud’s challenge of representation, where Derrida identifies the first overlaps between his theatrical vision and Nietzsche’s philosophy. He writes,

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<sup>23</sup> Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, “deconstruction.”

Comme Nietzsche – et les affinités ne s’arrêteraient pas là – Artaud veut donc en finir avec le concept *imitatif* de l’art. [...] *L’Art n’est pas l’imitation de la vie, mais la vie est l’imitation d’un principe transcendant avec lequel l’art nous remet en communication.* [...] L’art théâtral doit être le lieu primordial et privilégié de cette destruction de l’imitation : plus qu’un autre il a été marqué par ce travail de représentation totale dans lequel l’affirmation de la vie se laisse dédoubler et creuser par la négation...<sup>24</sup> (344)

Derrida recognizes the first parallel between Nietzsche and Artaud as their shared desire to do away with the concept of art as a practice based merely on the imitation/representation of life. Rather, true art seeks to understand the “transcendent principle” upon which life is based, and it has the power to put human beings back into communication with that essential force. Further, Derrida makes a connection between the physical (and also primordial) space in which Nietzsche and Artaud both identify as the place to destroy art as simple imitation: the theatre. He remarks that the theatre has the capacity to fully represent life, but in a manner that goes beyond mere representation, as the essential can split itself away from the representation and “dig through” the negation that lies in between. This is only possible, of course, if there is a negation, some empty space, which can be created by destroying the representative aspect of an inherently representative medium; not surprisingly, Derrida will go on to identify a limit to this contradictory pursuit (i.e. the “limit of representation”).

Derrida goes on to determine that Nietzsche and Artaud both provide the same warning about the inevitable outcome that will arise (or, rather, has arisen) upon our failure to refresh our modern conceptualization of artistic production. By continuing to present art as nothing more than a representation of life at its shallow surface, we create a society of voyeurs, who look at and consume what they see but have no capacity to critically engage with what’s in front of them: “Enfin un public passif, assis, un public de spectateurs, de consommateurs, de *jouisseurs* –

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<sup>24</sup> Derrida uses the phrase *affirmation de la vie* or “affirmation of life,” but this is not the same thing as the Nietzschean life-affirmation that seeks to philosophically overcome pessimism. In this instance, Derrida uses “affirmation of life” in contrast to “negation,” referring to presence vs. absence (i.e. *where* life is and isn’t in the context of the theatre), *not* to acceptance vs. rejection.

comme disent Nietzsche et Artaud – assistant à un spectacle sans véritable volume ni profondeur, étalé, offert à leur regard de voyeur” (346). Because art serves such an extraordinary purpose for both Nietzsche and Artaud, it should possess all the depth and dynamism that life itself does, which requires challenging modern notions about the purpose and practice of artistic production. This observation forms the basis of Nietzsche and Artaud’s shared criticism of modern/Western culture and theatrical practice and informs their fascination with and admiration of distant and idealized forms of theatre. For Nietzsche, of course, it was the ancient Greeks; for Artaud, the Balinese and other conceptions of oriental theatre. But there are clear parallels between the quality (or at least the perceived quality) of these two theatre traditions as Nietzsche and Artaud describe them. In fact, Derrida summarizes Artaud’s critique of Western theatre with a pointed allusion to *The Birth of Tragedy*. He explains:

L’Occident – et telle serait l’énergie de son essence – n’aurait jamais travaillé qu’à l’effacement de la scène. Car une scène qui ne fait qu’illustrer un discours n’est plus tout à fait une scène... Cela explique que le théâtre classique, aux yeux d’Artaud, ne soit pas simplement l’absence, la négation ou l’oubli du théâtre, ne soit pas un non-théâtre : plutôt une oblitération laissant lire ce qu’elle recouvre, une corruption aussi et une *perversion*, une *séduction*, l’écart d’une aberration dont le sens et la mesure n’apparaissent qu’en amont de la naissance, à la veille de la représentation théâtrale, à l’origine de la tragédie. (347)

Derrida thus evokes the origin (or, interchangeably, *the birth*) of tragedy in explaining that the modern Western theatre is only a perversion of pure theatre. The modern theatre participates in erasing the stage (and thereby destroying theatre) by prioritizing spoken language and focusing on the dramatization of discourse rather than on the mise en scène or any purely theatrical element of the theatre. Of course, Artaud ends up advocating for annihilation of theatre in another sense: retrieving pure theatre from the essence of life and rendering it life’s double effectively destroys the boundary between the spectacle and the superior forces it conjures. Obviously, this type of negation (one that leaves space for the essential to crawl through the forced hole in representation), is not the same as the negation, or, rather, the *obliteration*, as Derrida writes, of pure theatre caused by corrupted theatrical practice in the West. This

obliterated, perverse, corrupted shadow of theatre that exists in modernity no longer has any connection to its root; it has abandoned and forsaken its divine origins and lost its true purpose. Derrida equates the origin of pure theatre to the origin of tragedy, implying that Artaud conceptualizes his theatrical system around Nietzsche's interpretation of *the birth*.

However, even though Artaud conceptualized the theatre in such a way (that is, around the interpretation of tragic theatre that Nietzsche presents in *The Birth of Tragedy*) as to liberate it from what he viewed as the prison of mimesis, we already know that his project is necessarily impossible to bring to fruition. According to Derrida, the theatre of cruelty, which has never been and never will be realized, is its own *limit* in the project of putting an end to mimesis:

La *grammaire* du théâtre de la cruauté... restera toujours l'inaccessible limite d'une représentation qui ne soit pas répétition, d'une *re-présentation* qui soit présence pleine, qui ne porte pas en soi son double comme sa mort, d'un présent qui ne répète pas, c'est-à-dire d'un présent hors du temps, d'un non-présent. (364)

The theatre of cruelty endeavors to become "presence" in and of itself, to be fully immanent and exist on the same plane as truth and reality, to abolish repetition and anything actually performative about the performance, and to mirror life so accurately that the spectacle *becomes* life. But this idea can never be carried out to the end and must inevitably fail. Even if Artaud pushed the theatre as far as it could possibly go, basically deconstructing the theatre itself in the process, there is an unsurpassable limit to this endeavor imposed upon the creator by the very nature of the medium. "Artaud s'est tenu au plus proche de la limite: la possibilité et l'impossibilité du théâtre pur" (366), Derrida writes, and we see that Artaud's theatre is caught in a paradox brought about by its own intentions. It is life (in theory), but it cannot become life (in practice). If the cruelty it seeks to project or transmit must start with its own representation, or repetition of a kind of immanence/presence that cannot be represented, it will remain stuck in the realm of representation and repetition, even if it stretches itself further away than any other theatrical space has allowed it to:

Le théâtre comme répétition de ce qui ne se répète pas, le théâtre comme répétition originaire de la différence dans le conflit des forces où *le mal est la loi permanente, et ce qui est bien est un effort et déjà une cruauté surajoutée à l'autre*, telle est la limite mortelle d'une cruauté qui commence par sa propre représentation. (367)

Finally, and most importantly, Derrida will conclude this idea by again referring back to Nietzsche, equating Artaud's "closure" of representation with the tragic (presumably, as Nietzsche conceives it). Derrida claims the following: "Penser la clôture de la représentation, c'est penser le tragique: non pas comme représentation du destin mais comme destin de la représentation" (368). The limit of representation – or the tragic – is, in Derrida's analysis, characterized by the fact that it can only go so far in representing "destiny" or truth/reality because it actually demarcates the destiny/fate of representation itself. That is, representation and the necessary limits it entails, acts as its own limit in fully connecting the spectator to the truth and to the underlying cruel nature of things.

The equation of this "limit of representation" to the tragic makes more sense when we recall the purpose of the balance between Apollo and Dionysos in Nietzsche's interpretation of tragedy. As we have seen, the Dionysian facilitates de-individuation and submission to the primordial unity, a state that ultimately channels an understanding of the unpleasant reality of our lives. But the Apollonian, dwelling in the world of semblance and subjectivity, can translate this truth into terms we understand. Geuss explains the need for this balance by invoking Nietzsche's claims about the limits of tragedy. He says that "Nietzsche claims full, undiluted knowledge of the metaphysical truth about the world would be strictly intolerable to humans; it would produce in us a nausea in the face of existence that would literally kill us" (xviii), and then he asks: "If the knowledge of reality is really so terrible that no one can tolerate it, how can the audience in a tragedy survive a performance?" Interestingly enough, he then tells us that "the answer is that tragedy transmits the basic pessimistic truth about the world and human life while

at the same time enveloping it with an illusory appearance which makes it (just barely) tolerable” (xix-xx). Thus, we encounter another fundamental limit, which allows us to relate this idea back to Derrida’s equation of the limit of representation and the tragic. Nietzsche recognizes that tragedy is actually *its own limit*, invoking the Dionysian’s necessary and eternal opposite in order to maintain a much needed “illusory appearance” or, if you will, a level of representation that keeps the spectacle from destroying us along with that crucial boundary between performance and reality. Of course, the point should be made that Nietzsche seems much more grateful for this boundary than is Artaud. According to Geuss,

Tragedy originally arises, Nietzsche claims, from the dancing and music-making of a frenzied chorus in the grip of a Dionysiac ‘intoxication.’ [...] Fully formed tragedy has come into existence when words and stage-action are added to the collective, orgiastic music-making of the chorus. The world and the stage-action as it were deflect and dilute the impact of that reality, making it tolerable to humans. They do this by constructing a realm of what Nietzsche calls *Schein*, i.e. of appearance or semblance. [...] The words and action in tragedy generate a *Schein* in that they seem to individuate what is happening and give the audience distance from it. What is actually happening in the performance of a tragedy is that each member of the audience is being confronted with a general, but existentially pertinent, truth about what human life is and must be (namely one form of catastrophe or another), but the appearance is created that what is happening on stage is happening to some particular *other* individual, to Oedipus, or Tristan (not to you, the individual member of the audience). (xx)

It is this idea of *Schein* that delimits and encloses the medium of theatre, no matter how far away we are from mimesis or imitation based on realism. For Nietzsche, it is this Apollonian element that reels the Dionysian in at the last moment, allowing the spectator to return to her reality with a more developed understanding of what actually defines it. Therefore, whereas Nietzsche both recognizes and appreciates this reeling in or “distancing,” Artaud’s goal seems to be the total destruction of it, regardless of what that might do to the spectator in the process. (Perhaps we can consider it a good thing, then, that Derrida identified a limit to this destruction!) This seemingly deliberate rejection of what makes tragedy tolerable in a (somewhat counterintuitively) pessimistic affirmation of life corresponds with Artaud’s subsequent rejection of the very aspect

that tragedy/theatre, as Nietzsche interprets it, should affirm life. Geuss provides the following conclusion about Nietzsche's life-affirming interpretation of tragedy:

Paradoxically, if Dionysos and Apollo are successfully brought into alliance in a given tragedy, the result will be a transformation of 'pessimism' – not into optimism, to be sure, but into a kind of affirmation, that is, the *Schein* that arises will not sap the audience's strength, paralyze its will or lead to demoralization, but rather will energize the members of the audience to go on living. To be more exact, it requires great strength to produce and appreciate tragedy because it takes us so close to the basic horror of things, but if one can tolerate this, the result is an increase rather than a decrease in one's ability to live vividly... (xxv-xxvi)

In Artaud's theatre of cruelty, we never see a full "transformation of pessimism," as Artaud is not really interested in arming the spectator with a way to cope with the cruel truth she will witness when swept up in the chaos of Dionysian-esque intoxication and de-individuation. In fact, Artaud says next to nothing about what the spectator is to do once she has confronted the harsh reality of her existence, and he certainly does not suggest anything about how she can use her newfound and intimate primordial knowledge to "live vividly." With the theatre of cruelty, Artaud wishes not to simply take us within a few inches of the "basic horror of things," but to wholly immerse us in it, regardless of the potential consequences. That is not to say that Artaud does not feel this experience would be somehow beneficial for human existence in some way – as he clearly believes knowing the truth is necessary to alleviate modern social ills produced by prolonged passiveness and a lack of engagement with pure art/reality – but his theory is missing the key element of life-affirmation for which Nietzsche mobilizes the figure of Dionysos to so passionately advocate.

Essentially, we notice via an analysis of both Nietzsche's writings and the observations of scholars focusing on the connections between Nietzsche and Artaud that Artaud is not as enthusiastic about life as Nietzsche is. Artaud certainly employs elements of the Dionysian – namely, the phenomenon of confronting an ancient pessimistic wisdom by submitting to the primordial unity in a pure theatrical space. Yet there is a refusal on Artaud's part to move past

the pessimism of Silenus (and Schopenhauer) and truly affirm life and the human condition. This is where we arrive at the idea of “Artaud’s Nietzsche,” or, rather, the version of Nietzsche that Artaud presents in his theatrical system and that subsequently filters our perception of Nietzsche’s own purpose in writing about theatre. A brief return to Jannarone’s analysis of Artaud’s theatre and of those who influenced him will make this point clearer. In her explanation of the depersonalization and submission to primal forces necessary in the theatre of cruelty, Jannarone of course references Nietzsche and the Dionysian. She recognizes that what Artaud calls for in *The Theatre and Its Double* intensely evokes Nietzsche’s interpretation of Greek theatre in *The Birth of Tragedy*. However, Jannarone claims that “Artaud’s idea of cruelty demonstrates what would happen if the Dionysian were freed of any dialectical balance with the Apollonian and left to rot, spread, and explode without constraints” (62). Is this statement true, or does it consider the Dionysian only through the filtered lens of Artaud’s theatre of cruelty? It is accurate, at least, in the sense that *if* the unhinged Dionysian fully consumed theatrical practice (which, as we have seen, is impossible due to the very nature of art and theatre), the Apollonian would be rendered powerless and could not pull us away, just in time, from being fatally subjected to the unbearable truth. I have discussed Artaud’s desire for the theatre to double/become life and his subsequent rejection of any and all instances of representation/semblance as purely untheatrical. These points in Artaud’s argument for the theatre of cruelty, in addition to his insistence upon depersonalization and submission, act as evidence that he would delight in ripping Apollo from his crucial role in the theatre (*if* it were possible). Yet there is another layer to the Dionysian as Nietzsche conceives it that becomes further developed throughout Nietzsche’s work but is still fully evident in *The Birth of Tragedy*. As Del Caro suggests, we can “take Dionysos as the personification of the unmitigated,

unconditional vital force, as the life principle itself,” and, in doing so, “one embraces life despite life’s obstacles, despite misgivings and personal suffering” (78). In this case, the Dionysian spirit embodies the “in-spite-of” that not only allows but encourages us to exhibit strength and affirmation in the face of the cruelty and pessimism shaping our reality. Del Caro concludes,

The Dionysian serves as the carrier of all expressions of life-affirmation in Nietzsche, and to the extent that we can safely designate Nietzschean philosophy as a doctrine of life-affirmation, Dionysos is the ally whom Nietzsche enlisted to counter the other demigod, the life-negating one – Christ. [...] Nietzsche resurrected Dionysos as a philosopher god in order to tap into the spiritual potential of an increasingly fallow humanity. (89)

Thus, when we examine Dionysos more holistically, Jannarone’s claim fails to acknowledge Nietzsche’s complex and multi-faceted intentions for the Dionysian. Her titling the first section of *Artaud and His Doubles* as “The Rebirth of Tragedy” is misleading for the same reasons. *The Theatre and Its Double* does not represent a rebirth of tragedy, as it dismisses the crucial point that tragedy must *please* as well as *instruct*.<sup>25</sup> With regard to Nietzsche’s Dionysian, without an element of life-affirmation present, a rebirth of tragedy is impossible to achieve. In the theatre of cruelty, Artaud instrumentalizes select elements of tragedy, but to a much different end than what can accurately be implied by creating a strict equivalency between the aim of his work and Nietzsche’s.

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<sup>25</sup> This conceptualization of tragedy is, in fact, not unique to Nietzsche. In French classicism, epitomized by Racine, the purpose of tragedy, by definition, is to provide something enjoyable for the spectator as well as to provide instruction, typically on a moral level. *Pour plaire et instruire* (to please and instruct) – this was the unofficial, Horatian slogan for Racinian tragedy (Jaucourt, art., *Encyclopédie de Diderot et d’Alembert*, “tragique,” 521).

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have provided an analysis of Artaud's theatre of cruelty, including its theoretical foundations and practical applications. I have insisted on an intense focus on those elements which appear most relevant to a discussion of how Artaud's theatrical system engages with and enlists Nietzschean philosophical concepts, particularly the ones that were also conceived in relation to the theatre and established in *The Birth of Tragedy*. We can, of course, immediately recognize a shared fascination with Myth and the power of those ancient primal forces that keep the truth buried in Myth alive. We see that they both idealize ancient and/or foreign artistic cultural practices, whether that of the Greeks or of the Balinese, because they perceive in them a richness that has presumably been lost in their own modern cultural institutions, leading to the degradation of a society growing further and further out of touch with nature and with its own origins. Both Nietzsche and Artaud see the potential of theatre to help combat modern social ills, and they criticize those (whether it be Euripides/Socrates or Shakespeare/Racine) who have turned the theatre or art more generally into something that no longer serves a divine purpose. They examine the theatre as a place that prioritizes the body, nature, and instinct over flawed and fallible consciousness, and they appreciate theatrical languages that can bypass the spectator's intellectual faculties and speak directly to her on a more primal, psychic level. And, most importantly, they both insist that these theatrical languages are functional and effective thanks to the facilitation of depersonalization and submission to Dionysian primordial unity.

But to insist that Artaud's theatre is somehow the theatricalization of Nietzsche's philosophical project or even that it is brought to life by the unhinged Dionysian fails to recognize the multi-faceted nature of the Dionysian as established in *The Birth of Tragedy* and developed throughout Nietzsche's work. Artaud does not take the Dionysian past what Del Caro identifies as the first, aesthetic stage and into the second stage, defined by Nietzsche's

“articulation of the major tenets of life affirmation” (73). Therefore, although the central role of Dionysos (or at least of Dionysian properties) in theatrical production is the most essential reason to compare Artaud’s theatre theory to Nietzsche’s philosophy, the Dionysian also announces the point at which the two dramatically diverge. Artaud does accept and implement the Dionysian in order to ensure that the theatrical space becomes a space in which the body and physical sensation are emphasized over the intellect and in which the abandonment of individual subjectivity leads to a confrontation with the superior, cruel forces controlling our lives. However, Artaud rejects Dionysian anti-pessimism, and, despite believing that it is good for modern humans to reopen the lines of communication with our cruel reality and discover the truth, he declines *amor fati* (love of one’s fate). Artaud provides no positive life affirmation in the face of these cruel and pessimistic forces: we must confront and accept our human condition, but there should not be an enjoyable or hopeful element in this process of recognition.

That Artaud chose to resurrect some elements of the Dionysian in his theatrical system while neglecting or even pointedly rejecting others certainly carries significance in the social and historical context of interwar France. Disillusioned by and disappointed in the crumbling state of modern society, Artaud searched for answers by trying to distinguish what had made things better in the past or what worked in foreign places. He then wished to re-instate what he discovered back into modern society. Theatre, he thought, was a way to force-feed the truth to the masses, because it had the power to summon ancient forces. It could (re-)deliver the spectators to their primal, natural, communal state, and communicate with them on a more profound level. However, if we recall that he establishes the theatre of cruelty on the basis of an analogy that compares pure theatre to a flesh-rotting, mind-deteriorating plague, his insistence upon a theatrical access point to the primordial unity would not necessitate the affirmation of

life. In such a context, it makes sense that he would not see human life as something to be appreciated or enjoyed. Thus, we can (and certainly should) use Nietzsche as a tool to better understand Artaud's ideas about and intentions for the theatre of cruelty, but we should be careful not to conflate their ultimate goals and worldviews. To do so would be to acknowledge only "Artaud's Nietzsche," and we would unfortunately never encounter the element of the Dionysian that encourages us to find joy in living a human life.

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### **Vita**

Cheyenne Leonardo is from Oneida, Tennessee, and began her studies in French as an undergraduate at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2013. Upon graduating with her BA in 2016, she received the J. Wallace and Katie Dean Graduate Fellowship to continue her studies in the French department at UT and earn her MA in French in 2018. Cheyanne has maintained special interests in German Studies, Philosophy, and Theatre, and has focused on taking an interdisciplinary approach to her research. She has enjoyed serving as a Graduate Teaching Assistant as well as working in various capacities at the Clarence Brown Theatre on campus. Cheyanne spent the final year of her program as an exchange student in Germany at Universität Stuttgart where she was able to continue exploring her varied interests and gain further cross-cultural competence.