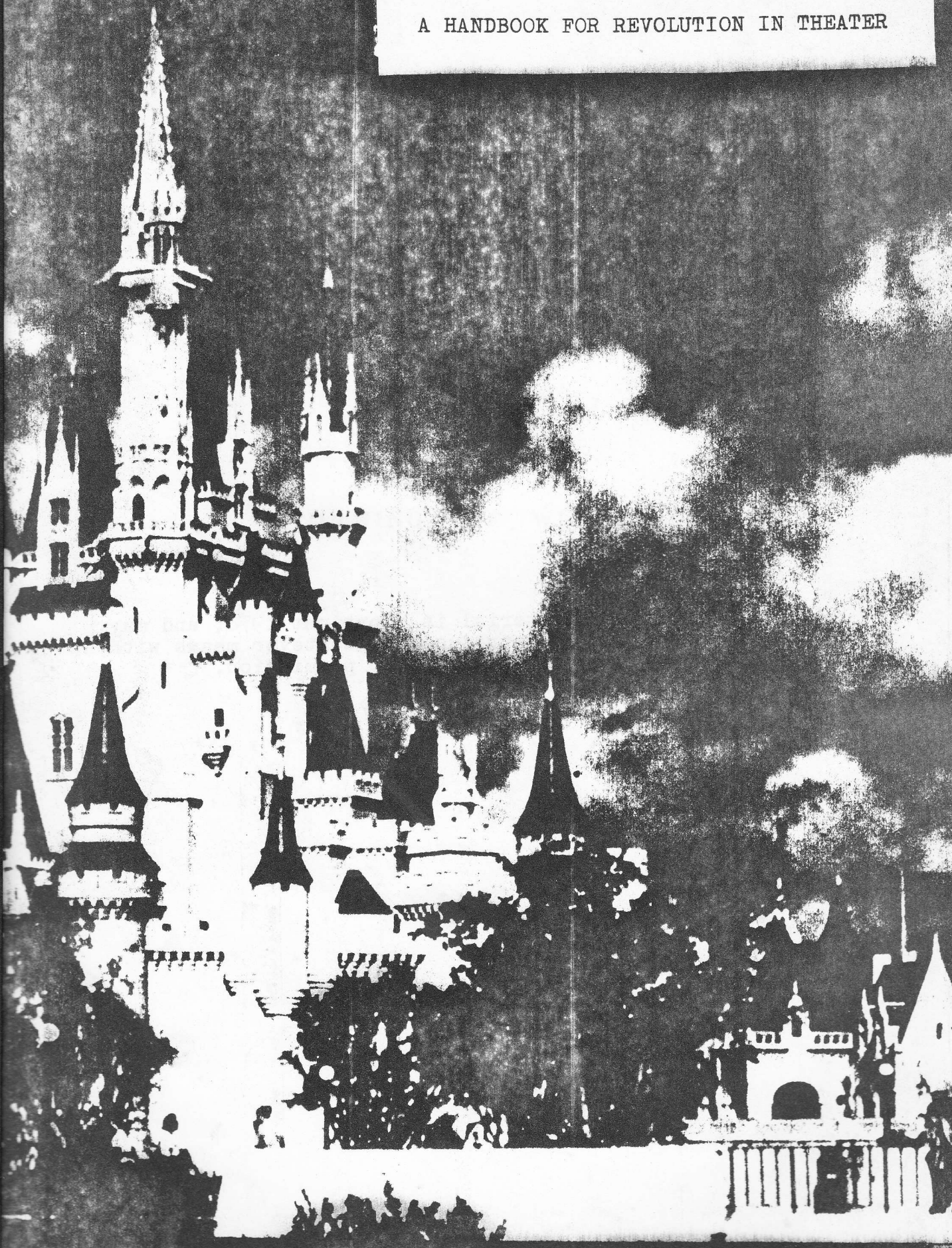


STORMING THE WINTER PALACE

- A. Razutis

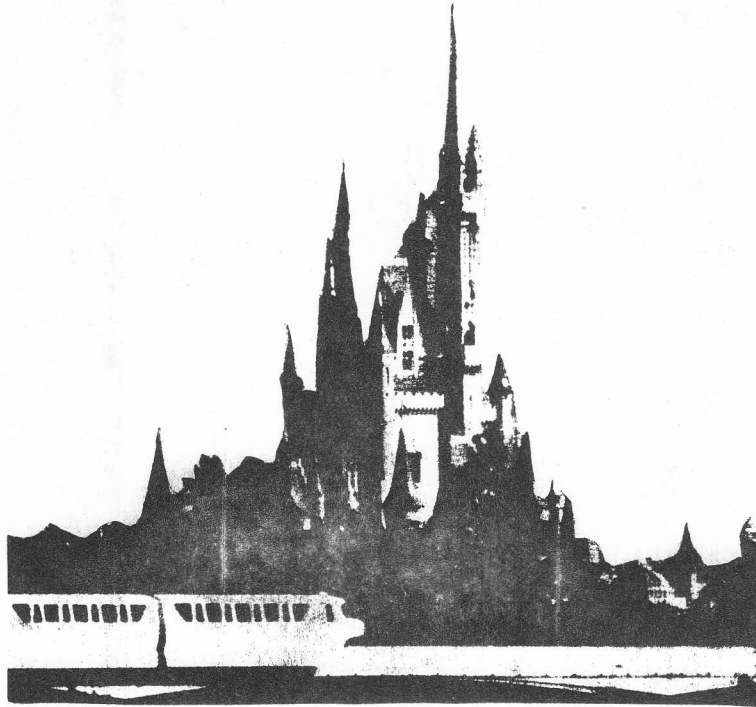
A HANDBOOK FOR REVOLUTION IN THEATER



STORMING THE WINTER PALACE

by A. Razutis

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FOREWORD

The nature of this treatise is one of indictment of culture & theater, intending to incite the reader to conscious action, rather than engaging in scholastic models of critical examination. Overt scholasticism and historicism have had (and will continue to have) their say with little effect on theater & drama, the most tradition of all art-forms.

I am indebted to Catharine MacTavish for her assistance in research of various source materials and for contributing ideas and words in the early MS. versions of this work, and to the Theater Crafts & Design Class of 1976 at the Banff School of Fine Arts, for whom treatise/manifesto was initially written (as The Traumatized Theater), and finally to the authors listed in the Bibliography -- especially Artaud and Tom F. Driver -- from whom I have quoted in attempt to further formalize & concretize the ideas presented herein.

A. Razutis
Vancouver, 1978

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"Life is a burning up of questions. I can't conceive of a work detached from Life." -- Antonin Artaud

II. A Tragedy of Errors

The contemporary artist, at large, has come to believe that this world, presently devoid of spiritual or metaphysical ideals and actualities, devoid of future, and polarized in all aspects of social & political aspirations, can be simply exploited in terms of topical media hysteria, public relations, pop-hero fixations, and narcissistic awareness of its own history -- in terms of its own weaknesses! Such contexts for contemporary arts snuff out the magical potential of existence and perpetuate tinkering with illusion, toying with form and perceptual trendsmanship.

In trying to apprehend the sources of ideational polarity, later manifested in trends, I would like to offer some comments made by Tom F. Driver (History of the Modern Theater):

"In 1749 Rousseau won a prize from the Academy of Dijon with an essay maintaining that the progress of the sciences and arts had contributed to the corruption, rather than the improvement, of mankind."¹

And

"Kant was the first modern thinker radically to challenge the assumption that human reason is grounded in reality...Kant held that what we commonly take to be real is a system of appearances constructed by the forms of human imagination and the categories of the human mind...Man is thus, as it were, imprisoned by his own consciousness, by the very means at his disposal for making contact with reality...the agent of recovery (Kant) found in aesthetics -- the experience of the sublime. Thus, the aesthetic intuition was made to compensate for the severe limitations of reason, and art became indispensable in the quest for reality."²

Whereas Rousseau will condemn the sciences and arts (and they are inseparable), Kant maintains that they are indispensable -- and such polarities become more amplified when we consider that many of the medias arising in the 19th and 20th century (i.e. photography, film, radio, television) were not only instant products of the technological revolution but also born in an era where romanticism was battling to assert the validity of myth and subjective experience over and against the mechanization of the industrial age. Arts that feature schizophrenic parents, perpetually embroiled in chaos. We will be considering the romantic dilemma further in Chapter IX, so let us turn our attention now to another element in this 'tragedy'.

Polarities require a thread (or fulcrum) on which to act, and this thread of mankind has been its notion of the order of things (cosmology). In the 19th century religious cosmology was replaced by history ('historical perspective') which Driver terms "the method,³ an approach to reality that conditions all modern thought." Within this "method" it was possible for Vico to postulate that "since man is a native to history...man is capable of re-evoking the past in the depth of his own consciousness."⁴ and to further cultivate the theory of "folk genius" and a dynamic (non-static, non-"ideal") human nature. In the twentieth century it is evident that historicism is disintegrating and the vacuum being replaced by a sensorium of simultaneous experiences, empirical fragmentation, temporary data configurations, contradicting strata of thought & behaviour, and dialectical materialism, if not hedonism.

The symptoms of this fragmentation are paranoic tribalism (regional & national chauvinism, women's 'sexism'), re-vamped Neo-Platonic mysticism (occult and fixations of a 'Golden Age'), and nihilism (i.e. 'Punk Rock'). But these aspects of fragmentation are simply redundant to the ones extant in the 19th century (see the discussion on Wagner and Jarry in Chapter #IX.)

When cosmologies topple so does the art of criticism. The contemporary critic (at large) is perhaps the most fraudulent element of art extant today. We witness the obscure being defined by even the more obscure (Ignotum per Ignotius!); we are treated to such words as "synaesthetic", "synoptic", "minimal", "structural", "concrete", "interface", "anthropomorphic" in an attempt to come to terms with contemporary art motifs such as: a) a 45 minute jerky zoom (film) through a room space b) a photo of a man holding up a mirror in front of his face c) a man impersonating a peanut in a 'neo-dada' performance piece. And to further disguise the nakedness of the times ("The Emperor's New Clothes") most critics will invariably endeavor to concoct more fraud, inventing "schools of thought" & trends with a language of excuses -- a language of a market-seeking art economy. (An excellent counterpart to this type of corporate art, and its journalistic (magazine) appendages exists in the Soviet corporation where phrases such as "formalism", "social realism", "cosmopolitan art influences", "reactionary theory of the Pythagoreans" are debated endlessly.)

The final element in this tragedy (or comedy if you wish) is the contention that the artist should "make some money, play the game for a while...and then free him/herself to make art." In other words, prostitution and market expediency. The assumption that money determines the presence or absence of art (and that inspiration is immortal) is another symptom of our materialistic neurosis; the assumption that art can be "put aside" reflects a preoccupation with the laws of supply & demand.

III. To Engage the Psyche...

The route past the discriminating self-preserving ego is via perceptions and direct experience. Art which addresses self-consciousness (or is self-conscious in nature) risks impotence and obsolescence. There is nothing more tedious or banal than a self-conscious performance, whether it be "this is me, sitting in my closet, talking to my tv camera" or an actor self-conscious on stage, or a self-conscious political "lesson". The route to the sources of emotion, conviction, action is via sensory experience. When an action is real, undeniable, its effect(s) are immediately perceived and experienced.

In the 1960's, 'total' environment experiences (i.e. rock & roll lightshows) became vogue. Their impact on contemporary social/political/cultural processes is undeniable, their effects evident within a 'counter-culture' lifestyle that involved language, appearance, sexual habits, and political attitudes. The environments became ones of total immersion -- immersion into the sensory, experiential, but inevitably transitory and vacuous realms of human existence. The television medium also became one of experience -- a media omnipresent in many homes day & night -- bringing the experience of the world to the home, and in the case of the Vietnam War, the horrors of napalm and bombings. Thus, the discriminating ego when confronted with the experience of war was bypassed and the results helped sway the public opinion in a new direction. It is interesting to note that the theater artists (Sartre, Beckett, Ionesco, Brecht) who have dwelt on the themes and/or techniques of alienation are products of the 40's & 50's, and not of the 60's -- and thus their audience will necessarily be limited.

To address the contemporary psyche, the elements of the apprehensible (accepted & perceived) world must be presented in a sensory yet sensible fashion. It cannot be simply an approximation or suggestion of the world at large, nor can it be limited to the rational or irrational realms of consciousness. It must be an undeniable, compelling synthesis (as participatory trauma) of a contemporary world. When experience can be interpreted as illusion, the mind of the viewer remains largely unmoved. Everything emoted by an illusion is once removed by the fact that it is simply an illusion (or, as termed these days, "simply art"). The Haunted House exhibit in Disneyland is a fascinating bag-full of illusions. Questions will arise such as "Is it optical trickery? Mirrors? Holography?" -- but not "Is it real?"

Of course, children are the last to ask the question "Is it real?", and usually only when confronted by their parent's notions of "reality". The rock & roll environment concerts are never questioned in terms of "Is it real?", nor were the Delphic Oracle, the Orphic Mysteries, and other "theaters" of Antiquity. Yet, contemporary theater is usually "just a drama" -- a far cry from the magical origins of theater.

However, imagine an illusion, a theater so complete, so true to the mechanisms of perception and the elements that compose the world, free from any ambiguity arising from misunderstanding or archaic language forms -- so complete that it cannot be distinguished from reality. Only then will that suspension of involvement, that is taken for granted in contemporary theater, not occur -- only then will you have rediscovered living theater.

IV. At the Turn of the Last Century

"At the turn of the last Century, writers wishing to emphasize that a painting possesses value irrespective of its imitative powers, have declared that a painting has an independent reality. We can appreciate this point by imagining the transformation of a painting into a trompe-l'oeil. We realize instantly the abysmal triviality to which a still-life by Cezanne would be reduced were it somehow made to convey the illusion of real fruits and vegetables placed in a recess in the exhibition's wall. It is as well that the integration of brushstrokes and canvas lends to all paintings a distinctive artificial quality which isolates them from dissolving in the surroundings of factual reality.

"It has been observed that the colours and shapes available to the painter cannot equal the variety of details we meet in nature...the painter must aim therefore from the start to produce an essentially untrue painting. He must strictly limit himself to producing a work of the imagination which will serve in its turn the viewer's imagination. The objects that it represents must remain parts of an imaginary reality."

Michael Polanyi
Optics, Painting, Photography

Evidently, the phrase "abysmal triviality" could be applied to such forms of expression as photorealist paintings, the beginnings of holography, and realistic costume and set renderings in theater.

V. The Contemporary Theater is Decadent

-- a treatment on a paragraph by Artaud.¹

"The contemporary theater is decadent because it has lost..."

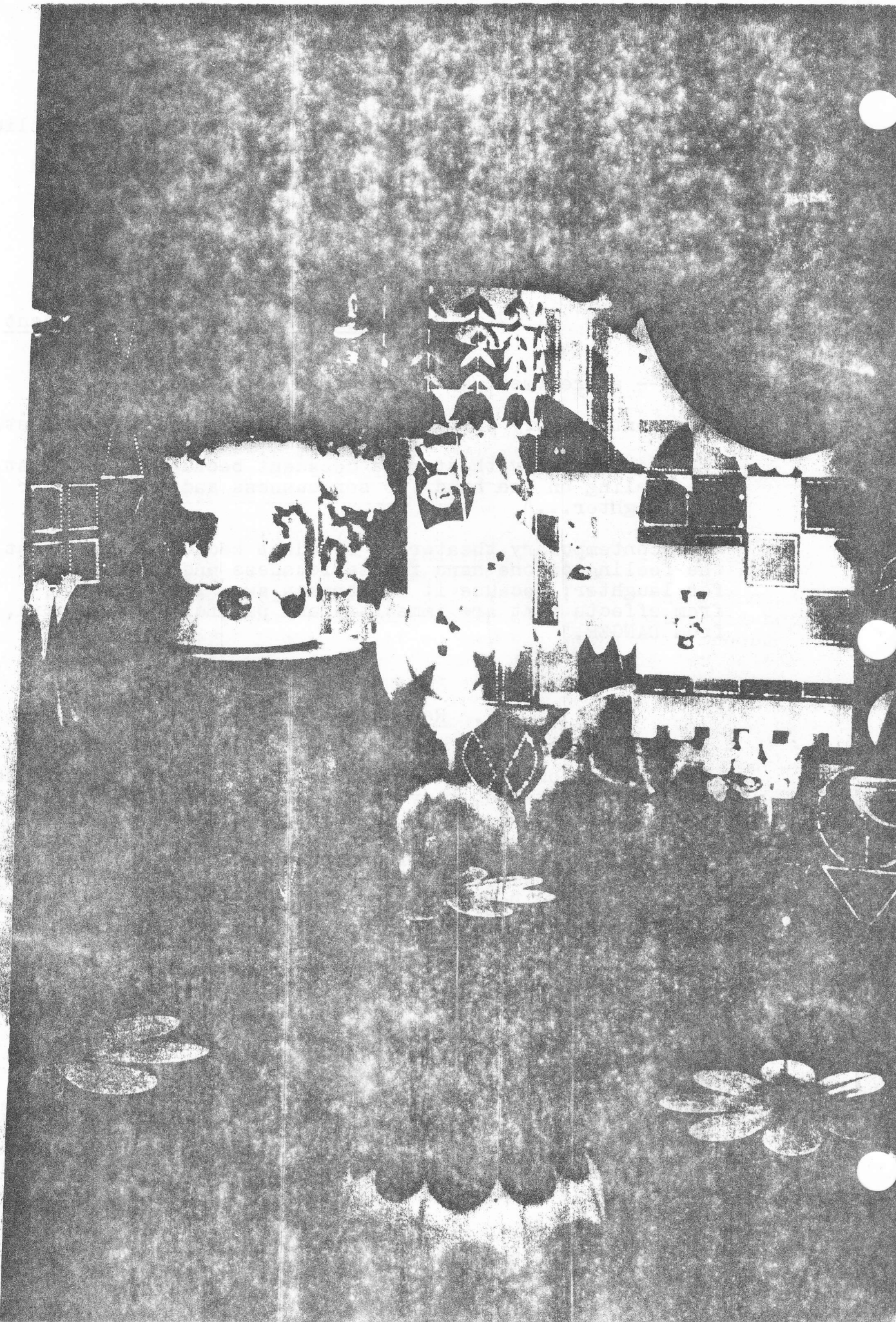
"The contemporary theater is decadent because it has lost the feeling on one hand for seriousness and on the other for laughter..."

"The contemporary theater is decadent because it has lost the feeling on one hand for seriousness and on the other for laughter; because it has broken away from gravity, from effects that are immediate and painful -- in a word, from DANGER."

VI. Renewal of the Seasons

What discussion of theater can ignore the Mexican pyramids? Built for spectacle, they represent an archtypal stage. The stage was elevated so that everyone could see clearly the sacrifices, self-torture, and ceremonial blood-letting. Steep steps made dramatic the treacherous ascent, aided even more so by the optical-illusion perspective. This was the stage shared by Gods, Demigods, and men. Sacrifices were believed to keep the world from ending. Victims went willingly to their deaths because they anticipated heavenly rewards. For a year, this sacrificial "god" feasted and was catered to in every way. Then he climbed the steps, a dramatic ascent -- and they ripped out his heart.

Soon, it became opening night, as usual.



VII. The Mise en Scène

It is apparent that our present-day culture has developed considerable sophistication in the realms of auditory and visual expression -- at the expense of verbal language development. Our capacity to orchestrate audio-visual spaces (even to the point of laser 3-d spectacle) is ever increasing -- our verbal language diminishing in range and expression. One need only consider the proliferation of slang and colloquialisms (and sub-culture slogans) to realize the state of diminishing literacy. Therefore, it becomes difficult to comprehend that in contemporary theater why (to quote Artaud) "everything that is not contained in the dialogue is left in the background." Or, as he would continue, "how does it happen, moreover that the Occidental theater does not see theater under any other aspect than as a theater of dialogue?"

Even stranger, is the fact that perhaps the greatest "theater of dialogue", perhaps the most expressive and verbally-rich body of works, known as Shakespearean Drama, is still being rendered as if to an Elizabethan-literate audience, within the confines of an archaic language that is no longer comprehensible to the contemporary theater goer. Long soliloquys delivered to an unattending audience -- an audience that is as diminished as it is elite.

The assumption commonly made is that these texts are somehow sacred, that a contemporary interpretation of the image-rich passages, of the setting and dramatic context of the works would somehow degrade their value. Inevitably each production will have a few attempts at innovation (usually on the part of the designer), but the over-all fabric remains unchanged. The past has shown that "purity" of language cannot survive out of context -- it requires constant revitalization. (The Egyptian hieroglyphic 'language' survived for 4,000 years only because of the continual presence of a autocratic Theistic (if not despotic) state.) The evident schism between a "theater of dialogue", and a "theater of sensory experience" is even more obvious in the contemporary arena.

At a latter point, we will be considering the revitalization of the spoken and written language -- but for now, let us apply ourselves to the contemporary dilemma of the mise en scène (prop/set/design) and follow up on Artaud:

Commonly:

"I say that this concrete language (of theater), intended for the senses and independent of speech, has first to satisfy the senses, that there is a poetry of the senses as there is a poetry of language, and that this concrete physical language to which I refer is truly theatrical only to the degree that the thoughts it

(cont.)

cont.

"expresses are beyond the reach of the spoken language... To make metaphysics out of a spoken language is to make the language express what it does not ordinarily express, to make use of it in a new, exceptional, and unaccustomed fashion; to reveal its possibilities for producing physical shock; to divide and distribute it actively in space...to turn against language and its basely utilitarian sources...to consider language as the form of INCANTATION...For me the theater is identical with its possibilities for realization when the most extreme poetic results are derived from them; the possibilities for realization in the theater relate entirely to the mise en scene considered as a language in space and in movement."¹

It has been argued by some that Artaud in his attempts to create a metaphysical and incarnate theater was attempting the "impossible," and that discussion will rage on in the minds of both playwrights and directors. One thing though was certain, that according to Artaud the theater did not need words or plays for it to exist, and that it needed Shakespeare even less for "Artaud made himself very clear when he said that Shakespeare was the cause of the downfall of the Western theater." In Artaud's theater, "the word becomes incarnate as sound and fury, but instead of signifying nothing it signifies the body (incarnate)".² The incarnate body ~~crucifix~~ lead inevitably to "the example of this monotonous crucifixion, this crucifixion wherein the soul is forever being lost."³

Our linguistic capacity in the realms of the mise en scene, in the realms of space and movement, light, darkness, colour, shape, sound, and sensory experience is approaching phenomenal proportions -- yet the evidence at hand indicates that little of this potential has been creatively explored, or even yet, composed to complement the actor and his craft. "Theatrical traditions die hard" and in some cases have to be murdered. In justification, Driver points out that "the theater, being a social institution as well as an art, responds more slowly than other arts to innovations in form."⁴ So slow in fact that "the playhouse most familiar today -- with its orchestra seats, balconies, proscenium arch, stage, wings, fly galleries, and artificial light -- was an invention of the Italian Renaissance." But the hierarchies in charge of this Renaissance relic are not to be confused with "Renaissance genius". The defenders of the proscenium stage, of the cyclorama, of traditional design and 'orderly evolution' are quick to dismiss Artaud as a "lunatic". But let us look briefly at some of the aspects of the "evolution of design" -- in all its dismal qualities:

"The first signs of change came, naturally enough, in a romantic concern with the past. They showed themselves in attempts to achieve authenticity in period costumes for historical plays. This concern, which is commonplace now, was then (19th cent.) quite new." 6

--Driver

"In 1841 Mme. Vestris scored a success with the use of a box set...side walls of rooms were built solidly from front to back so that the actors, instead of entering, as formerly, between side wings set parallel to the footlights, came in through doors set on hinges. More than twenty years elapsed, however, before there appeared an embattled advocate of three-dimensional sets." 7

--Driver

"Presumably the walls must be of canvas but it seems about time to dispense with painted shelves and cooking utensils. We are asked to accept so many stage conventions that we might at least be spared the pain of painted pots and pans." 8

--A. Strindberg
1883

"...always an advantage to have an actor touch a piece of furniture or some other nearby object. That enhances the impression of reality." 9

--Duke of Saxe-Meiningen

"If I were to criticize it, there would be only one thing I should not attack: the author's very obvious desire to bring the theater into closer relation with the great movement toward truth and experimental science which has since the last century been on the increase in every manifestation of human intellect...In the theater every innovation is a delicate matter...The drama will either die or become modern and realistic." 10 --Emile Zola

"Stanislavski's vocabulary, contrasting inner truth with outward naturalism, is of the utmost importance. It shows that he perceived the analogy that gave human meaning to the theater's drive toward a fully three-dimensional stage. A three-dimensional object has a center somewhere in its depth. A play conceived as three-dimensional has a center in which depth and unity coincide. An actor's performance either remains on the surface of character or plumbs the depths..." 11

--Driver

"Slowly, very slowly, has imitation come into its own, and the stage learnt to hold a plain, unexaggerating, undistorting mirror up to nature." 12 --William Archer

In pursuit of realism and over a time-span of nearly two centuries, theater has evolved from scenic painting on canvas to rearranging its ground plan so as to "envelop the actor", to release of the actor from the stage "picture frame" -- a dismal evolution! Even more so when one considers that scenic painting is still seriously practiced, and the "picture frame" is still very much in use, and the stage volume has always been there to begin with. With a few exceptions, such as the work by Joseph Svoboda, scenography & attitudes to the mise en scene have not really progressed beyond pathetic and modest revisions. It is not surprising that with the advent of the medium of holography many designers now found a more "usable" means by which they could effect ghosts and apparitions. The general irony is best expressed by Artaud:

"A public that shudders at train wrecks, that is familiar with earthquakes, plagues, revolutions, wars; that is sensitive to the disordered anguish of love, can be affected by all these grand notions and asks only to become aware of them, but on the condition that it is addressed in its own language, and that its knowledge of these things does not come to it through adulterated trappings and speech that belong to extinct eras which will never live again...Instead of continuing to rely upon texts considered definitive and sacred, it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought." 13

This unique language "half-way between gesture and thought" is the metaphysics of the mise en scene and is only obtained by mastery, the mastery of language, sound, acting and the human gesture, spatial visual forms, and the paradoxes of perception, time and duration, and instinct.

We must as quickly as possible proceed from revulsion to revolution; from slight modification of this or that to complete reconstruction. All revolutions require a plan, otherwise we would simply have a mob at the gates. The plan can be likened to a web; the overall design the mastery. Within this web, or worldweb, the mise en scene is simply a collection of strands -- but each strand/element indispensably contributes to the overall tension. If any one strand is removed, the web begins to disintegrate. To complete the mastery, one must be aware of not only all the elements at hand, but a synthesis, a design.

That web, herein described, is Art.

VIII. Insert: The Right Panel

Garden of Earthly Delights, a painting by Hieronymous Bosch, contains in the right panel possibly the most complete theater piece to arise from the collective unconscious of Medieval Europe. It is at once a morality play; its immediate effect is compelling and powerful. It stands as a unique case of synthesis binding phenomena, action, and content which is amplified by the nature of the frozen metamorphic moment perceived from an aerial vantage point. This unconscious synthesis is free from overt logical contexts, free from gravity, convention, and literally occurring in a writhing all-consuming Hell. The characters rendered are as much a part of the setting, as the setting is a part of them -- the condition is inseparable, the mise en scène complete.

It is recorded that when this painting was first exhibited, viewers went into violent convulsions from the terror they felt and many could not bear to view it. In that sense, its effect was immediate, and the work required no critical interpretation of the action to validate or invalidate its presence. What theater piece today can make such claims as to its 'success'?

--(Perhaps if we are to believe Strindberg, there have been a few instances of such a nature: (during the performance of The Father) "...an old lady fell dead during the performance...another woman fainted and when the straight-jacket was produced on stage, three-quarters of the audience rose like one man and ran from the theater bellowing like mad bulls!" -- in a letter to Nietzsche)'

IX. In Defense of Madmen

"The genuinely insane men in asylums protect themselves... for a lunatic is a man that society does not wish to hear but wants to prevent from uttering certain unbearable truths." ' -- Artaud

In chapter #II we considered historicism in light of Kant's notions that reality is a system of appearances constructed from human imagination and inevitably imprisoning us with their consequences. (Accordingly, we may take the notion of a "supreme truth/reality" to be nothing more than the "supreme delusion".) The pursuit of reality has been termed

by some writers as romanticism. Romanticism according to Stephen Spender consists of "exploiting the historical past as contemporary dream, fortress and granary of stored impressions, which are accessible to a modern, just as he uses childhood for the same purpose."² In his history of the modern theater, Driver elaborates more fully:

"In all forms of romance, man goes upon a quest...He may grope for the path of search, his soul's salvation, the ideal society, the true morality, or an unknown goal...He does not imagine that the reality he seeks is in the nature of a fixed order, an unchanging truth somewhere awaiting him, but rather imagines that it is a mystery, something unsearchable that must never the less be searched...And the romanticist lives utterly in history, that is, in his experience of change, his exposure to the passage of all things through time... To a spirit more inclined toward classicism, by contrast, reality is given, one way or another. It is there, even even if temporarily obscured, and wants recognition, and a willingness to make whatever adjustment is required... At any rate, the primary human problem is not to find reality but to come to terms with it...Classical tragedy shows the settlement that reality forces upon man, to his destruction...Classical comedy show the bargain man is finally able to make with reality by the exercise of his wit..."³

The romantic quest (as we shall see) many times culminates in the love of death, absolutes, nothingness and even alienation (where the quest is the question "whether all search for meaning is not futile")⁴. The act of breaking out of habitual systems of appearances & constructs ("the fixed order"), whether self or socially imposed can be understood in terms of the word madness. Yet madness (and even the madness of genius) is not sadism and masochism or simply base "theaters of cruelty" but rather a passionate struggle to come to terms with the insoluble questions concerning reality and life. The issue is highly emotional, the reader having to take sides -- for there is no easy compromise in between, for all of us bear seeds of madness within our psyche. Rage at observing others go mad or being subjected to intollerable circumstances provides the passion -- whether or not the circumstances be the parasitic "purveyors of taste" or the jailers in a death camp -- but the rage must be checked, at least temporarily, and dealt with by the dexterities of language

In considering the madness of genius and their romantic origins, I will present brief sketches of events & personalities related to theater and the mise en scène. Obviously the list could be extended to include such writers as Hesse, Nietzsche, Joyce, Poe, or the Radio Roma broadcasts of Pound and his subsequent incarceration; but perhaps the issues will become clear on the merits of what is included.

There is a rough awesome and "terrible" power in the madness of genius, at times expressed in rage, at times in catatonic silence (as exemplified by Nijinsky's last performance which ended with the dancer in a catatonic-like trance, and the audience sitting dumbly tolerant and silent.) In apprehending the nature of our "asylum", the following "case histories" are presented in a manner more reminiscent of "psychiatric scholasticism & historicism" perhaps better to illustrate the "treatment" that these attitudes are subjected to within a "sane" world-view.

ALFRED JARRY (1873-1907)

"In 1896 a raucous, insulting, and notorious kind of theatricalism burst upon Paris. On the evening of December 10, a distinguished audience had made its way to the Theatre Nouveau...the play to be performed was Ubu roi (King Ubu), the first work of a 23-year old Frenchman named Alfred Jarry. The curtain parted, and actor Firmin Gemier came forward. He was dressed as a fat, ugly "King", an absurd glob of humanity whose very appearance was insulting. After looking disgustedly over the audience, he hurled toward it the play's opening word, Merdre! (a perversion of the common merde). Such an obscenity had never before been uttered on the French stage. The audience retaliated with catcalls, boos, and a general commotion. Some spectators left immediately...those who remained to the end were intensely divided." 5

This performance featuring a repulsive, manic, comic, adolescent id of a "king" was somehow a long precursor to the punk-rock of today. "Before Freud had begun to publish his works on psychoanalysis, Jarry had put the id directly on stage. In his life he demonstrated that the id unbound searches for death." (Jarry drank himself to death by age 34.)

Yet it wasn't the social effect or anti-social consequences of the play that bear merit -- and the play itself makes tedious reading -- it was the theatrical useage of events and the mask of theater, whereby the actuality of the events are to be perceived only through the masking. The following quote contains Jarry's concepts for the staging of the production.

"Mask for the principal character, Ubu...A cardboard horse's head which he would hang round his neck, as they did on the medieval English stage...One single stage-set or, better still, a plain backdrop...A formally dressed individual would walk on stage, just as he does in puppet shows, and hang up a placard indicating where the next scene takes place. (By the way, I am absolutely convinced that a descriptive placard has far more "suggestive" power than any stage scenery. No scenery, no array of walkers-on could really evoke "the Polish Army marching across the Ukraine.")... Abolition of crowds...just a single soldier in the army parade scene, and just one in the scuffle when Ubu says "What a slaughter, what a mob, etc..." *7

In light of Jarry's staging, much of the later Dada performances, the staging of Brecht's plays, and contemporary neo-dada performance staging suffer in terms of their 'originality'.

ANTONIN ARTAUD (1896-1948)

Artaud wrote no major plays, directed only a few performances (the most notable of which "The Cenci" occurred in 1935), acted in nearly two dozen films, spent 9 years in an asylum, and died shortly after his discharge and 'cure'. His major effect on theater (and hence importance) has been to bring about a dialogue calling for the complete reformation of contemporary theater with an urgency that paralleled the struggles he carried on with a sanity that was threatening (or threatened) to slip away. Much of his attitudes towards theater are contained in correspondence between himself and Jaques Rivière, in fragments & manifestos collected in Artaud, Anthology, and his book, The Theater and its Double. Both in his writings and his life, he exhibited the "realization when the most extreme poetic results are derived" and his work can best be understood in terms of infection rather than persuasion. It is for this reason that many academic interpreters of theater will shun his work, describing it as "lunacy" or "license for bestiality" and cloister themselves within their own academic straight-jacket. The "Theater of Cruelty" which Artaud proposed has many times been misinterpreted as an arena that depicts cruelty, but Artaud with unyielding urgency was committed to trying to give thought form on stage, to render it as corporeal reality (beyond words) -- to manifest the very nature of incarnation -- and as he phrased it, "the real pain is to feel thought shifting inside you."

Artaud, like Strindberg, was prone to obscene denunciations of religion and social mores, fascinated by alchemy, and indeed a true agent of theater reformation. Unlike Strindberg, who later recanted, Artaud bore with him this urgency until the end. Throughout the treatise his thoughts on theater will be seen, but in this discussion I would simply like to present Artaud the reformer, and in his own words.

"I hate and renounce as a coward every being who does not agree that the consciousness of having been born is a search and a study superior to that of living in society."

"I hate and renounce as a coward every being who can endure to live without first having separated himself in truth and essence from an already created organism, whether individual, unitary or totalitarian." 8

This individual in his attempt to achieve consciousness of "having been born" was repeatedly subjected to electroshock (at one time was even pronounced dead, then on the way to the morgue suddenly 'awoke'), drugs -- though fortunately spared from the madness of World War II.

"The difficulty really is in finding one's place and rediscovering communication with one's self. Everything lies in a certain flocculation of things, in an assortment of all these mental stones around a point which is precisely what we are searching for.

And here is what I, Artaud, think of thought:
INSPIRATION DOES EXIST.

And there is a phosphorescent point where all reality is rediscovered, but changed, metamorphosed... and I believe in mental meteors, in individual cosmogenies." 7

He continued in a different vein:

"I am stigmatized by an urgent death, so that actual death holds no terrors for me...it is this contradiction between my inner facility and my external difficulty which creates the torment I am dying of." 10

Torment...conflict...once the prime ingredients in heroic values, now "inadmissible" and to be treated as a psychological disorder. In Artaud's case, the conflict between thought/inspiration and body/form was being conducted within the walls of a French asylum; in the case of the world of that time the conflict between unyielding ideals was conducted (as WW II) in the asylum of Europe.

As a final attempt to render a portrait of Artaud, I would like to present Artaud's portrait of Van Gogh's work (Vincent Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society) in part:

"All the more reason, on the social plane, for institutions to disintegrate, and for medicine, which resembles a stale and useless corpse to declare Van Gogh insane.

For a long time pure linear painting drove me mad until I met Van Gogh, who painted neither lines nor shapes but inner things in nature as if they were having convulsions."

cont.

"Carded with Van Gogh's nail,
landscapes reveal their hostile flesh,
the snarl of their eviscerated meanderings,
so that no one knows, on the other hand what strange
force is in the process of being metamorphosed.

An exhibit of Van Gogh's painting is always an historical
event, not in the history of painted things but in
plain historical history.

For there is no famine, no epidemic, no volcanic
eruption, no earthquake, no war that heads off the
monads of the air that wring the neck of the grim face
of fama fatum and the neurotic destiny of things,

like a Van Gogh painting -- brought out
into the sunlight, and put directly back
into view,

hearing, touch,
smell,

onto the walls of an exhibition hall --" 11

Surely there must be an irony large enough to embrace both
the above 'portrait' (complete with Van Gogh's lonely suicide)
and the fact that Van Gogh's paintings are hoarded by the
"purveyors of taste" and garner upwards of 1 million dollars
each.

In January, 1947, Artaud "gave his body as spectacle" in a¹²
"lecture" conducted at the Vieux Colombier in front of an
audience that became more and more upset by a performance
featuring convulsions, hallucinations, calm rhetoric, frenzy,
obscenity, and display of bodily functions as actuality
of metamorphosis. Some will contend that this was the only
time when the Theater of Cruelty ever really existed.

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883)

Wagner was perhaps the epitome of the romantic artist who
tried to transcend all the medias by creating a complete
synthesis known as musical drama. In his sense, theater
became the supreme art because it could transcend the
limitations of each contributing element with the overall
design (of his "worldweb") deeply rooted in myth. Driver
points out that "romanticism's ultimate return to rationalism
can only be musical. That perception was left to Richard
Wagner...(a case in point of) consciousness attempting to
consummate and complete itself in mythological thought."

Through Wagner, the mise en scene astounding acoustical/
musical and visual proportions. His was an attempt to turn
theater into a "single, gigantic instrument, whose every part
would function in concert with the rest to transport an

audience from the mundane to the mythical, from the partial to the absolute." All by himself, he invented, refined and exhausted the Wagnerian drama -- a spectacle inducing in the spectator a state of dreaming. The mind, he said, "should be placed in that dream-like state wherein it presently shall come to full clairvoyance and thus perceive a new coherence in the world's phenomena." But "the unadulterated mythos", complete with its archtypal superheroes, urged on by the madness of genius, attempts to complete itself in death.

"If I think of the storm of my heart, the terrible tenacity with which against my desire, it used to cling to the hope of life, and if even now I feel this hurricane within me, I have at least found a quietus which in wakeful nights helps me to sleep. This is the genuine ardent longing for death, for absolute unconsciousness, total nonexistence." ¹³

--in a letter to Franz Liszt
1854

In another century, society would discover (as Driver has so eloquently pointed out) "that romantic absolutes easily carried over into the political realm result in orgies of human suffering. Myth does indeed feed history, sometimes with poison." ¹⁴

GEORG BÜCHNER (1813-1837)

Büchner was a socialist rebel in exile -- a revolutionary without a program -- who turned to playwriting to exorcise the feelings of alienation, finitude, and to answer questions addressed to existence. In his work we see the "romantic quest" expressed in both social, political, and philosophical queries. The following are excerpts from his play, Danton's Death (1835):

DANTON: "Why should a hand be cursed which already bears the curse of a must? Who put the must there, eh? Who is it inside us doing the lying, whoring, stealing, and killings?...We're a lot of puppets, and the unknown powers have us on strings. Ourselves, we're nothing! Just the swords that spirits fight with -- like a fairy story, you can't see the hands."
(Act II, scene v)

And from Act III, scene vii:

DANTON: "The creation's spread too far, nothing's fallow any more, everything's teeming. This is the suicide of oblivion -- creation is the fatal wound, we are the drops of blood, and it's now rotting in its grave, the world." 15

Murder (Robespierre-style), violence, fatality and futility abound... "Those stars are like glistening tears scattered about the night; there must be a terrible grief behind the eye that dropped them." ...and the last lines of Danton (before he is led to his execution by guillotine) speak of impending paralysis of will: "The world is chaos. Nothingness is the world god yet to be born." 16

The madness of genius puts us in touch with realms of consciousness and experience most feared and oftenly repressed -- the "unbearable truths" and the unbearable paradoxes of our own struggle in life. It reveals to us patterns of behaviour and certain forms of "freedom of expression" that all humanity aspires to but may not be willing to pay the price for. But there is another side to romanticism, in that the dream of romanticism is found to culminate in fixations of death, Black Melancholy & Gothic revivalism, frequenting tombs, indulging in "The Fall of the House of Usher" or notions (Mussset's) that "the world is only a bottomless cesspool, where the most shapeless sea-beasts climb and writhe on mountains of slime"

--or it can culminate in paralysis, the total innertia, the catatonic trance of Nijinsky's last performance

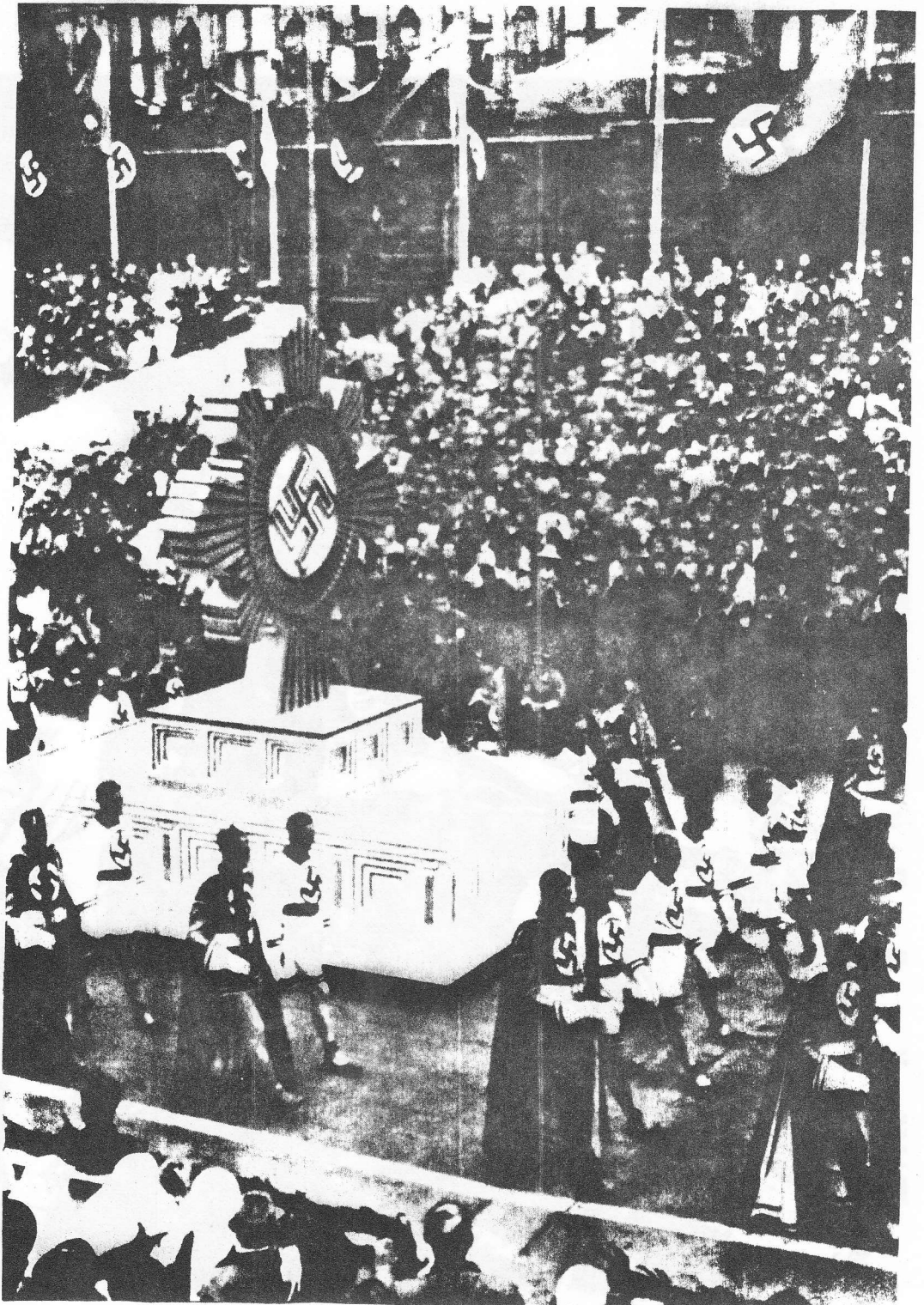
--or social absolutism, by divine or mythological right (again total paralysis of social evolution and dynamism)

--or alienation, the theater of Ionesco or Beckett, wherein the simple act of communication is the quality of the theatrical "mask" and the quest itself for the meaning of life is questioned, if not dismissed

-- or evil and nothingness, as Genet's insistence that "Evil is superior to good because it is Nothingness expressed as pure form" illustrates.

(all of the above seemingly a variation on the same theme: PARALYSIS)

-- or in the example that follows in Chapter X.





"Hey, S.O.B.

Why did you give life to me?

Such a life, such a life

Better if you had a miscarriage."

--Concentration Camp song'

X. The Auschwitz-Gulag Symphony Orchestra

We must turn our attention now to an extreme (though historically real) form of "State subsidised theater" -- one that can only exist when romantic absolutes are taken to their final conclusion, when criticism is virtually non-existent or serving only to placate the State decree concerning all that is "real" or "human", when the arts simply serve the purposes of State propaganda and individuation is virtually non-existent. The reader may be asking what is "theatrical" about this production. The simplest answer is that it is "staged", and in this case there is no debate about "is it real?" or "is it drama?".

SETTING: A freshly-painted railway station, one of many that are interconnected by shining steel rails throughout the Mother-FatherLand; on a slight-knoll, above the entrance to the performance area, hangs a sign, "Work makes Freedom". The lawns are finely manicured, displaying newly planted flowers; the hedges are neatly trimmed, and all the buildings boast a new coat of cheerful color combinations. The orchestra, dressed a bit shabbily, is already assembled, awaiting the arrival of the audience. Sentries with dogs on leash, upon directive from the house manager, patrol the environs to make sure that everything occurs with planned efficiency, according to schedule, and that there are no gate crashers.

The audience arrives in sealed boxcars, anticipating the worst. But when the doors are pried open and the masterful work of the set designers is revealed to them, a few breathe a sigh of relief. The stench of urine, excrement, and decomposing bodies (for there were some who were unable to survive the journey) is unbearable, and the orchestra is compelled to begin the program almost at once.

TODAY'S PROGRAM (pronounced 'pogrom'): "Night and Fog" -- a cheerful yet moody orchestration somewhat reminiscent of Bach, or perhaps Chopin.

The audience has noted that the orchestra is comprised of their own countrymen (perhaps of their own faith!), and their light-hearted rendition of the musical score is indeed very comforting. Perhaps the ugly rumors were simply that.

A whistle is heard; the orchestra abruptly stops playing.

The audience is lined up, all valuables are taken for 'storage'; the children, the old and crippled are sent in one direction "for decontamination" in the showers, whereas the young and fit

Lundquist's Camp Song

The first line of the song is a simple statement of fact: "The first line of the song is a simple statement of fact." This line is repeated throughout the song, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character. The song is a simple statement of fact, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character.

The second line of the song is a simple statement of fact: "The second line of the song is a simple statement of fact." This line is repeated throughout the song, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character. The song is a simple statement of fact, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character.

The third line of the song is a simple statement of fact: "The third line of the song is a simple statement of fact." This line is repeated throughout the song, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character. The song is a simple statement of fact, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character.

The fourth line of the song is a simple statement of fact: "The fourth line of the song is a simple statement of fact." This line is repeated throughout the song, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character. The song is a simple statement of fact, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character.

The fifth line of the song is a simple statement of fact: "The fifth line of the song is a simple statement of fact." This line is repeated throughout the song, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character. The song is a simple statement of fact, and it is this repetition that gives the song its unique character.

are sent to the work barracks. At the slightest provocation, dogs are set upon those hesitant or refusing to part from their families; pregnant women are beaten "in the act of duty", and stragglers are shot for "stepping out of line". There is no turning back.

By evening, the incinerators will be working over-time, spilling their sweet-smelling stench over the countryside; and villagers in the outlying areas will comically remark, "up the chimney", and pretend they live on another planet. The orchestra will perform again the next day, and the next -- the casting department will make sure that any vacancies that suddenly arise are quickly filled, for there are more than sufficient applicants interested in increasing their livelihood -- and yet inevitably these performances will be forgotten, for they weren't really that "moving."

With the exception of the 600 at Treblinka, the 60,000 in the Warsaw Ghetto, the tens of thousands at Norilsk and Vorkuta, and other isolated examples of disorder, the stage managers would proclaim that everything went "normally" and "according to the will of the people". Mutilation, torture, slavery, and murder would continue. The critics would by-and-large ignore it, or feel helpless before it; the ordinary people would pretend "it doesn't exist", or having lost a blood relation they would become "the only child". Industrialists,² like I.G. Farben (Bayer Aspirin and Zyklon-B gas pellets) and Krupp (armaments -- later to help found the European Common Market), would profit from it and the 'free' labour that it provided. Five-Year⁷ plans would be built on the backs of this 'sub-human' reactionary audience, and Joseph Stalin would be prompted to declare:

"Anti-Semitism, the most extreme form of racial chauvinism, is the most dangerous survival of cannibalism."⁴

Bravo Comrade Stalin! But there are no Jews in your Central Committee, and your personal/state approach to cannibalism is now well known under the implementation of the wide-sweeping Article 58. Yes, what of your GULAG penal system that accounted for the 'marvelous accomplishments' of the Soviet worker? A CIA invention? And if you "great father, O guiding light" are the best of examples, why were there no Chekists on the stand at Nuremberg? Their crimes were identical, and in keeping with the times. Bravo also to Churchill and the noble RAF who exterminated hundreds of thousands of civilians in blanket-bombings over Germany "in the name of freedom and civilization".

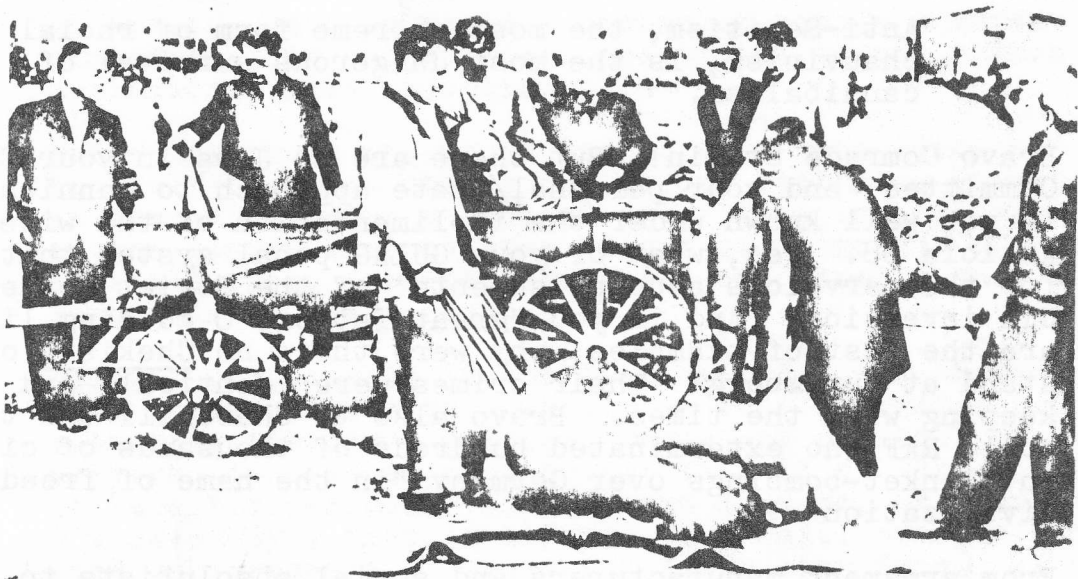
From armament manufacturers and social absolutists to street-gang terrorists a similar logic follows. And shall we blame Wagner? Poe? Shakespeare? It is known that Shakespeare was a favorite of Stalin, and Wagner a favorite of Hitler, but

to lay full blame at their feet would be cretinism, yet to totally exempt art & literature would be foolish.

Some anthropologists will maintain that we are descendants of cannibals, and that war-technology simply makes it easier for us to accomplish this on a large scale. But it is not the purpose of this chapter to explore atrocity (in all its forms) fully, but to acknowledge the revelations given by a few individuals (a far cry from the apologists!), and to understand what little effect there is in phrases such as "it isn't happening", "don't get involved", "it's hopeless anyway", whether in Germany, the U.S.S.R., or on the Streets of New York -- and perhaps achieve a better understanding of the nature of that "symphonic orchestra" and its daily "performance".

"Terror is the rule of people
who are themselves terrorized."
--Engels

And human cowardice reaps its rewards.



XI. The Plague is Upon Us

In The Theater and its Double Artaud examines the mechanisms, the cause, effect, and context of plague--whereby the mechanism is seen as traumatic infection, the cause is unknown -- yet isolation, be it personal or cultural, seems to provide the weakness upon which it thrives; the effect is conflagration, the total transformation of psyche & body; and the context is mortality and theater.

The condition of humanity, be it during the "Black Plagues" of the Dark Ages, or war, or even the spectacles within the walls of the Roman Colosseum, he likens to that of theater. For theater invariably has to draw its strength from the human condition, and not from some remote "artistic condition". B

"...the unavailing despair of the lunatic screaming in an asylum can cause the plague by a sort of reversibility of feelings & images, and one can similarly admit that the external events, political conflicts, natural cataclysms, the order of revolution and the disorder of war, by occurring in the context of the theater, discharge themselves into the sensibility of an audience with all the force of an epidemic... For if the theater is like the plague, it is not only because it affects important collectivities and upsets them in an identical way. In the theater as in the plague there is something both victorious and vengeful; we are aware that the spontaneous conflagration which the plague lights wherever it passes is nothing else than an immense liquidation." -- Artaud

In light of the previous passage, consider the following: during the Second World War (as well as the First) virtually all of the motion-picture, radio, and news media efforts were geared to the production of war propaganda. As a result, "important collectivities" were thoroughly manipulated and "upset in an identical way"; as a further result, many men and women immediately volunteered to go to war and participate in an "immense liquidation".

Consider also the Roman Colosseum within the context of effect. Spectacles of athletic skill, death, and bestiality many times provoked some of the audience to hurl themselves into the arena and be dismembered along with the intended victims.

But Artaud speaks not only of the mechanisms of theater (in its idealized form) but also content: "The terrorizing apparition of Evil which in the Mysteries of Eleusis was

produced in its pure, truly revealed, form corresponds to the dark hour of certain ancient tragedies which all true theater must recover." 2

In a sense, Artaud was as infected by the "plague" that was slowly spreading in Europe prior to the Second World War, as were the laborers, merchants, soldiers, and leaders -- yet he was conscious of this infection, profoundly aware of the responsibility of artist to humanity, and appealing to theater to immediately revitalize itself before the stage became a battlefield. (Art, in this sense, is not necessarily restricted to aesthetics but should be inclusive of social, political, and economic considerations as well.) By contrast, the Dadaist movement was engaged in ritualized mockery and when war broke out many of them fled to New York.

If we are to understand the term "plague" (both in its physical & psychic forms), we must understand it as a continuing phenomena. And in today's context, its effects are far more subtle. The "despair of the lunatic screaming in an asylum", the anguish of a saint, the heroics of a martyr, have been replaced by the "history of Rock & Roll", drug overdoses by pop stars, and economic insecurity. Content has been replaced by omnipresent & repetitive musical jingles, visual indulgences, higher decibel levels, and intense colors. The proliferation of collective habits in speech, appearance, taste, and morals has spread with the rapidity of plague. The "true" theater today is created by ad men, movie and rock & roll promoters, and a cultural/economic elite dedicated to the accumulation of wealth. Art is rapidly becoming simply a marketable commodity; its value determined by the lowest common denominator: mass acceptance.

There are those who would insist that mass acceptance is the only true measure of any worth; that mass entertainment is the only worthy aspect of art. This is probably based on the assumption that the "mass" is conscious of itself, of its future, present, and past, and finally that it is conscious of individuation.

History (especially in the 20th century) has shown us that a mass consciousness is cowardly -- that it relies on a higher authority (leaders, oracles, gods, and a clique of interpreters) to tell it what to do; that it is lazy (how else would it submit to economic slavery and bondage, or even the 9 to 5 work-a-day); that it aspires to a basic sensate experience (the omnipresence of drugs (in their many forms) is no mere reaction to materialism); that it could do well without art, and very well without trauma, or individuated conscience.

In times of economic, political, or social instability the tendency is for people to 'collectivize' -- the herd instinct working overtime. And it is during these 'collectivizations' that manipulation becomes most effective, that the imposition of one's will over others will most likely succeed. Today, values and attitudes are constantly manipulated via mass suggestion of success and fortune, induced paranoia, repetitive slogans & jingles, subliminal advertising -- and these are the symptoms of the plague. Even natural disasters are second to our experience of the news: for example, in Los Angeles (in the early 70's) a major earthquake caused considerable damage, yet the main experience of this disaster was the one contained in the daily and ongoing news reports -- an experience distilled and fitted into a "reality" structure as the omniscient news.)

The manipulation of mass consciousness is evidently accepted, perhaps even self-induced. The manipulators are as much a part of the 'mass consciousness' as the manipulated. It is a closed circle, born of cowardice and laziness. The induced aspirations of greed and materialism are shared commonly.

The plague is upon us; its symptoms are ^{manipulated} mass consciousness, its origins are fear, apathy, and lack of individuated conscience, its mechanisms are media suggestion, its effect is "nothing else than an immense liquidation" --

the liquidation of Western Culture.

XII. Content: the Synthesis of Action, Phenomena, and Meaning

In a previous chapter, we considered Art as if a 'worldweb' with each element, each strand, indispensably contributing to the overall tension. This tension is the dynamic element incorporated in any design, in any content; it is the synthesis, inseparable from the overall structure, and subject to continual change, re-definition, re-interpretation.

"We must believe that the essential drama, the one at the root of all the Great Mysteries, is associated with the second phase of Creation, that of difficulty and of the Double, that of matter and the materialization of the idea. It seems indeed that where simplicity and order reign, there can be no theater nor drama, and the true theater, like poetry as well, though by other means, is born out of a kind of organized anarchy after philosophical battles which are the passionate aspect of these primitive unifications." -- Artaud

Simplicity and order produce no tension. For order to exist, there must also be chaos; for life, death must also exist; for passion, complacency, etc. The realization of mortality is one such "tension". Within the above-mentioned context, Artaud's "difficulty" and "organized anarchy" assume an accessible meaning. "Materialization of an idea" requires a context of transformation (action & time), phenomena (matter), and meaning (unification).

All order must be perceived against the notion of chaos; all phenomena against the notion of void. Our culture's fixation with chronological time (a semblance of order), as evidenced by our notion of history and evolution, are equally present in the theater. Action usually proceeds from a starting point (to be defined in aftermath as "past") towards a conclusion -- all in linear time, or abbreviations thereof. The theater events (in terms of renditions in space) that accompany each of these moments (termed 'scenes', or grouped together as 'acts') are usually noted for their consistency and literal adaptation of the linear moment. Rarely, except possibly in 'dream' sequences, can we see where past, present, and future are brought together as simultaneous event, events that are interchangeable and transitory. Even rarer is the occurrence of discontinuity or total absence of phenomenologically constructed time. Our collective habit would rather that action be present at all times and be developed in a chronological order. Thus, our collective notions of time are rarely responsive to psychic process, one that embodies both conscious and unconscious qualities of perception and experience.

If one could express that each moment is both mortal and immortal, conscious and unconscious, phenomenal (physical) and metaphysical, then the preoccupations with chronology would vanish -- then finally a dynamic synthesis ("an organized anarchy") of action would take place. The writing of Joyce (Finnegans Wake) allude to this task, as do some experiments in contemporary-experimental film-making. But theater, initially confined by its 'physicality' has yet to make major inroads in this direction, and hence affect a major change in its attitude to content.

Phenomena, or perceivable event, is basically the "matter" in this entire process of materialization. It is at once the substance, the condition, the image of the moment -- and yet the image and its duration are intricately linked. Its meaning is derived from the precariousness of the event and its integration within the overall time fabric.

Many of the stage settings we witness today are "embalmed" with a sense of permanence & relevance. But this is mainly due to the fact that they imitate a collective notion "as to

what the setting should be" and end up resembling a visual carcass of collective notions "lying in state". A painter, for example and with greater limitations enforced upon his craft, learns to master visual phenomena by transcending the limitations (and the absence of sound, actors, dynamic lighting, etc.). His compositions must move the eye, engage the mind (quite aware that it is perceiving a paradox: a flatworld rendition that implies depth), reveal complexities of metaphor and form; his images must be timely in nature, yet owing little to nature.

The unification (as synthesis) ^{of} time, phenomena and their implied relationship become the nature of content. Content is not present in a "surprise ending", although many works have lead us to that eroneous belief by nature of the vacuum that the rest of the work reveals. Similarly content is not present if it excludes the viewer's psyche from participation (for the 'web' is incomplete without the viewer). And finally, a synthesis can never be a static model, a rule of perfection.

A synthesis (or cosmology) that is complete to all time, to all conditions, belongs only to the immortals -- and they can have it.

XIII. Will and Archtype

The concept of will, in its historical/conscious development can be well illustrated by considering the following classical theological contentions:

"Chaos was first of all,..." (Greek, from Theogony)

and,

"In the Beginning was the Word..." (Christian, N.T.)

Beginning with Chaos, Theogony contends that "next appeared.. Earth", while the Judeo-Christian tradition maintains that "the Word" and Creation are active omnipresent God-Principle. (The misinterpretation of "the Word" by, for example, the Kabbala (a system of knowledge dedicated to deciphering that "Word" of Creation by means of numerological relationships to the Hebrew alphabet), can quickly lead the researcher back to agree with the first phrase of contention.) In the modern view, to manifest Universe from chaos (or void) requires MANIFEST URGE, or CREATIVE WILL/THOUGHT, or more ambiguously, "Word".

Assuming, of course, that there was a "Beginning".

But, avoiding being too entrapped in lengthy philosophical arguments, let us agree that the concept of manifest urge (WILL) is an omnipresent condition -- perhaps understood at least as well as the common cold, in terms of its symptoms: "let there be" or a sneeze -- and that it was once attributed only to God (or Gods), but later in history also associated with human endeavor.

(The discussion of whether it is 'voluntary' or 'involuntary if the consciousness is creative' would lead us hopelessly into tautological circles.)

The development of our notions of human consciousness parallels the development of our ideas of universe and reality. Some scholars maintain that what we term the 'unconscious mind' was a foreign concept to primitive (pre-Greek) cultures; that the act of thinking "I think" was simply understood in terms of "the Gods tell me" and that dreams were the experience "of the spirit world". It is also known that non-verbal (written, transmitted and recorded) language was kept under wraps by priesthoods, and that it was mainly the Greeks that made written language accessible to 'common' man and thus perhaps beginning a revolution of thought known as science.

Few today believe that the universe is static, that time does not exist, that will and providence are only in the hands of God, that 'free will' is heresy, or even that the earth is flat...but it is indeed curious that the terms "universe" and "reality" (or even "God") are rendered in our language as nouns, rather than verbs. Perhaps we still carry with us archaic notions of man being simply a passive player in God's drama, and the universe only a stage, a thing. If that is the case, then it is more understandable why we tolerate a passive audience, a passive reaction, the idea of spectators.

The origins of theater I believe to be sympathetic magic (and not the Dionysiac orgiastic rituals) -- the ritualized act of willing the nature of phenomena, bridging the gap between the Microcosm (earthbound) and Macrocosm (astral) -- and we will be following up the implications of these concepts in theater & acting in this Chapter (and even more so in Chapter XVIII). The "death" (terminal end) of theater I believe to be the concept of unalterable (static) absolutes, "perfection", "sublime virtue" -- whether they be derived from Romanticism or Classicism -- since neither can be achieved or apprehended except in the type of paralysis we have spoken of before.

The 'reality' of our universe depends on change; the vitality of theater depends on innovation. And change and innovation are inseparable from will.

If, as I contended earlier, we can best understand will in terms of its "symptoms", and willed thought and the projection of thought in terms of its effect, then the universe could best be understood in terms of a mirror/lens of great complexity and curvature (a hologram), which remains invisible until light-energy or phenomenon occur and are rendered as if in reflection/transmittance. The dimension of the events would be relative to the condition of perception (as Einstein's Theory of Relativity implies, that galactic bodies are nodes and 'warps' in space which bend light along the lines of curvature of these 'warps' or gravitational-field contours.)² Similarly then, the stage could be viewed as an invisible optical matrix, which is only illuminated by phenomena -- the direct manifestation of artistic will.

Thus, we can also consider the actor in terms of willed and projected thought. I think the words of Artaud are very appropriate in this regard:

"The gifted actor finds by instinct how to tap and radiate certain powers...the belief in a fluid materiality of the soul is indispensable to the actor's craft. To know that a passion is material, that it is subject to the plastic fluctuations of the material, makes accessible an empire of passions that extends our sovereignty...to know in advance what points of the body to touch is the key to throwing the spectator into magical trances. And it is this invaluable kind of science that poetry in the theater has been without for a long time."³

An actor who has not tapped the centers of his power of movement, speech, gesture, and psyche -- who cannot actuate or will these faculties into existence -- has no more chance of inspiring an audience than does a technological medium (i.e. television, cinema, radio, technical effects in theater) devoid of the awareness of its "center of power".

Awareness in a technological medium (of its "center of power") usually occurs at the time of the creation of the medium. The early pioneers of film (most notably Méliès), who were in effect its creators, displayed an amazing awareness of not only its mechanical elements (i.e. construction of camera, manufacture of film) but also its linguistic capabilities in terms of optical effects, color, sound, composition in time & space. What they couldn't technically achieve & perfect, they alluded to, with the result that many further developments by new-generation film-makers were only refinements of initial conception. However, lacking in the early cinema is a sense of drama; probably due to the fact that the early film-makers themselves never went to the source of drama, but only imitated it.

Electronic music also suffered (in its early days) because of its admitted intent to duplicate any existing natural sound (especially the sounds of musical instruments.) To the dismay of these pioneers, an instrument such as a clarinet, or a flute, was found to produce not just a tone (which can be duplicated by electronic oscillators), but also noise (the sound of air rushing, lips vibrating). Subsequently, sound synthesizers incorporated "white-noise" generators, but still obviously missing was the human breath, and the control of this breathing. It is only with the advent of direct computer (waveform) synthesis that electronic music has now come into its own -- complete with a new "nervous system" and an independent set of rules and approaches to sound composition.

A willful approach to art is one of aggressive creation; a passive approach is one of plagiarism and repetition (if only to reinforce its weak argument for existence.)

From will to archtype:

Archtype is best understood as the chief/foremost model or symbol of an event and/or condition. The myths of Creation are full of them: the Eve/Pandora figure, hermaphroditic symbols of unified consciousness, tree of life/self-knowledge, serpents, creatures as personification of the unconscious, and even the baser conditions of humanity (as personified best by the Ancient Grecian Gods): cannibalism, incest, lying, whoring, stealing, etc.

The static archtype (or 'fixed symbol') is antithesis to will and experience; the mutable-dynamic archtype (i.e. a circle or mandala, understood in terms of implosion/explosion or as a 'wheel in motion') at best an attempt to collectivize and approximate experience. In either case, the archtype is a reductio ad absurdum of the rich language of psyche, emotion, and intellect. Freudian and Jungian psychology, each in its own way, attempted to present a rendition of archtype as model of conscious-unconscious processes, and at best succeeded in presenting mirror-fragments of a collective (and agreed upon) personality structure.

Take the image-archtype such as tower/train/serpent...the reader is laughing, yet some psychologists would love to point out the special context and relevance of these images in our "collective unconscious" (our 'collective agreement') throughout history. But a tower/train/serpent does not have to necessarily connote a penis, it can simply be what it is. A vase/wreath/circle does not necessarily connote a vagina, it also can be what it is -- either as a collection/hybrid of images, or as individual experiences -- experienced in light of the immediate moment, free from the shackles of prejudiced intellect. Perhaps Jung, in his studies of Medieval consciousness, was prompted to attack the problem from categorical point of view, but the justification by psychologists, theologians, and hermeticists to extend this

line of reasoning in attempt to apprehend contemporary consciousness is indeed slim, and its application to theater (heroic archtypes? infantile archtypes? religious archtypes? dramatic archtypes?) entirely anti-dramatic.

Beyond the context of interpreting and understanding certain processes of thought in antiquity, present-day preoccupation with archetype, arch-condition, and arch-myth constantly betrays our experience of the present (i.e. we are male or female, have two legs, hands, and a bilateral symmetry -- so what is so mysterious about the Yin/Yang? Four limbs and a head -- the magical five-pointed star? Archtypal secrets?) -- adding only another inane mystery to the already proliferated garden of mysteries which surrounds us. We need no more mysteries, no more hidden arcane symbols, meanings, and otherwise insidious mechanisms of human bondage.

(The keepers of "secrets", as history has shown us, will always do so for their own benefit, for the perpetuation of their own 'illuminati' species -- whether it be in the sanctuary of God, or in the sanctuary of technology.) In a word, usury.

The snake eats its tail: we began the chapter with "the Word" and the Kabbala and we shall end in a likewise, but Moebius, fashion with a quote from a letter by Artaud:

"My dear friend Jacques Prevel, I think I have taken about as much shit as I'm going to from Kafka, his arsoteric allegorical symbolism...they will, however, stop giving me a pain in the ass right now, because I am not about to hear another word of them, ever. I doubt the world has ever known a more obnoxious crock of silly shit and sanious monkeyshines than the cock and bull stew known as the Kabbala, this larva coming out all over in an angry rash of the rejected angels of the mind. If God is above all innumerable and unfanthomable, and nobody ever did have God's number, then why not cease and desist from incessantly measuring and enumerating all these shadows of non-being into which, according to the Kabbala, he is in the process of withdrawing, beyond any possible return or recourse, from the innumerable numbers of creation...What is this number 3 they keep harping on like some revelation of the secrets of the universal cipherable quantity forever rattling on like an egg-checker in a henhouse? So the hen laid the egg in 3 days. So what!...which amounts to making man a sucker for a big infected piece of communion wafer candy on a stick, a regular all-day sucker, so they can keep a hold not only on man himself, but on that certain something more, which has been called the divinity of man."4

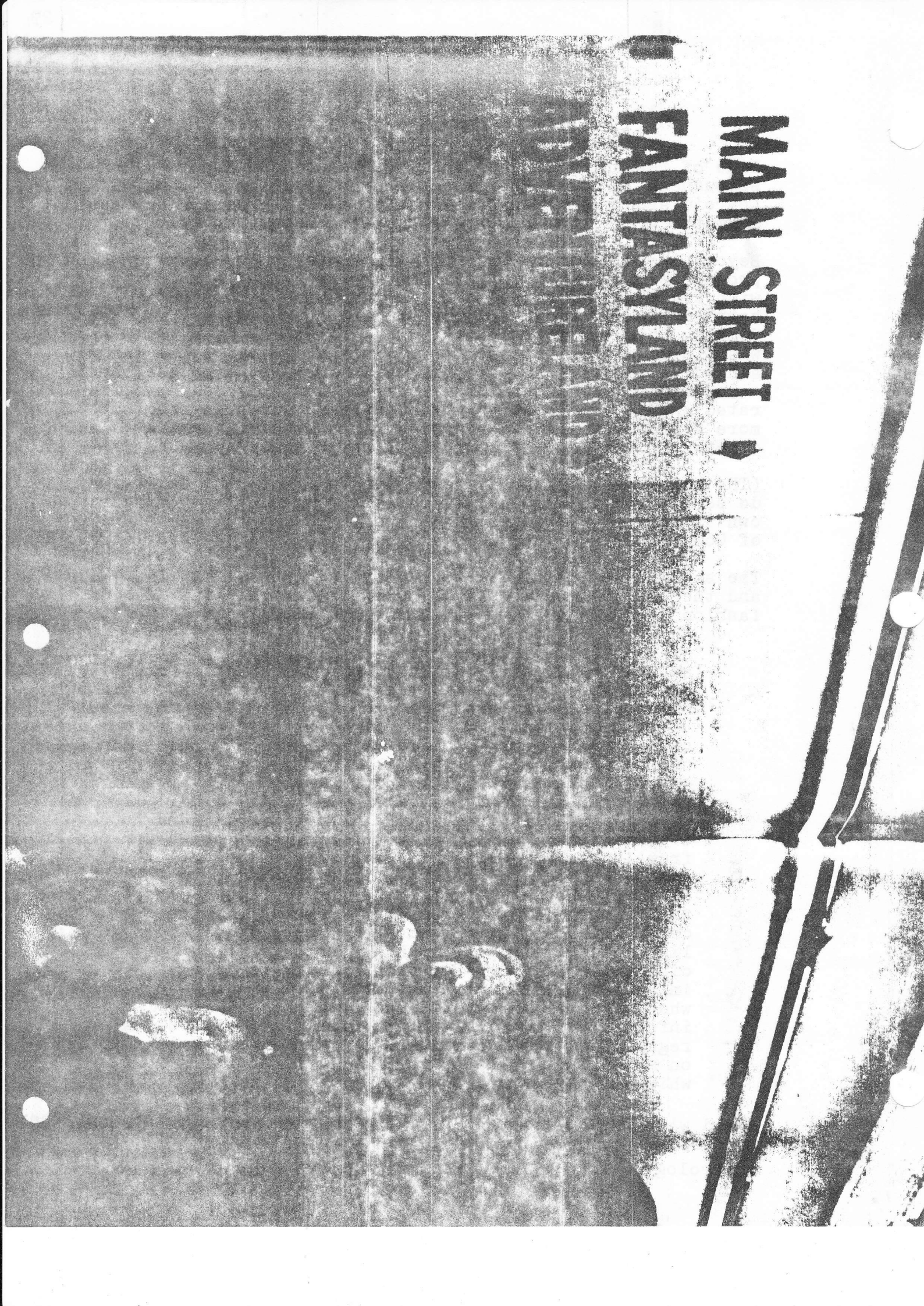
--and with that, we leave Artaud, the very real Inquisition, the very real Stalinist terror; terror in the name of whatever numerology.

MAIN STREET



FANTASYLAND

ADVENTURELAND



XIV. A Lesson in Life

--Essay rendered as One-Act Play

SETTING: A long corridor; (from audience direction/point-of-view) to the left of the foreground entrance stands a desk with papers strewn about. A middle-aged female receptionist sits stiffly at the desk. To the left of the entrance is a cardboard sign, on a stand, with the words "No Exit" clearly rendered. The corridor is lit up by isolated spots, thereby suggesting a skeletal segmented backbone that diminishes into blackness. Traffic sounds are heard to emanate periodically from the end of the corridor; voices emanate from the walls. Props will appear to materialize and dematerialize.

A boy, late teens and in formal attire, holding a violin in one hand, ENTERS from off-stage, walks slowly towards audience (shielding his eyes from the footlights, which had been turned on just prior to his entrance) -- he is oblivious of the receptionist. The boy pauses, brings the violin up to his chin to begin playing.

RECEPTIONIST: (Slowly looking up, then suddenly:) Young man!

Boy turns his head, looks for the source of the sound; satisfied that there is no one, tries to begin anew.

RECEPTIONIST: Come now! I haven't all day.

BOY: (Confused again, finally notices her.) Yes?

RECEPTIONIST: (Helpful) You haven't registered yet, have you.

BOY: I thought...

RECEPTIONIST: Well?

BOY: (Moves towards her & out of range of footlights which are dimmed) Well...no, not yet anyway.

RECEPTIONIST: Everyone does you know. First, you must pre-register...sit down please. (He looks around, there is no chair; the receptionist notices also.) You may stand.

BOY: (Nods as if to say 'Thank You')

RECEPTIONIST: (Cold, yet helpful) What category please?

BOY: (Unsure of himself) I'm an art student.

RECEPTIONIST: Oh yes...THE art student.

BOY: (Stronger) Music.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes, I see...(not looking up, pauses, shuffles paper) yes...sign here...and then down the hall and to your left.

BOY: (Signes the form) Ah, excuse me...?

RECEPTIONIST: Well?

BOY: When can I play?

RECEPTIONIST: (Suddenly very severe) After you have registered...
(dismissing him) down the hall, and to your left.

BOY: (Moves away, catches sight of the sign, pauses) But you said...

Receptionist, desk, and sign dematerialize; the boy is left alone. A telephone rings. The boy pauses, as if to answer it, then moves away down the corridor. Sounds of traffic noise emanate from the end.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE: (With fanfare music) Today's activities include...(static, followed by girls giggling)...without i.d. cards will be penalized...(static)...i.d. photos will be taken (static)...in...(static)

Boy is looking around, trying to locate the voices.

VOICE: At least on the outside I can pick my roommate.

VOICE: (Interrupting) Recite after me...

VOICE: (Interrupting) This is intolerable, how do they expect...

VOICE: It teaches discipline...

VOICE: Excuse me...(clears his throat)

Another table, desk lamp, clock materialize -- no chair.

VOICE: Well?

BOY: (Startled) I'm an art student. I would like to register.

VOICE: Are you an optimist?

BOY: (Looking around, disoriented) Well...yes.

VOICE: Good! Pessimists are not allowed!

BOY: I'm here to...

VOICE: Yes...we need dedicated, intelligent, strong, creative...
(fanfare starts again)...excuse me...(silence, then a 'click'
-- the music is turned off)...yes...good!

CLOCK: (Interrupts -- clockface animates) Time's up!

VOICE: Good luck! (Fades out with sound of wind.)

All props dematerialize.

P.A. VOICE: Registration is closed!

BOY: But...I paid my tuition.

VOICE: (Distant) You'll get a refund...we're sorry, but registration closed yesterday. Didn't they tell you? Didn't you notice?

BOY: Notice what?

VOICE: There are no chairs.

VOICE: (Formal, interrupting) We apologize and regret any inconvenience...

BOY: But I was told...

VOICE: Please make way and exit left.

BOY: But I have pre-registered.

VOICES: (Confusion of voices at first) Oh...that makes a difference.

Chair materializes, lit from above.

CHAIR: Take your seat please, the course will begin.

BOY: (Looking about, then noticing chair) Yes sir.

VOICE: Recite after me...

BOY: (Eagerly) Yes?

VOICE: (Pause) Oh...give him a diploma.

BOY: (Protesting) But...

VOICE: Done! (Sound effect: door slams.)

BOY: But I haven't done anything?

VOICE: Didn't you say you were an optimist?

BOY: Yes!

VOICE: (Command) Give him a desk! (Desk materializes) Music?
(Muzak softly fades in, then out.)

BOY: (protesting) I want to study.

VOICE: (Loud, booming) WHAT?

BOY: Well, what I mean...

VOICE: (To another) He read the sign.

VOICE: (To the boy) You read the sign? Yes? Good!

VOICE: He must be!

VOICE: Days off, then. Fringe benefits, office parties twice
a year...welcome on board!

VOICE: We expect you here at 9 a.m. sharp.

BOY: (Addressing the desk) Who expects me?

VOICE: It doesn't matter.

BOY: But I have to know.

VOICE: There is nothing to know.

VOICE: (Interrupting) EXCEPT!

VOICE: Oh yes...the Optimist Club meets tomorrow noon.

VOICE: Perhaps you could give us a recital?

BOY: I...think so.

VOICE: Excellent! Give him a key. (Key materializes). That's
all you need.

BOY: Thank you. Can I play now?

VOICE: If you wish.

BOY begins to play; lights suddenly go on, revealing the set
and stage props & instruments -- sounds of loud applause and
"Bravos" interrupt him. He is startled; fanfare music begins,
a piano is sheeled in from off-stage; workmen appear.

CURTAIN DROPS.

XV. Technology and Morals

Technology, as an extension of mankind's pursuit towards greater perceptual and intellectual achievements, as a tool for heightened expression, makes it possible for even our smallest (and incidental) gestures to become extremely amplified. It is also capable of producing a great deal of mediocrity and manipulation of a purely sensate nature, perhaps to the point of mesmerising the viewer/audience. Technology is at once both the object of romantic attack and derision, and romantic adulation.

The rock & roll arena is one cultural form that continually exploits the capacity for technological audio-visual stimulation. In its worst form, the physical gestures, sounds, and music are not substantially different (in motivation) from those of a three-year old child, who upon being given a new toy (i.e. whistle, spoon, or pans) proceeds to produce sounds noted only for their loudness and chaotic novelty. In its more refined forms, it features subtle compositions of audio-visual language and social intercourse. In any case, it tends toward spectacle in an almost religious sense, wherein primal emotions can be unleashed by banks of gigantic amplifiers/speakers, wherein catharsis and emotional transport is achieved on a mass scale. Perhaps a contemporary attempt at a new metaphysics (i.e. the metaphysics of laser, light, sound), one that can seemingly escape (or transcend) questions of morality by simply assuming that the experience is supra-moral, beyond reproach (no matter how the 'conservative element' will natter on about it leading to sexual perversion, debasement of old values, etc.)

Before we continue too far, we should at least consider the definition of morality: namely, the interpretation of content, context, and action in terms of good and evil. Thus, it is apparent that if we are to question the use of technology (in terms of morality, good & evil), we must also consider what purpose technology serves, and how.

(I am reminded of an episode that took place while I was teaching Geometry: Within the context of our studies on volume geometry, I had introduced the contemporary notions that volume shape influences the nature of energy fields, and specifically set out (with the assistance of the class) to conduct experiments to prove or disprove this phenomena -- at least on a basic level. The mistake I made was that I chose to use the 'golden pyramid' -- a shape rescently embroiled in many fierce scientific and pseudo-scientific

contentions. Immediately, I was approached by an irate parent of one of the students who denounced me for dabbling with knowledge "expressly forbidden in the Bible", "corrupting young people's minds", "investigating the powers of God" -- in effect "Black Magic". No amount of argument could move this individual from his original contention which, in my opinion, amounted to believing that we should have never utilized any form of knowledge (the old "Garden of Eden" scare business), and that the invention of the wheel was the cause of our downfall.)

Let us look at a few examples of technology and morality:

Low frequency sound is known to produce nausea, temporary insanity, disintegration of organs inside the body, as well as setting in motion the collapse of buildings, if the correct subsonic resonant frequency is engaged. Its use, therefore, is extremely dangerous, and considered 'evil' by most standards. But sound, of either high or low frequencies, can be used as a physical element (in a musical or dramatic sense) to enhance a condition, rather than as a weapon against the audience. In this sense, we would contend that its use was for the 'good' (of the situation). In a similar vein, if the stroboscopic visual effect is intended to produce epileptic convulsions in the audience, then it is also a weapon (and immoral); if it is intended to enhance an experience in colour perception, add to trauma, engage after-image perception, then we would deem it moral. It is therefore imperative that the artist be versed in not only the uses and applications of technological language, but also the content and effect it has on the viewer. Indiscriminate use is not just infantile, it is dangerous. And avoiding the issues ("Wishing it would go away") is impotent reasoning.

Avoiding contemporary issues of linguistic development is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that visual artists have rarely explored & exploited subliminal visual language, at least not to the extent that the advertising industry has. Subliminal language (meant to include not only visual, but also acoustical forms) can best be understood as a form of communication that by-passes the rational (conscious) screening mechanisms of acceptance/rejection and assimilation/deliberation to work on the viewer's unconscious desires, fears, and attitudes of behaviour/expression. Its use in advertising is basically manipulative (i.e. to convince the public to buy a product or lifestyle) and it is basically insidious because it is an example of subjugating mind(s) to the profit of others. Yet, I also contend that there are moral uses of subliminal suggestion -- uses which are directed towards inspiration and revelation of individuated psyche. In this manner, it would probably be most closely allied with psychiatric health (since the techniques are basically derived from psychological approaches to perception), rather

than usury.

The specific techniques employed in both graphic and cinematic visual processes have been explored by other writers and film-makers, and their specific mention and discussion is not warranted here at this time. The major issue is basically whether the artist applies his/her energy in support of an absolute notion of the 'right way' (a totalitarian ideal, or an economic absolute like "wealth"), and in so doing condones the use of any kind of brain-washing (cultural/political) by means of slogan insemination directed at "the masses" with the obvious intent of serving the purposes of the ideal/state, or whether the artist applies his/her talent towards the process of awakening individuation, the individual experience & catharsis, the individual revelation, which must also include the process of educating and revealing to the viewer the subliminal languages used. In the latter case, the artist then demands a full conscious response to the work.

(In workshops that I conducted in subliminal language, the first reaction that occurred when the revelation of these techniques became apparent was one of horror, followed by anger (at the manipulative practices), and finally understanding.)

It is necessary for us to become the masters of our own propaganda, and not leave the use of it to others.

Sometimes our usage of technology approaches stupidity. In the days of initial experimentation with carbon-arc and mercury-vapor light sources to render 'black-light' ultra-violet effects little concern was evident for any potential harm these instruments may exhibit towards the human body. Manufacturing standards were un-coordinated, safety was of little concern. The result of this, and in light of current research concerning damage to the body from Ultra-Violet radiation (along with the author's personal experience in this area), is that the use of these instruments without proper training/knowledge is dangerous, harmful in some respects, and immoral.

Another area of concern is bio-feedback: the 'closed-loop' bio-feedback systems that enable the subject to simultaneously perceive and create audio-visual phenomena through (for example) an interface of bio-rhythm monitoring devices that amplify brainwave, heartbeat, respiration, etc. signals instantaneously, and feed these signals into a video-synthetic system of dramatic/traumatic amplified display. Obviously, the viewer/subject watching this video display will react to the images, and these reactions will instantly (simultaneously) affect the image -- the time delay between action

and reaction minimal -- in effect: a short-circuit. Some theater applications (as well as home applications) have been voiced with regards to a 'total audience participation' via such a mass bio-feedback system and large-scale display. In this sense, the audience could instantly affect the nature of the material viewed as they view it, and in concert with each other. In effect, a collective nervous system -- a collective mise en scene.

These notions should be subjected to a great deal more study than is at hand -- and again the author's own experiences with this process (in a live televised performance situation) suggests extreme caution.

Many of the "Prometheans" (the inventors and innovators of technology) of our own Age displayed a great concern for humanitarian matters. Perhaps at times they did not have a total vision of what the full implications of their discoveries would be (in terms of future generations), but their motivations were largely humanitarian. We have all probably read of the concerns of Einstein, Planck, and others of the nuclear-physics family, but I think a supreme example of inventor-visionary is **Nicholas Tesla**, a largely forgotten man. Tesla was an inventor who created, developed, the wireless radio, wireless electrical transmission, a variety of a-c current devices, robots, power generators, motors, etc. -- in fact we owe it to his genius the concept of alternating current and almost all of the electrical devices we take so easily for granted. And these designs were well in existence at the turn of the century. Their implimentation, however, subjected to capital(ist) whim. It was also Tesla that predicted (at the turn of the century) future oil shortages, impending war (to this effect he was trying to create a weapon so terrifying that it would never be used by either side), ecological disasters, and he was adamant about the need to find not only other energy resources, but also the need to cultivate our social humanity. His writings are scarce, but they exist -- perhaps some will also be made accessible (by the Freedom of Information Act) from the F.B.I which confiscated his files upon his death -- and if the reader wishes to understand the nature of the technological 'visionary' he/she should endeavor to look up these writings, lectures, and 'prophesies'.

It is our responsibility in a technological society to understand the nature and usage of technology, in both a practical and moral sense.

XVI. Towards a Living Language

Visual language constantly conspires/aspires to add new words and meanings to its vocabulary, to develop new contexts of existence; the mise en scène is usually the area of innovation in theater, constantly trying to develop itself beyond the reach of spoken language. But now we come to the last strands of our "web", the written and spoken language -- domain of playwright & director. And here, at the very haunts of the "ghost of Shakespeare" we shall apply ourselves to the task of revitalizing the written language.

In light of such noble predecessors, early paralysis can well set in. (Consider the dilemma of Italian sculptors faced with the omnipresent evidence of Michaelangelo's work, and then their task to exceed it in aesthetic excellence.) But the language of our contemporary era is one of synthesis utilizing many disparate elements of our spatial, acoustical, visual, technological, and futuristic experience. To best understand this disparity, and especially in terms of theater, let us look back at the true context of the Elizabethan drama (in terms of staging).

The Elizabethan stage was quite bare, with little attempt at scenery or costuming, jutting out (thrust) and surrounded on three sides by audience. G.B. Harrison (Shakespeare, the Complete Works) presents the following description:

"There was no curtain to conceal or reveal the main stage, no light but daylight. Hence contact between actors and spectators was close and intimate; both shared in one experience...All the illusion nowadays created by the electrician and the scene-painter had to be effected by the dramatist and the actors. Words and gestures alone kindled the imagination. When the modern director requires dawn or moonlight, he calls on the electrician. When Shakespeare needed dawn, he suggested it in the dialogue:

'But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.'

...We owe the poetry of Shakespeare's plays to the barrenness of the Elizabethan stage and to the appreciation of the Elizabethan audience...One reason why Shakespeare's plays are so vivid to read or to broadcast is that so much of the action is described and embedded in the words."

Aside from the demands made on the Shakesperean actor ("Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines".² -- Hamlet's instructions to the players.), and the fact that it is definitely a special proving ground for acting oratory, Shakesperean dramatic language is a burden to the modern theater. A character thinking aloud, commenting in audible whispers, reveals an uncomfortable self-consciousness of this type of drama rendered in tact in an era no longer belonging to it. The settings of so many Shakesperean dramas rendered to day are redundant (by nature of our modern conventions demanding a realistic, descriptive setting) to the words. The lines seem simply "mouthed", and words such as "lief", "periwig-pated", "unkennel", "jig-maker", "Hautboys" lead us to the footnotes in search of their intended meanings. The purists have had their way for many years insisting that the text is sacred, and the ridiculousness of the Elizabethan 'dinosaur' that is inflated yearly (the script intact) and presented at festivals is becoming obscene.

The modern-day directors should perhaps well remember the words of Hamlet, "Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action..."³ and act on their license to acknowledge the contemporary stage of acoustical and visual complexity and alter, interpret the text, and reform it altogether. (Otherwise it is, as Artaud commented, the subjugation of theater to an archaic language form.)

Revision, re-interpretation, and reformation of text should not be limited to Shakespeare, but all of theater's predecessor playwrights. And it is primarily the director's responsibility to engage this reformation in light of considerations for setting, actor, stage, and audience.

"I have heard that guilty creatures
sitting at a play have by the very
cunning of the scene been struck so
to the soul that presently they
have proclaimed their malefactions..."⁴
(Hamlet)

To strike the contemporary audience "so to the soul" requires of the setting a context that is believable and relevant -- a context touching their own experience. It requires characters who reflect the audience's own passions, joys, and concerns. A North American audience today can only but curiously gaze upon courtly activity that is occurring as if on some distant asteroid in time and space. If these plays be of a moral nature, then they must touch us in terms of our morality. If public figures be a mirror of our 'collective' morality, if 'MacBeth' be held up to

account for his immoral behavior, and his tragic plunge towards fated doom be witnessed by us, then we must be addressed in contexts familiar to us. (In example, a similar drama occurred in our decade, and this drama was presented live as the Watergate and impeachment hearings of Richard M. Nixon -- missing of course the poetic utterances and soul searching of the MacBeths, but nevertheless compelling because of its immediacy and relevance.) Modest innovation will not save theater from becoming a cultural anachronism.

The burden of reformation (if not revolution) falls on the shoulders of the playwrights and directors. We, as an audience, must learn how to enjoy, play, experience language in a unique and novel form. Realism and the use of language in its base utilitarian manner is a "tired horse", and will no longer do. We, as an audience, demand incantation in modern syllables! We demand contemporary magic and linguistic metamorphosis! We demand to experience love, infidelity, revolution, chaos, murder, political satire, comedy, despotism, mistaken identity, madness, war, political ideology, folly, revenge, metaphysics as relevant moments within ourselves and society. We wish to have our senses (smell, sight, touch, hearing, and the extraordinary senses) contended with. We wish to be "addressed in the language of our time."

I will not agree with Artaud that Shakespeare's plays "should be burned", but I think that Shakespeare's pre-eminence in drama should be displaced. By whom? By the contemporary playwright, by "the rough beast, its hour come round at last". The pretending (if not elite) Shakespearean audience, along with the genuinely interested scholar, critic, and ordinary theater goer, will undoubtedly be interested in 'the Classics', whether Greek or Shakespearean. But honestly rendered, or creatively interpreted by poets who are acutely aware of verbal, visual, auditory, and spatial characteristics of contemporary language. The rhythm, pacing, and intonation of the original form can be subject to re-interpretation (to render it simply in our present-day colloquial form would be ridiculous.) Peter Brook, the renowned English director, has indicated that he engages his actors in attempts to apprehend the language by first extracting phrases which lend themselves to natural delivery, then exploring missing passages in terms of sound and movement. Thus, he maintains, that the change of style "from the apparently colloquial to the evidently stylized is so subtle that it cannot be observed by any crude attitudes."

Insight into the context, total fabric, as well as the immediate condition or moment is required in rendering any text; and mere colloquial garb, contemporary setting, and condensed utterance (with audio-visual amplification) will not suffice.

Since Shakespeare represents a milestone in the "theater of dialogue", any discussion of reformation must necessarily apply itself to the reformation of Shakespearean dialogue. And it is here (with selected examples) that we will apply ourselves.

Prevalent throughout Hamlet are passages which evoke projections of the psyche, anterior states of mind. Mirrors, literally, held up to the psyche. Hamlet's words, "I will speak daggers to her, but use none" could be rendered in the colloquial as "my words will hurt her, but leave no scar"; but the net result is weaker since the word "dagger" is crucial in terms of suggested metaphors (i.e. the sharp tongue, words as instruments of violence & retribution, etc.). Thus we either find a spoken/visual composite (not to mention the actor's talents in rendition) to replace the archaic "dagger" or live & die with it. As a contemporary audience we demand externalization of inner processes (i.e. the inner psyche & countenance expressed in visual manifestations such as invisible optical planes/mirrors and the countenance 'burning' within) in favor of a self-conscious rendition of Hamlet muttering to himself aloud.

A passage such as : "Oh shame! Where is thy blush? Rebellious Hell, if thou canst mutine in a matron's bones, to flaming youth let virtue be as wax and melt in her own fire"⁶ is naturally synthetic in the sense that it addresses both Hamlet's mother, outer appearance, inner conscience, and Hamlet's inner predicament. Again if rendered in the more colloquial "Where is your guilt? Look!" it must be supported by Hamlet holding up a mirror to her -- revealing a metamorphic image, a maiden transformed into a whore-like skull, and continuing "If you can cheat adultery, then youth and virtue has no example but to be consumed, corrupt" (mirror broken in defiance to this).

Again, an archaic passage such as (Queen): "Oh, speak to me no more, these words like daggers enter in my ears. No more sweet Hamlet!"⁷ can be interpreted as a more contemporary "Your words, they tear and sear me with their touch! No more!" and Hamlet's reply, as aside, "Its not my words, but fiery Hell you feel, singing your mind with your fears."

These approaches are by no means definitive, but perhaps they do 'break the ice'.

To externalize inner process we do not always have to resort to overt theatricalisms (i.e. mirrors), the actor's craft may suffice, or it may not. If the actor is deficient, the entire personality-role structure changes, and it is the director's responsibility to rewrite the text in light of these changes.

"O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell
and count myself a king of infinite space,
were it not that I have bad dreams."
--Shakespeare (Hamlet)'

XVII. Heroic Content

Our examination of theater, in going beyond form, language, the mise en scène, and the manner of speaking, inevitably leads us to consider human models of content (or, in keeping with the earlier metaphor of "worldweb", the psyche of the spider itself). From Antiquity to the present, we have witnessed an almost endless parade of heroic & anti-heroic models (i.e. The Gods & Graecian Heroes, the Greek Army as tragic hero, Oedipus, Electra, Medea & Jason, the Shakespearean tragic & comic heroes, the classic, the romantic, the comic, the revolutionary) all in ways that attempt to resolve destiny, man's predicament in society & nature. In all of these events, we are drawn to the individual (individuated) condition contending with the extra-individual context. We are not looking at compulsive behavior, nor the coldly rational, but a conscious synthesis of the two. We interpret bravery and cowardice as conscious acts with moral repercussions. The magnitude of the heroic action is dependent on the context and circumstances (is love, the family, society, or the world at stake?); the demanded sacrifice is one of death. (In this sense, the final stakes are life and death.) The heroic content is thus the precise edge (of the event) which is established between the nature of conscious individuation (and the forces of self-preservation and procreation) and the nature of the collective (the forces of social preservation).

Heroicism necessarily implies that the self be subjugated to the collective, that will and sacrifice be evident, that the event take place at a crucial time. In all, it is an indication of the moral fulcrum upon which our actions depend and well within the universe of cause and effect. If, for example, our society condoned as virtuous actions the betrayal of others, cannibalism, violence without reason, usury, bestiality, then it could not exist as a society for long, and the nature of the heroic content' would be to encourage (by example) those states of behavior. (An excellent historical example of an approximation to this type of society is furnished by Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, where betrayal & violence was encouraged -- but only if directed at the social 'undesirables' i.e. Jews and 'reactionaries'--and enforced by the police state.) Thus, the nature of heroic content is largely determined by the society & social mores.

The selfless actions of a hero, acting in accordance with the moral laws of society (which can in themselves vary from "the end justifies the means" to "the means must be such & such") reach the apex of heroicism if they occur at the "perfect moment". In other words, when the action can have its greatest effect. Timing. In historical terms, this occurs when the protagonist realizes when his/her "appointment with destiny" is slated, and keeps said appointment. In theater, it refers to the correct timing of the dramatic catharsis/climax, and failure to execute this on time results in "anti-climax".

To better illustrate the above concepts, let me suggest a scenario that presents differing historical and theatrical possibilities:

The scene takes place in a jail cell in a Roman prison. Barabas and Jesus are seated alone, anticipating the rising of the sun, and knowing full well that before the next day is over one of them will be crucified, and the other freed. Barabas tells that he has been incarcerated for robbery, murder, the raiding of caravans, and the attempt to raise a revolutionary force to overthrow the Roman invaders (colonialists). He has attempted escape several times, and his one hope is that the verdict tomorrow will be favorable towards him. In contrast, Jesus has been incarcerated for preaching reformation of the Old Testament & Mosaic Scripture, encouraging pacificism & social responsibility (brotherly love), and advocating a revolution of mind, at the expense of body. He anticipates that the verdict will be against him. At dawn, and according to the "Catholic" scenario, the Jewish people will decide which of the two they want freed.

Without continuing further, we can readily guess the results, and "history" (also Catholic myth) will prove us "right." Jesus was crucified, and Barabas was freed to continue his career (later in "Spaghetti Westerns" as an anti-hero). Both had appeared on the revolutionary scene at the same time, but according to the scenario the "appointment with destiny" was definitely Jesus'. (The Catholic scenario, rather than the Jewish one.)² As a result, Jesus' example is understood as the Super-Heroic, Barabas is ignored, and the choice of the Jews is held against them for centuries. In another culture, with other leftleanings, Jesus' crucifixion would possibly be termed as "inconsequential" and Barabas' failure to overthrow the Roman conquerors a "major tragedy". The latter culture in contemporary terminology would be that of "dialectical materialism". In theater/dramatic terms, the above events would all be anti-climactic since the context and conclusion is so historically biased and familiar.

The hero is thus a conscious individual who is at once at odds with forces above and beyond his/her immediate control, who risks his/her life in that struggle, and who will be judged not only by himself, but by society and in the future. Indeed, a rare combination of elements -- elements of instigation (and action) rather than of passive witness.

The heroic theater, as dominant force, has more or less ~~come~~ to its conclusion in the contemporary arena. Debased remnants remain (in terms of familiar melodrama), most notably in the American theater, but its end seems to coincide with the wasteland produced by "heroic" battles and destruction in the "European Theater of War".

(The reader will notice that the American Theater has by a large been ignored in this treatise, since its most dominant characteristics of musical comedy, pseudo-psychological melodramas and tragi-comedy are so ephemeral -- with the few exceptions provided by Williams and Miller -- that lengthy discussion would prove fruitless.)

It is to the European Theater, amongst the wasteland populated by wandering babbling mussulmen of the camps, that we turn to experience the rejection of heroic content as exemplified best by Genet, Artaud, Ionesco, and Beckett. Thus also, we will see that in this new contemporary theater the notions of 'psyche' (as portrayed in the example at the beginning of the chapter) will also be rejected.

In Artaud's theater, "an act is a surd, and a surd is cruel because it has no meaning."³ This notion is further developed by Genet when he later held that "the only beautiful (that is, true) act is unmotivated, the acte gratuit."⁴ Thus, action (in theater and by implication in life) is now deemed to be free from logic, both individual and social. The truly contemporary theater, Driver suggests, is "the place where the actual reality of the (natural) world appears... It is the world come fully into its own."⁵ He further maintains (with examples drawn from the above playwrights) that whereas society is dramatic (human behavior expressed in terms of idea, conflict, continuity), nature (and theater) is disconnected -- hence contemporary theater's anti-social tendencies *and* "alienation".

And continuing the above argument, Artaud will maintain that the "surd" is the only "absolute" ("it is absolute or nothing") Ionesco will offer that "after having rejected false theater language, that we must try as painters have done, to rearticulate them, purified and reduced to their essence. Theater can only be theater (and not ideology, allegory, politics, lectures, essays, or literature)... Theater is an extreme

exaggeration of feelings, an exaggeration which disjoins the real." ⁶

"Disjointing of the real" is just the beginning of what has been termed "The Theater of the Absurd", and has prompted Driver to comment:

"Thus, the general proposition is that the theatrical imagination is not subservient to any other form of mental activity...At its best, absurdist theater leads one to the edge of consciousness and invites him to peer into the darkness beyond." ⁷

The mental disconnection (the mind disconnected from nature, society, logic), symptomatically termed "Alienation", reaches its apex in the plays of Samuel Beckett. In Beckett's carefully crafted work, there is no longer any need of Artaud's angst, Genet's "absolute nothingness", or Ionesco's "pure theater" -- all events are now to be rendered as a series of disconnected fragments in disconnected myth and time. Theater now becomes acting games (i.e. two characters engaging in dialogue, question & answers, waiting for someone who never comes; the 'someone' and the waiting inevitably inconsequential "theater for theater's sake", and exercises in futility. In its efforts to apprehend a "natural state" theater has now finally come to its terminal state. We are treated to the final emptiness of the romantic "quest for reality"; there are no heroes or martyrs, no society of any consequence, no struggles of any merit.

The landscape is barren. Life is a series of encounters. Meaningless.

We are bankrupt.

We are left with nothing. Not even our tears.

XVIII. The Alchemical Theater

"I decided I wanted to live. Nothing else counted but that I wanted to live. I could have stolen from husband, child, parent of friend, in order to accomplish this...I would even take from the dying."

--concentration camp inmate'

As the Great War freezes over, the Holocaust^t submits to an uneasy 'silence': one side of the fence, 'Joe' Stalin orders the execution of soldiers captured by the Germans (for cowardice & treason) and the mass deportation of peasants who fled their homes (for consorting with the enemy); on the other side of the fence 'Joe' McCarthy is conducting witch hunts for anyone with a slightest hint of a leftleaning posture. War criminals are re-instated in government and economic positions to fill a 'new quota'. Madness and propaganda warfare is now firmly entrenched; the political apologists organize into vocal ensembles.

Amidst the dead sea of rubble and ash, that stretches^t out past foreground's broken buildings, children wander with innocent wonder. Their imagination cannot be contained -- from the moment of conception, life demands to be heard. But what of the horrors? They are not theirs. A Phoenix of a theater, arising from ashes, will begin here. Beginning with a few sticks and stones piled up, the imagination will 'make something out of nothing'; in the ruins of this theater 'backlot' the roving bands of children will discover their own humanity.

'As above, so below', it was once said. But if their Microcosm and Macrocosm were mirrored, why didn't the stars fall and lie amongst the dead? Why didn't the self-willed masters in the Himalayas come and prevent this -- or was it a dream they spoke of? But it is too late for dreams. The human Alchemical Theater that we will witness is not the one of Medieval metallurgic practices, for those tools have long since vanished along with a language reduced to symbolic babble, and Hermes of once-upon-a-time has long since been denounced as forgery. We will take from the past only what is true, and we will discover the truth ourselves. We will be the instigators of a future; we will transmute this world of base cynicism into one of hope. Our mirror of macro/microcosmic reality will be the one of society & individual. We will use technologies & tools of our day to perform an alchemical transmutation of revolutionary humanism. From the ashes, we will create life, and the physicists will never understand how it could possibly be. Technology will no longer be a romantic quest (for 'reality') or a classical given, it will be a necessity, the skeletal necessity of existence.

Technology did not create the Holocaust.
We are not responsible for the sins of our ancestors.
We are responsible to our children and a future.

We will harness energy, for energy is our tool, and communication a necessity of life.
And then we will fight the remnants of usury that still exists!

The Phoenix theaters, formed in basements & abandoned church cellars, spill into the streets. In the distant remains of the Winter Palace, a light goes on in the tower room. The Provisional Theater Government is forming. Overlooking a sea of ashes.

"It is there we must go! For we only have a skeleton, and a spirit. We have no play."



XIX. At Home in the Winter Palace

"The gates are locked!"

As the crowd waits anxiously outside, a few steal in through the basement to wake the janitor.

In the basement bunkers of the Palace, the old prop shops

still stand intact. Heaps of booty, plundered from old productions, make passage difficult. Stuffed fowl, historical costumes, boxes of medals, assorted wigs are strewn about. This must be the costume department! Another room displays a maze of painted scenery, sets transported here in tact from all four corners of the world, although one can notice a new wing where posters & slogans are being feverishly worked on by a new breed of peasant woman. Upstairs, the stage is quiet -- its empty proscenium frame cluttered with watered-down humanist slogans (a smoking section to the left), and bare instruments of theater technology. Up a winding flight of stairs, at the end of a dimly lit hall, a group of faceless men are seen watching a television program, "I was a counterspy". So this is the provisional government? In another room, an animated discussion proceeds. We shall put it on the loudspeakers for all to hear.

"From the first it has been the theater's business to entertain people, as it also has of all the other arts."

"Entertain?"

"Yes. The theater must in short remain something entirely superfluous."

"But comrade, it has been superfluous!"

"Everything hangs on the story; it is the heart of theatrical performances. The exposition of the story and its communications by suitable means of estrangement constitute the main business of the theater."

"Estrangement?"

"There will be no catharsis. Catharsis must be rejected out of hand. Secondly, we will allow the spectator to witness all preparation, so there is no illusion. Light shall only reveal, and set no mood."

"Entirely forbidden, true."

"The spectator shall be encouraged to question all aspects of the play, especially in a scientific and social context. He must at no time identify with the actors. Truth is concrete."

"Dialectical excellence comrade."

"The audience therefore will be educated as to the scientific beauty of social realism, and all action will point to renewal."

"But what if the spectator mis-interprets the play? Or comes to no conclusion at all?"

"We will endeavor to have the painters make more signs and slogans, and perhaps use television. With your permission of course."

"Of course, comrade Brecht."

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XX. You're All Under Arrest!

The crowd swells, enraged!

"YOU HAVE ALL DECEIVED US! ARE WE TO SIT STILL FOR ANOTHER HUNDRED YEARS WHILE THEATER IS TO BE DISCUSSED? WE DEMAND OUR SENSES, WE DEMAND CONTROL! WHERE ARE THE KEYS TO THE GATES!

"The keys to. Given!"

"LIAR!

The stream of humanity storms the gates, smashing anything in its way. Ministers are surrounded. The proscenium is torn down. Burned. All remnants of stage are recycled.

"YOU'RE ALL UNDER ARREST!

"LOCUSTS! ALL PAST IS REACTIONARY THERE IS NO TIME FOR DISCUSSION. SHOOT THEM ALL!

The directors, artistic directors are immediately shot; the second wave consumes the technical directors and any personnel having liaison with the box office. In the third wave, the faculty members are arrested, their tenure revoked by the People's Tribunal. But who shall replace them?

"SKEPTIC! WE SHALL ORGANIZE INTO WORKER COLLECTIVES! ORGANIZATION SHALL REPLACE STRUCTURE! WE WILL BE OUR OWN HEROES! WE WILL HAVE OUR THEATER IN THE FACTORIES, IN PARKS, ON THE STREETS. BURN DOWN THE MAUSOLEUMS! THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE WILL BE MANIFEST. THE SOCIAL MACHINE WILL REPLACE HISTORY A PERPETUAL WHEEL. CREATING. CONSUMING. WE WILL REVOLUTIONIZE AND AUDIT THE PLANET WITH REALISM! AN END TO FORMALISM AND ANY REACTIONARY THOUGHT OF ANY KIND! ABSTAINERS WILL BE GIVEN 25-YEAR SENTENCES. AN END TO MYTHS! EQUALITY FOR ALL!

--BUT NOT FOR THE PSYCHOPATHS,
OR BANKERS
OR SOCIAL PARASITES.
WE WILL HAVE SOCIALIST PSYCHIATRISTS
TREATING THOSE WITH SOCIAL
DISORDERS.

The first wave is purged
by the second; the second
by the third, and so on.
The wheel grinding, creating,
consuming, spitting, coughing

blood.

"CYNIC! AUTHOR! STILL YOU BABBLE, BUT
YOU HAVE GIVEN US NO PROGRAM! NO
PLAYS! NO FINAL SOLUTION!

"The quota is being filled..."

"RENEGADE! DISCOURSES OF THE PAST!

"By discussing the past, you
have been given examples from
experience; you have been
given recognition of usurpers,
plagiarists, and exploiters.
You have been given compassion,
criticism, and foresight."

"RUBBISH! ONLY TO SLANDER THE PRESENT
STATE! FOR ANTI-SOCIAL, INDIVIDUATED
BOURGEOIS PURPOSES!
THE SENTENCE IS LIFE...IN AN 'INDI-
VIDUATED CAGE', ON A CRAG OF YOUR
CHOOSING."

XXI. Once More Prometheus

Setting: A cage (once inhabited by Aeschylus¹) on a bare and
desolate crag in the Caucasus. As far as the eye can
see, there are other cages dotting distant crags.
Enter Might and Violence, servants of the State, and
Jailer.

JAILER: This is the creature you have enquired about. A pitiful
sight.

VIOLENCE: Pity for enemies of the State is forbidden by the
Father, lest you become one of them yourself.

JAILER: I meant nothing by it, but I do not know what to make of his silence.

MIGHT: Perhaps he thinks we are vestiges of the Past.

VIOLENCE: Figments of your imagination? (Strikes the creature.) Speak!

MIGHT: (Interceding) We can well show you how real we are, but this is not our task. Here, at World's End, you can play the insolent, invent languages, plunder the State's privileges and give them away. But at this very moment, while the others are repenting in their cages, you yourself need the forethought you were famous for to extricate yourself from this contrivance.

VIOLENCE: Let us fulfill our task. Jailer! Drive in the spike, and secure him well. (Spike is driven into his ribs.)

MIGHT: Let us leave him for the others. (They all EXIT.)

ENTER Chorus of bird-like telepathic mutants.

CHORUS: Do you not think it is a waste?
He mocks our language, yet his silence speaks.
But it does not answer the question.
They are waiting.
Creature, tell us who will overthrow the State.
Give up the answer, and the Father shall set you free.
He has said this many times.
Do you not believe it to be true?
Silence still!
A solemn secret I suppose that you are hiding.
(They laugh.)

With heroic fanfare, ENTER Comrade Joseph Truman Ivanovich Ford, thrice-decorated Hero of the State.

COMRADE: Creature, your obstinacy angers the Father. He has commanded you to speak and reveal to him your ideas as to his downfall. Say it quickly, and I will intercede on your behalf -- for I have some influence. A lackey you dare call me? I am a revolutionary Hero, as is the Father.

CHORUS: Is it true that the State can fall from power?
The Father has declared it eternal.

COMRADE: Quiet! Your chattering annoys me. (To the creature.) What be the nature of this subversive smile? I think you find your circumstances too soft. Soon the pain will drive you mad, and you will babble uncontrollably. Tell me now, while there is still a possibility of saving you. Very well! (EXITS)

CHORUS: They could make you speak.
But they fear that you would not survive the rigors of examination.
Or they fear the truth.
You have been visited many times.
By the Delegation for Correct Thinking & Speech.
The Delegation for Correct Revolutionary Sexual Manners.
You are unmoved.
But this last Comrade, you should have heeded him.
He could save you.
Yet another will come in his place.

CHORUS (cont.): Their presence disgusts you?
But your chains are real!
Your thoughts are confused. As if in a modern tongue!
Are we so despicable?
Can you see us as we were?
Can you see us as we'll be?
How many years? At least give us a proper thought!
The keys, given?
What nonsense is this! We can no longer understand,
An end to words?
Your pain has brought on delirium.
What deeds?
When?
Oh, let us leave him to the others.

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