

# The Theatrical Model of Artaud's Self-in-Flow

ANDREA ERDÉLY PEROVICS

Affiliation: Doctoral School of Philosophy  
University of Szeged, Hungary  
Email: andreaerdely@yahoo.com

## Abstract

The study examines Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty, focusing on whether cruelty can be conceived as a process of self-knowledge observed from a third-person perspective. The dynamics of Artaud's inner actualities, in constant motion, and the momentary modes of his selves are interpreted through a model of theatre that, in accordance with the Plessnerian *conditio humana*, enables the subject to create distance from itself. The analysis differentiates between the world stage, understood as the process unfolding between the self and the external world, and a *private theatre*, constituted by the inner performances enacted within the self—a theatre defined by the encounter of the self with itself. The articulable modes of Artaud's consciousness—expressed through various characters, shifting masks, and identifiable components of the self—are situated within his *mental theatre*, which engages the horizontal plane of Artaud's consciousness. To map even the inarticulable, elusive events within the Artaudian subject, the occurrences of his private theatre are analyzed across *three planes of existence*, analogous to the vertically arranged logic of early modern emblematic theatre. Throughout the analysis, particular attention is given to Artaud's propensity for self-dissection and anatomization, a dominant force manifested consistently in both his writings and visual works. The following presents and develops this analysis.

**Keywords:** Antonin Artaud, theatre of cruelty, planes of existence

## Mental Theatre and the Anatomization of Consciousness

For Artaud, writing is an apparatus that enables him to capture the fleeting impressions of his thoughts. In his correspondence with Jacques Rivière, the editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (Artaud, 1968), Artaud discusses the crisis of thought, revealing that the cause

of his suffering is not the content of the thoughts that unfold in his innermost being, but the conviction that he is not the owner of those thoughts. By putting down on paper the estranged images that flowed through his mind, the painful and exhausting travail of his consciousness, Artaud gave an insight into the struggles of his self that have been the subject of many studies. Artaud's impressions are not merely regarded as remarkable works or reflections in philosophy, but thanks to their sophisticated language and plastic description of psychological difficulties, they are also considered to be relevant to literature and psychology, as today's medical diagnosis is that Artaud may have suffered from schizophrenia (Darida, 2011). Artaud's oeuvre cannot be disassociated with "the terrible illness of his mind" (Artaud, 1968, p. 20). Consequently, every single poem, piece of prose, letter, drawing, talisman, every story about him, every situation in his life, his fate itself, every gesture he made seems to be a reference to his theatre of cruelty. As he puts it: "Cruelty was not tacked onto my thinking; it has always been at home there: but I had to become conscious of it" (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 102). It is impossible to separate Artaud's visions, claims, and demands for the theatre of cruelty, which is not art but a viable deed, a real magical action (Artaud, 1953, p. 103), from his life and his emotions in relation to the world around him.

The irreconcilable nature of Artaud's verbal sorcery, rooted in his plural selves and fragmented mind, puts the recipient in a state of discomfort. The rather associative and diverse tendencies of the ideas seem to entrap the interpreter, who clings to rational understanding, in a labyrinth or melting pot where adherence to entrenched explanations only widens the distance to the exit. The zigzagging of fragmented ideas creates multiple, contradictory narrative planes between which there is no passage, only a leap. The failure to understand the Artaudian textual cascade rationally evokes a key moment in the aesthetics of performativity, as defined by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), in which the recipient no longer interprets but experiences, no longer observes but acts—dislocated by Artaudian cruelty. The guardian of experience is none other than the body, since "the idea of a serious theater [...] inspires us with the fiery magnetism of its images and acts upon us like a spiritual therapeutics whose touch can never be forgotten" (Artaud, 1938/1958, pp. 84–5). In *The Nerve Meter*, Susan Sontag identifies the revelation of Artaud's 'innermost' self, in which he attempts "minutely to retrace the heavy, tangled fibers of his body-mind" (Sontag, 1980, p. 23). According to Sontag, in his work, as he discusses the state of alienation of his consciousness, Artaud refutes the *cogito*, unlike Descartes, he does not reach the reassuring conclusion that there must be a self from which thoughts arise. For Artaud, there is no solid or sure foundation, in line with Descartes' first principle, and he cannot see anything clearly and distinctly (*clare et distincte*). Artaud perceives his thoughts in a deafeningly silent, imageless space, where he is shaken to the core, for it is in this unreality

that fragments of the real world are revealed to him (Artaud, 1968). Sontag stresses that Artaud's real pain occurs when he senses changes within his thoughts, confronting the fact that consciousness can only be a process, ever-changing and ever-flowing. The insatiable desire to find a *cogito*—foredoomed to failure—is what drives Artaud to madness. Only through the act of writing can he resist this oppressive force, even as the boundless flux of his consciousness prevents resolution, and the inadequacy of language distorts his scattered, uncertain thoughts: "I am a man whose mind has suffered greatly, and as such I have the *right* to speak" (Artaud, 1968, p. 28).

The fragile Artaudian consciousness constructs a heterogeneous, fractured subject, presenting it through writing as a form of *mental drama*. This expression, as Veronika Darida points out, was used by Artaud himself in his early text *Bird's Bait*, which can be read as a drama that takes place in the mind alone (2010, p. 155). The protagonist is not a real person, but an "I" who is both the title character, the Renaissance painter Paulo Uccello, and Artaud himself, who cannot control his spirit from overflowing beyond himself. In Darida's view, Uccello is Artaud's first great mask, as cruelly treated by society as he was. From among the outcasts, Artaud invites several characters to join his mental theatre, such as Abélard, the love-struck, castrated monk, Nerval, the deranged, suicidal poet, Cenci, the demonic figure who transgresses social norms, Van Gogh, the despised, "suicided" painter, but also evokes the ghosts of Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Poe, Hölderlin, Coleridge, and Kierkegaard (Artaud, 2022). Each of the Artaudian masks confronting the faceless masses bears the stigma of what society calls madness, because to be clear-sighted, ruthlessly honest, uncompromising, and authentic is regarded as an unforgivable sin. According to Artaud, the evil-minded average majority emits poison into the air, whereby the exceptional are inevitably infected and victimized by breathing. The mediocre mob casts its net on the unspoiled individual, torments the days with anxieties, burdens the nights with fears, and vomits its bourgeois curse until the victim is entirely cast out of society.

Darida repeatedly characterizes the Artaudian phenomenon of outcasthood through the imagery of surgical intervention. Individuals who perceive others as different often confine them to mental institutions, seeking to remove them from what is considered the healthy body of society (Darida, 2010). Regarding Van Gogh's portrait, Darida describes the gaze as weighing heavily on the viewer, as if placing them on a dissection table (2010). In another instance, Uccello's eye is described as looking inward rather than outward (Darida, 2010). Artaud's approach to dissecting consciousness, separating and examining its elements, closely resembles the process of an autopsy. This movement of searching in the depths—a paradoxical, continually expanding inward turn (Kiss, 2024)—was already

evident in the early modern period. Attila Attila Kiss, referring to the emblematic theatre of the Shakespearean era, encapsulates the essence of Artaud's mental drama, claiming that it is as if we were in the laboratory of consciousness, where we can also look again and again into the anatomy of mental processes; early modern drama is a double anatomy, bodily and mental, testing the limits of meaning, knowledge and identity (Kiss, 2024).

Artaud's self-dissecting tendency is also present in the various forms of exploration and dissection of the body, to mention just a few examples: the image of the woman murdered in *The Butcher's Revolt*, whose mutilated, bleeding body is found in a basket with her arms thrown over her head, or the butcher's preparation to cut up the little woman who has been laid out, in *Héloïse and Abélard*, the removal of the penis with scissors, in *Cenci*, the title character drinking from the goblet as if from the blood of his sons, in *The Jet of Blood*, the torrent of blood spurting from the hand of God, or the Nurse's swelling genitals and the dragging of the dead girl's body.

In Artaud's mental theatre, both the masks and the previously mentioned gory, cruel poetic images reinforce an inward focus and a commitment to the anatomization of self-knowledge. The same applies to Artaud's prints, most notably his self-portraits that expose his most intimate parts.

### **Toward Higher Reality via Theatre and the Double**

According to Jacques Derrida (1998), Artaud's theatre of cruelty is not realized in real space, but on the stage of writing and drawing, where the artist, by diving beneath the surface, tears up the underlying layer (*subjectile*) and breaks the awkward order of forms. Artaud redraws his face several times, deepening his features to the point where they become more like sharp scars, until finally the wounds cover entirely what looks like a slit skin on a sheet of paper. In the momentum of the "expanding inward turn," the tip of the grey pencil, like a surgeon's scalpel, cuts into the coating of the canvas body by a sharp scratch or puncture, getting closer to the nerve and flesh. In several of his drawings, the surface is almost filled with composite facial configurations. Certain body parts, such as the ears or hands, are accentuated. Nevertheless, the gestures inscribed by the pencil strokes generate powerful, dynamic shock waves that resist the fixation of a single, stable face. Just as Artaud's thoughts cannot be grasped—only their fleeting impressions are inscribed in his writing—so too the features of the faces accompanying the voices he articulates elude documentation. What remains are blurred, deformed, and fragmented shapes produced by the rapid alternation of faces, or by the "streams of flesh" (*fleuve de chair*) in the Deleuzian sense (Deleuze, 2014).

Gilles Deleuze interprets Artaud's cruelty through the works of Francis Bacon and Paul Cézanne, the painters who captured sensation. One of the most significant merits of these two artists, according to Deleuze, is their ability to represent the ever-vanishing Figure—a turbulent bundle of energy, always in a state of flux, always in a state of formless change—that acts as a guide to deformation and affects the nervous system. The essence of the Figure in intense movement, and the painters' desire to represent this invisible force, leads to a paradoxical situation. At the same time, although the perceptible representation is visible in contrast to sensuality, it is the effect of the former that is more powerful. The sensation, which transcends the levels of hearing and sight, is not qualitative in nature, but a vibration comparable to an alternating rhythm, a lively force. According to Deleuze (2014), just as the Figure is in constant motion, the pulsation of cruelty has nothing to do with representation, only with sensation. Thus, from the endless stream of facial metamorphosis, the Artaudian self-portraits flashing through the vibrant graphite lines, and the multiplicity of masks pulsating in his texts, they can only convey a sense of the constant change that is taking place within. Otherwise, the static face looking back from the frozen moment would be a death mask.<sup>1</sup> In Darida's reading: in Artaud's "mental theatre," under every role and under every mask, there is a single face: the face of Antonin Artaud. A face that cannot yet be captured, a face in constant transformation: a face that can only acquire its final features in its own death mask. Until then, it is constantly changing (Darida, 2010).

The entirety of Artaud's inward-turning, anatomizing oeuvre—visual, verbal, phonetic, vocal, and those works arising from their negation or reconfiguration—centers on the exploration of the self in flux. A more purified version of this intention and engagement can be seen in the dramas of Adrienne Kennedy, where the characters are *expressis verbis* the different selves of an unraveled subject; for example, the protagonists of the drama *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, the disintegrated consciousness of the protagonist, Negro-Sarah, are the Duchess of Habsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus, and Patrice Lumumba. Kennedy, in agreement with Artaud, rejects the linear plot line of the traditional conception and the realistic representation of the bourgeois illusion-realist theatre, while also drawing attention to the inadequacy of character. The representation of the fragmented identity traces of the plural self on stage can be reconciled with poststructuralist thinking, according to which the subject is produced through an ideologically prefabricated identity pattern shaped by current technologies of power. Kennedy's schizoid characters suggest that there is no pre-existing,

---

<sup>1</sup> Derrida thinks that death always lurks in the countenance of the self-portrait, and looks both the spectator and the artist that they encounter a rigid skull (1993, p. 73).

essential, circumstantial, or environment-independent unity, truth, or self-identity behind the disintegrated consciousness, only an always-emergent, ongoing subject. Kennedy's up-ended characters are thus identities that can be interpreted through the dominant cultural and political social system of symbols and relations, and are consequently in a state of permanent crisis (Kiss, 2019).

The use of a common technique in postmodern literature—desubstantiation, as defined by Elinor Fuchs—can thus already be observed in Kennedy's dramas. In the anti-essentialist conception, characters are empty subjects without an inner core. While there are many similarities between the Artaudian approach and the postmodern toolkit, such as the various manifestations of the split-conscious self, the difference between the two worldviews is even more significant. While postmodernism claims that there is nothing but emptiness behind the fragmented subject, Artaud's anatomizing and introspective work suggests the opposite. Artaud performs a kind of living, mental autopsy on himself because he believes that behind his fragmented, injured consciousness, there is a more complete reality in which he can recreate himself, both mentally and physically. One of the most striking examples of his essentialist worldview is the paradox of the "body without organs" (*corps-sans-organes*), which he calls the etalon of the human body, derived from the original whole, unrepresentable and unthinkable. For Artaud, the contradiction is not synonymous with isolation due to incompatibility but is a legitimate element of the path towards a restored totality. This is why, for a deeper understanding of cruelty, the influence of Heraclitus' teaching on Artaud's view of the necessity of contradictions cannot be overlooked.

According to Heraclitus, everything in the world, and in human life, i.e., in both external and internal processes, is constantly changing and in motion (*panta rhei*). Hence, opposites are also just manifestations of processes of change; that is, opposites are just aspects of unity, and therefore, from a distant perspective, they are the same. Like the external world, the interior of the individual is a dynamic whole composed of opposing elements. Artaud demonstrates his profound knowledge of the fragments of the "obscure" philosopher in *Mexico and Civilization*, in *New Revelations of Being*, and in the Pseudo-Heraclitan fragments: "From opposites are born agreement and Harmony." When discursiveness ceases in Artaud's texts, giving way to images and metaphors—often paradoxical and charged with passionate dynamism—it is crucial to recognize Artaud's conviction that, from a distant perspective, the opposing forces, the poles of the inner conflict, are ultimately the same. Artaud is convinced that behind his contradictions lies something beyond reason, something more real than any visible, comprehensible, mundane reality—a different reality that penetrates the visceral. His agreement with Heraclitus therefore ceases at this point, because on the one hand,

he disputes that the deep structure of the world can be grasped rationally and linguistically. On the other hand, he is not concerned with whether there is a structural system or a world law (*logos*) that can be revealed at the depths of all things. Artaud contends that beyond socially constructed everyday life lies a more archetypal, essential, and threatening total reality (Kékesi Kun, 2007, p. 219), full of contradictions, which can only be realized in the truer semblance of life: the theatre. He asserts that between the person he is on stage and the person he is in reality, there is indeed a difference of degree; however, the theatrical is the higher reality (Artaud, 1985). The question then arises: for Artaud, who regards the stage as “the reflection of man,” where are the boundaries of the theatre drawn?

The task of theatre, as the essence of life, is to guide the individual toward their authentic, essential self: their double. Since conventional artistic language, by definition, cannot express real, essential content, Artaud seeks a means of communication that can bridge the gap between thought and language, experience and expression. Artaud’s dualistic essentialism is based on the duality between the primordial, profound experience of the artistic event and the potential, superficial quality of expression. Sontag observes that Artaud, like the Gnostics, sees the process of materialization as material: while the soul materializes into flesh, thought is devalued into language. While the most depraved activity of the former is sex, the most atrocious form of the latter is literature. However, in order to recreate one’s own ill-constructed body and transform one’s spirit, one must transform art into total art and the body into a “body without organs.” This is possible through the search for a doppelganger that contains the energies of life and death, the resonances of terror and suffering, the anarchic, contradictory resources of origin.

### **Three Planes of Existence Through the Skin Surface, Its Depths, and Beyond**

In his study, which can be understood as an analysis of the Artaudian double, Deleuze (1990) describes two ways of engaging with the world. The first is a well-functioning realm of superficial engagement with the world, characterized by social exteriority and a constant alternation of meaningless words. The other, however, is the opposite of this horizontal line, the vertical line that seeks depths, that sinks. The two opposite tendencies are represented by the fairy-tale heroine Alice, created by Lewis Carroll, and the schizophrenic Artaud. The schizophrenic sees the skin, the surface, as perforated, as a sieve; that is, he comes to realize that the surface becomes nothing, disappears. Therefore, the body no longer has a surface, having split open; it is a vast void that swallows everything.

Since for the schizophrenic the surface of the skin is lost, the inside–outside, the inner–outer pairs of opposites also cease to exist. Although Artaud’s body is fixed in the horizontal, social world represented by Alice, the vertical line of his double, his true self, draws from the deepest reality, and records on paper the shock waves or signs that arise when the energy accumulated there is released, whether in drawing, poetry, drama, or theatre.

Artaud’s fragmented, contradictory, split-conscious, ever-changing self never strives to overcome rigid opposites, but to allow the forces in tension within it to alternate with the greatest possible dynamism, so that the movement raging within it appears as a blurred, contourless image. Artaud communicates from this in-between state, from the inarticulate noise of the conceptual pairs: art–life, horizontal–vertical, aesthetics–society, politics–ethics. According to Camille Dumoulié (1992), it is this in-between that Artaud names when he discusses the modes of bodies: the first is the “obscene,” that is, the ordinary body in which we live, while the second is the outcast “pure,” also known as the “body without organs” (*corps-sans-organes*). Since the latter is an elusive middle point that is both a principle of unity and a principle of dispersion, it cannot be defined by verballity. Artaud does not classify himself within any mode of the body and, with some irony, positions himself between the genital organ and the anus (*entre-deux-corps*). He regards contradiction as a validation that beneath the horizontal plane runs a vertical path toward restored wholeness; consequently, he favors a both–and logic over an either–or reasoning.

Artaud’s inner actualities, in constant motion—that is, the dynamics of the momentary modes of his selves—can be mapped through a theatre model conceived as a vertical space in which events unfold across multiple planes of existence. Artaud perceives the horizontal, everyday occurrences of life through his schizoid skin surface. Beneath his skin—using the method of anatomization—he aims to reach the essential sphere, his Doppelgänger located deep within, a sphere accessible through theatre. He longs for transcendence beyond his skin surface, in the re-creation of his corrupted body, toward the body without organs, a pursuit that borders on the impossible. This theatrical template corresponds to the emblematic theatre of the early modern era, which, following the theory of *analogia entis*, established a cosmic space structured by a vertical logic. By constructing a microcosm on stage, it simultaneously illustrates the interconnectedness of the macrocosm. Consequently, emblematic theatre did not seek to replicate everyday, empirical reality exclusively; in other words, it did not consider its task to be to illustrate the social, horizontal mechanism of life on stage, but to view and interpret the workings of the world from a metaperspective. The stage symbolized the events of social, everyday life.



The level of the balconies represented the mundane world, while the painted canvas above the stage symbolized the supernatural, divine sphere. The part below the stage, accessible through the trapdoor, was the underworld, the realm of hell.

The performances were staged exclusively in natural light, allowing the audience to see everything on stage, including the partially covered events. More importantly, they could also see each other. Thus, the event that takes place in the theatre's framed and highlighted space, along with the feedback and reactions expressed in the auditorium, became the object of public observation under transparent conditions. As the stage volume extended into the auditorium, attention was focused not only on the actor but also on the spectator's body, thereby erasing the distinction between the theatrical representation and the reality of the audience (Kiss, 2024). Although the structure of Artaud's vertical private theatre resembles that of emblematic theatre, there are significant differences. While Renaissance spectators were not entirely passive, in Artaud's theatre, spectators and actors become indistinguishable; in other words, full equality between spectator and actor is desired, so that the audience becomes an integral part of the experience (Artaud, 1985).

Artaud constructs the spatial structure of his private theatre of cruelty primarily within his own body, that is, within his skin-covered nervous system, flesh, muscles, internal organs, and skeleton: "a theater difficult and cruel for myself first of all" (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 79). Because of the illness of his mind, as Deleuze illustrated, the schizophrenic's skin is permeable and perforated; he cannot draw a sharp line, he absorbs everything, and as a result, the body does not distinguish between inside and outside, inner and outer. As Artaud's expansive introversion, in his exploration of the inner dimensions of his body and consciousness, consumes all boundaries, he cannot perceive the difference between the impassable opposites. Diving down the vertical line is vital to Artaud because it leads him to a more archetypal and essential reality, where he can recreate himself. This is why he risks sinking into the gaping void: in addition to being unable to separate himself from anything, his sieve skin cannot protect him from external influences.

Artaud's theatre does not know the boundary of the principle of differentiation. Instead, it emphasizes the ambivalence arising from the in-between state, all the more so. The boundary, as debarment or exclusion, is the most relevant element of the classical theatre conception, since it determines the imaginary location of the fourth wall between actors and spectators. The border represents the law that separates art from life. Artaud, on the other hand, positions his theatre in a magical transitional space that encourages transgression. In the art of this kind of crossing, where the border becomes a threshold and offers the possibility

of transformation, Fischer-Lichte sees a performative turn as a phenomenon in which life and art intertwine. The Artaudian private theatre, in my opinion, serves as a threshold to be crossed, thereby multiplying Plessner's claim that the actor embodies the *conditio humana* itself (Plessner, 2016). According to Helmuth Plessner, when the actor steps out of himself and offers his body (*Körper*), which can also be used as an instrument, to another possible content, but at the same time is identical with this materialized body (*Leib*), the human capacity for duplication and the inherent distance become emphasized. The quality of being human thus emerges within this tension—in the capacity to refer to oneself self-reflexively (Lichte, 2008, pp. 104–5). Artaud defines the frames of his private theatre within the contours of his own body. This also implies that, alongside the ever-changing Artaudian masks—Van Gogh, Nerval, Hölderlin, and others—on the internal stage of cruelty, observation from multiple audience perspectives is an integral part of the Artaudian content. This duality is experienced in Artaud's suffering when thoughts arising within him do not originate from his own consciousness. He presents the actors on his inner stage through the masks flashing across his endlessly transforming self-portraits and texts; simultaneously, through the absurdity of these thoughts, he conveys the perspective of the anxious and astonished Artaudian spectator.

At this stage of his private theatre, Artaud experiences the coexistence of the two essential elements of theatre—the actor and the viewer, the subject–object dichotomy. The events unfolding on the stage and in the auditorium of his vertically structured theatre correspond to the Plessnerian *conditio humana*, expressed in the capacity for self-observation. In this way, all of Artaud's under-the-skin movements—the dynamics of tension among his internal organs, the communication between his selves, the constant interchange between actor and spectator, and the tumult of role reversals—are enacted through the observer–actor ensemble. Artaud's dualistic essentialism is thus evident not only in the event–language relation, but also in the actor–spectator and actor–observer relations. In my view, these forces of high dimension, confronting each other under the skin, are at work in the more essential reality that Artaud calls the Double. The theatre of cruelty is inherent in life, and unlike the social way of being, it offers a more real sphere: the possibility of total existence. The double, emerging from the private theatre, releases energies that inevitably resonate with the social body anchored in the horizontal, everyday world:

The theater is the only place in the world, the last general means we still possess of directly affecting the organism and, in periods of neurosis and petty sensuality like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking this sensuality by physical means it cannot withstand. (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 81)

Both the emblematic theatre and the theatre of cruelty, operating according to the logic of a vertical system, place the dimensions of everyday, social human life at the center. While the former positions the earthly mode of existence on the stage at the boundary between the realms of God and Satan, Artaud attempts to sense the dividing line of his social self through his skin, covered with perforations. However, by penetrating the vulnerable surface, Artaud does not enter hell, but rather the reality of the Double: "For this reality is not human but inhuman, and man with his customs and his character counts for very little in it" (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 48).

Artaud experiences hell on the social plane of existence, in each and every suffering-filled second of everyday life. At the age of five, he contracted a severe case of meningitis, the consequences of which haunted him for the rest of his life. In order to endure the physical pain, he was forced to use strong painkillers and opiate products, forcing him to undergo a drug withdrawal treatment. From the forty-first year of his life, he was treated in closed wards in various neurosanatoriums. Despite his protests, he was electroshocked more than fifty times during therapy. In *Letters from Rodez*, he states he has suffered for seven years and feels exhausted. He asserts his right to imagination and some happiness, yet believes the world has never provided this, leaving him to view his life as merely a simulacrum (Artaud, 2011). Therefore, Artaud seeks redemption in the reality that unfolds beneath the surface of his skin, where he can move from a horizontal existence, which is social and no longer human, but uncanny or demonic, to the fulfilment of total man, or total art, which is merged with life. The surface of Artaud's skin is not a border but a magical threshold in an intermediate space that offers the possibility of transformation into a more substantial form of life.

Artaud is convinced that by exploring the Double, which resonates with life and death, a threshold can be crossed into a transcendent reality—beyond horizontal and vertical perception, independent of the immanent world—where man can reconstruct his own ill-formed body and transform his spirit. This transcendent mode of being in the theatre of cruelty, comparable to the supernatural or divine sphere of emblematic theatre, exists above the Artaudian skin surface, in the unrepresentable dimension of the "body without organs." The fragmentation of Artaud's schizoid consciousness overflows and, twisting the self-referentiality of the Plessnerian *conditio humana*, he aspires to a vision beyond the metaperspective. A sign of this is how, in *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, Artaud displaces God and situates the capacity for re-creation within his own transcendent body without organs, realized in the rhythmic unity of the senses.

## Conclusion

Artaud's color print, *Le Théâtre de la cruauté*, shows four doubles lying in coffins and a headless, amorphous figure. Although Artaud's doubles appear to be dead, the open eyes seem to tell us something else, that is, to speak to us from the space between the living and the dead. Artaud places this intermediate space between the ordinary body, lying in a coffin, and the deformed body without organs, which transcends the boundaries of verbality and representability (*entre-deux-corps*), located in the picture's right-hand corner. The Artaudian threshold, which invites a magical crossing, appears as the invisible yet visible realizations and manifestations of a self-induced theatre of cruelty in progress, permeating the imagination, the nervous system, and the viscera. Two facial impressions can be discerned from the shape of the body without organs; one reveals the green bruise marks, and the other the circular spreading of a red wound, which then fades into a fog. It is as if, in this apocalyptic and meaningless state, Artaud's effort to give form even to the various nervous waves and vibrations prevails. While he is disjuncting himself in his graphics and texts, which depict his inner, intimate space, he is doing his utmost to recreate his body and spirit by acquiring his true self, his double. By drawing multiple lines, Artaud creates a new human being, no longer with the aim of reconstruction but of absolute transformation.

Artaud's inner actualities are in constant motion and can be understood across three planes of existence through a theatre model, similar to the vertical logic of the emblematic theatre. Both the emblematic and the *theatre of cruelty* place the social, everyday human being at the center. The emblematic positions earthly existence at the boundary between heaven and hell, while Artaud perceives the hell of everyday life through the vulnerability of the skin. The subcutaneous sphere corresponds to the vertical mode of the Artaudian Double, and the transcendent mode occupies the dimension of the "body without organs," leading toward the total human and the fulfillment of total art. The framework of his private theatre is marked out by Artaud's skin, functioning not as an isolating boundary, but as a magical threshold. Fischer-Lichte defined the difference between the border and the threshold phenomenon in the theatre as follows: the former works on a sharp separation between life and art, appearance and reality, while the latter denies the autonomous definition of art; in other words, it merges art with life. In this spirit, the performative turn from Artaud's vision renounces rational understanding. It opens the way to a non-dichotomous, "magical" aesthetic worldview in which the act of performativity provides the possibility of transgression. By exploring his body and his mind, by dissecting them into parts, Artaud demonstrates his commitment to an anatomizing self-knowledge. To make visible the elusive thoughts and contourless faces of his own inner processes, he uses the gesture of performativity to split his own skin and let himself

and his spectators into the space between life and death. Artaud's overflowing spirit communicates from this passageway, the "death point of space," which cannot be measured by reason.

## References

- Artaud, A. (1968). *Correspondance avec Jacques Rivière* [Correspondence with Jacques Rivière]. In *L'Ombilic des Limbes suivi de Le Pèse-nerfs et autres textes* (pp. 17–47). Gallimard.
- Artaud, A. (1958). *The theatre and its double* (M. C. Richards, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1938)
- Artaud, A. (1968). *L'Ombilic des Limbes suivi de Le Pèse-nerfs et autres textes*. Gallimard.
- Artaud, A. (1985). *A könyörtelen színház. Esszék, tanulmányok a színházról* [The cruel theatre. Essays, studies on the theatre]. (Betlen, J. Trans.; Vinkó, J. Ed.). Gondolat.
- Artaud, A. (2011). *Rodezi levelek (1943–46)* [Letters from Rodez] (M. Szabó, Trans.; V. Darida, Ed.). Kijárat Kiadó.
- Artaud, A. (2022). *Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société* [Van Gogh, the suicide provoked by Society]. Éditions Allia.
- Darida, V. (2010). Antonin Artaud és a mentális terek [Antonin Artaud and mental spaces]. In *Színház-utópiák* (pp. 153–177). Kijárat Kiadó.
- Deleuze, G. (1990). Thirteenth series of the schizophrenic and the little girl. In C. V. Boundas (Ed.), *The logic of sense* (M. Lester & C. Stivale, Trans., pp. 82–93). The Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, G. (2014). *Francis Bacon. Az érzet logikája* [Francis Bacon. The logic of sensation] (Seregi, Trans.). Atlantisz Könyvkiadó. (Original work published 1981)
- Derrida, J. (1993). *Memoirs of the blind: The self-portrait and other ruins* (P.-A. Brault & M. Naas, Trans.). The University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1998). To unsense the subjectile. In (M. A. Caws, Trans.), *The secret art of Antonin Artaud* (pp. 59–148). MIT Press.
- Dumoulié, C. (1992). *Artaud et Nietzsche—Pour une éthique de la cruauté* [Artaud and Nietzsche—for an ethic of cruelty]. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Fischer-Lichte, E. (2008). *The transformative power of performance: A new aesthetics* (S. I. Jain, Trans.). Routledge.
- Fischer-Lichte, E. (2009). *A performativitás esztétikája* [The aesthetics of performativity] (Kiss, G., Trans.). Balassi Kiadó.
- Fuchs, E. (1996). *The death of character: Perspectives on theater after modernism*. Indiana University Press.
- Kékesi Kun, Á. (2007). *A rendezés színháza*. Osiris Kiadó.
- Kiss, A. A. (2019). „Feloldhatatlan zavar”. Adrienne Kennedy posztmodern memóriaszínháza [“Unresolvable confusion”. Adrienne Kennedy's postmodern memory theatre]. In A. Kennedy, *A bagoly válaszol. Öt egyfelvonásos* (Kiss, A. A. & Tóth, G., Trans., pp. 7–22). JATEPress.
- Kiss, A. A. (2024). *Kettős anatómia Shakespeare színpadán. Angol reneszánsz tragédiák a kora újkorban és ma* [Double anatomy on the stage of Shakespeare. English Renaissance tragedies in the early modern period and today]. Szeged Humanities Press.
- Plessner, H. (2016). *A színész antropológiájáról* [On the anthropology of the actor] (Besze, F., Trans.). Játéktér.
- Sontag, S. (1980). *Approaching Artaud. In Under the Sign of Saturn* (pp. 13–73). Vintage Books.