

Antonin Artaud's „Theatre of Cruelty“

Summary

Antonin Artaud is widely known as a man who made huge impact to evolution of 20th century Western theatre. He was a founder of „Theatre of Cruelty“ (*Théâtre de la Cruauté*). Relationship of „necessary cruelty“ and theatre is indistinguishable from the nature of visual narrative itself. Any film or play, a spectacle in general, manifests itself as violence against our imagination, just because the image is viewed from the principle of actuality, while the verbal narrative reveals a polysemy of words. In any performance carefully structured, visual organization is imposed on the perceptual system of its audience, thus makes imagination mere secondary. Artaud apparently felt this necessary connection of image, violence and thinking. Spectator of Artaud's performances (cinema, drawings, etc) is sensorially and physically magnetized and involved, but savagely assaulted too, in the eye. Artaud's partner in cinema in our opinion is Russian cinema director Sergei Eisenstein; he is possessed with idea of manipulating his viewer's emotions (or reflexes) and in his movies violently attacks them with images/sounds/montage flow that forces them *feel* and *think*. Both artists avoided a direct appeal to the viewer's mind and tried to affect his senses, or just body. Since body becomes the main reason to provoke thinking, sensory aspect in „Theatre of Cruelty“ is more important than the psychological. “We have reached such a degeneracy, that metaphysics can penetrate into our souls only through the skin” – states Artaud in the first manifesto of „Theatre of Cruelty“ (Artaud 1999: 87). He knows that if theatre seeks to affect the body directly, it must be specific - overwhelming and hypnotizing his viewer with violent imagery, deforming his consciousness, leading to trance and physical transformations of body, and at the same time refusing both psychological, as well as unconscious approach to character. In such way „Theatre of Cruelty“ involves both aspects of visual violence (explicit and implicit). In Artaud's theatre director in particular must remain a key figure in the structure, while position and role of all other elements clearly changes in comparison to traditional Aristotelian structure of dramatic theatre. Theatre of Cruelty is primarily a theater of director.

Thus, the image here is important because of its power to make direct impact on the viewer's consciousness, and visual narrative – because opportunity to manipulate the images.

Word understood as „logos“ undergoes crucial transformation here. Artaud seeks to develop a new theatrical language, which is distinguished as „material“. It is language of gestures, facial expressions, postures. To use language in a new and unusual way, for Artaud means to return its essential, magical foundations, the ability to effect physically. Endless confrontation of language with image is directly expressed in Artaud's notebooks project. Artaud himself, shortly before his death, made catalogue that would have produced fifty pages of his notebooks. The most striking visual element of Artaud's notebook pages is that they directly express the substance of writing and drawing as one of warfare. The space of notebook pages is one of lost and won ground, of replacing and transformation between image and text. Artaud asserts, that above all, these confrontational assemblages of image and text is aimed at creating a *language of the body*.

From his earliest writings Artaud has spoken of a dual trap, within which all of his attempts to create language fell apart. Firstly, he was faced with the scattering of his language through inarticulation – the unavoidable slippages which his mental images suffered as they were brought into a textual form. Secondly, on the occasions when he was finally able to assemble a text, he was immediately faced with its loss into representation, which he perceived as the stealing-away of the unique or original relevance with his language had possessed to his physical presence. For Artaud body is everything: to transform or transmit the body is intention of all his work. Bodies seen by Artaud as passive/suffering organisms can turn into absolutely non-representative, non-productive, formless, un-made „body without organs“. Obvious difference amid these two modes of living body is demonstrated in Artaud's drawings. They can be seen as the most astonishing explorations of an images of the human figure. It has parallels with only one or two figures within European art: artists like Francis Bacon and

Edvard Munch, whose ultimate obsession, like Artaud's, was to make an image of the body alive and screaming. Artaud began drawing in January 1945, the month after his electroshock treatment in Rodez asylum has ended. At first, Artaud's drawings articulated the fragmentation of identity which he had endured through electroshocks, but were transformed after he left Rodez – shattered fragments of human figures became more substantial, powerful. The first imagery is one of the physical collapse and torture reflects passive dimension of so called „suffering body“; the second imagery is on which gives absolute pre-eminence to the body as the site of all human transformation, liberation and independence and reflects effective dimension of „body without organs“.

Practically „body without organs“ implies dancing body. The dancing body becomes a strong image for Artaud in his work. Artaud wrote extensively about dance in his final months, emphasizing a dance of furious revolt which could be brought into existence in order to detonate „the mystery of the human body“. Dance for Artaud is a point of origin for a transformation of the human body, thought violent, but self-controlled exploration of itself and its potential elements of chance and external attack. Theoretically it was absorbed by Deleuze and Guattari. In philosophy of those thinkers it becomes an alternative for self-identical and integral subject. Artaud diagnosis – schizophrenia – turned „body without

organs“ into a reflection of schizophrenic experience and let Deleuze and Guattari introduce him to the project of schizoanalysis as a major figure of becoming. Philosophers established schizophrenia as a continuing, positive, life extending transformation, i.e. becoming-other, and thus incarnated Artaud desire to reverse the disease and normality. However, the reading of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* emerges essential difference between „body without organs“ or acting body and organism or suffering body, or schizophrenia conceived as a process and the schizophrenic conceived as final product of this process. This book tries to solve fundamental problem related to schizophrenization: how schizophrenia may be released as a force of nature and humanity, and do not product schizophrenic at the same time? In our view attempts to give answer to this question from theoretical perspective fail. Deleuze and Guattari conceptualizes the idea of Artaud, following Derridian method of rejection, but their attempt to convert the organic to mechanics, hallucinogenic experience – to a sort of military operation, was limited to the machinary-technical-jargon, but has not explained how to control the spontaneous becoming. The physical dimension of body in Artaud's theory is strictly opposed to representation; for Artaud it is representation alone which makes the body absent. Into the process of representation are submitted the forces of society, religion, psychiatry and medicine in general.