

VII. The Theater and Cruelty

An idea of the theater has been lost. And as long as the theater limits itself to showing us intimate scenes from the lives of a few puppets, transforming the public into Peeping Toms, it is no wonder the elite abandon it and the great public looks to the movies, the music hall or the circus for violent satisfactions, whose intentions do not deceive them.

At the point of deterioration which our sensibility has reached, it is certain that we need above all a theater that wakes us up: nerves and heart.

The misdeeds of the psychological theater descended from Racine have unaccustomed us to that immediate and violent action which the theater should possess. Movies in their turn, murdering us with second-hand reproductions which, filtered through machines, cannot *unite with* our sensibility, have maintained us for ten years in an ineffectual torpor, in which all our faculties appear to be foundering.

In the anguished, catastrophic period we live in, we feel an urgent need for a theater which events do not exceed, whose resonance is deep within us, dominating the instability of the times.

Our long habit of seeking diversion has made us forget the idea of a serious theater, which, overturning all our preconceptions, inspires us with the fiery magnetism of its images

and acts upon us like a spiritual therapeutics whose touch can never be forgotten.

Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theater must be rebuilt.

Imbued with the idea that the public thinks first of all with its senses and that to address oneself first to its understanding as the ordinary psychological theater does is absurd, the Theater of Cruelty proposes to resort to a mass spectacle; to seek in the agitation of tremendous masses, convulsed and hurled against each other, a little of that poetry of festivals and crowds when, all too rarely nowadays, the people pour out into the streets.

The theater must give us everything that is in crime, love, war, or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity.

Everyday love, personal ambition, struggles for status, all have value only in proportion to their relation to the terrible lyricism of the Myths to which the great mass of men have assented.

This is why we shall try to concentrate, around famous personages, atrocious crimes, superhuman devotions, a drama which, without resorting to the defunct images of the old Myths, shows that it can extract the forces which struggle within them.

In a word, we believe that there are living forces in what is called poetry and that the image of a crime presented in the requisite theatrical conditions is something infinitely more terrible for the spirit than that same crime when actually committed.

We want to make out of the theater a believable reality which gives the heart and the senses that kind of concrete bite which all true sensation requires. In the same way that our dreams have an effect upon us and reality has an effect

upon our dreams, so we believe that the images of thought can be identified with a dream which will be efficacious to the degree that it can be projected with the necessary violence. And the public will believe in the theater's dreams on condition that it take them for true dreams and not for a servile copy of reality; on condition that they allow the public to liberate within itself the magical liberties of dreams which it can only recognize when they are imprinted with terror and cruelty.

Hence this appeal to cruelty and terror, though on a vast scale, whose range probes our entire vitality, confronts us with all our possibilities.

It is in order to attack the spectator's sensibility on all sides that we advocate a revolving spectacle which, instead of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds, without possible communication, spreads its visual and sonorous outbursts over the entire mass of the spectators.

Also, departing from the sphere of analyzable passions, we intend to make use of the actor's lyric qualities to manifest external forces, and by this means to cause the whole of nature to re-enter the theater in its restored form.

However vast this program may be, it does not exceed the theater itself, which appears to us, all in all, to identify itself with the forces of ancient magic.

Practically speaking, we want to resuscitate an idea of total spectacle by which the theater would recover from the cinema, the music hall, the circus, and from life itself what has always belonged to it. The separation between the analytic theater and the plastic world seems to us a stupidity. One does not separate the mind from the body nor the senses from the intelligence, especially in a domain where the endlessly renewed fatigue of the organs requires intense and sudden shocks to revive our understanding.

Thus, on the one hand, the mass and extent of a spectacle

addressed to the entire organism; on the other, an intensive mobilization of objects, gestures, and signs, used in a new spirit. The reduced role given to the understanding leads to an energetic compression of the text; the active role given to obscure poetic emotion necessitates concrete signs. Words say little to the mind; extent and objects speak; new images speak, even new images made with words. But space thundering with images and crammed with sounds speaks too, if one knows how to intersperse from time to time a sufficient extent of space stocked with silence and immobility.

On this principle we envisage producing a spectacle where these means of direct action are used in their totality; a spectacle unafraid of going as far as necessary in the exploration of our nervous sensibility, of which the rhythms, sounds, words, resonances, and twitterings, and their united quality and surprising mixtures belong to a technique which must not be divulged.

The images in certain paintings by Grunewald or Hieronymus Bosch tell enough about what a spectacle can be in which, as in the brain of some saint, the objects of external nature will appear as temptations.

It is in this spectacle of a temptation from which life has everything to lose and the mind everything to gain that the theater must recover its true signification.

Elsewhere we have given a program which will allow the means of pure staging, found on the spot, to be organized around historic or cosmic themes, familiar to all.

And we insist on the fact that the first spectacle of the Theater of Cruelty will turn upon the preoccupations of the great mass of men, preoccupations much more pressing and disquieting than those of any individual whatsoever.

It is a matter of knowing whether now, in Paris, before the cataclysms which are at our door descend upon us, sufficient means of production, financial or otherwise, can be

found to permit such a theater to be brought to life—it is bound to in any case, because it is the future. Or whether a little real blood will be needed, right away, in order to manifest this cruelty.

May 1933.

VIII. The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)

We cannot go on prostituting the idea of theater whose only value is in its excruciating, magical relation to reality and danger.

Put in this way, the question of the theater ought to arouse general attention, the implication being that theater, through its physical aspect, since it requires *expression in space* (the only real expression, in fact), allows the magical means of art and speech to be exercised organically and altogether, like renewed exorcisms. The upshot of all this is that theater will not be given its specific powers of action until it is given its language.

That is to say: 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.

This language cannot be defined except by its possibilities for dynamic expression in space as opposed to the expressive possibilities of spoken dialogue. And what the theater can still take over from speech are its possibilities for extension beyond words, for development in space, for dissociative and vibratory action upon the sensibility. This is the hour of

intonations, of a word's particular pronunciation. Here too intervenes (besides the auditory language of sounds) the visual language of objects, movements, attitudes, and gestures, but on condition that their meanings, their physiognomies, their combinations be carried to the point of becoming signs, making a kind of alphabet out of these signs. Once aware of this language in space, language of sounds, cries, lights, onomatopoeia, the theater must organize it into veritable hieroglyphs, with the help of characters and objects, and make use of their symbolism and interconnections in relation to all organs and on all levels.

The question, then, for the theater, is to create a metaphysics of speech, gesture, and expression, in order to rescue it from its servitude to psychology and "human interest." But all this can be of no use unless behind such an effort there is some kind of real metaphysical inclination, an appeal to certain unhabitual ideas, which by their very nature cannot be limited or even formally depicted. These ideas which touch on Creation, Becoming, and Chaos, are all of a cosmic order and furnish a primary notion of a domain from which the theater is now entirely alien. They are able to create a kind of passionate equation between Man, Society, Nature, and Objects.

It is not, moreover, a question of bringing metaphysical ideas directly onto the stage, but of creating what you might call temptations, indraughts of air around these ideas. And humor with its anarchy, poetry with its symbolism and its images, furnish a basic notion of ways to channel the temptation of these ideas.

We must speak now about the uniquely material side of this language—that is, about all the ways and means it has of acting upon the sensibility.

It would be meaningless to say that it includes music, dance, pantomime, or mimicry. Obviously it uses movement,

harmonies, rhythms, but only to the point that they can concur in a sort of central expression without advantage for any one particular art. This does not at all mean that it does not use ordinary actions, ordinary passions, but like a spring-board uses them in the same way that HUMOR AS DESTRUCTION can serve to reconcile the corrosive nature of laughter to the habits of reason.

But by an altogether Oriental means of expression, this objective and concrete language of the theater can fascinate and ensnare the organs. It flows into the sensibility. Abandoning Occidental usages of speech, it turns words into incantations. It extends the voice. It utilizes the vibrations and qualities of the voice. It wildly tramples rhythms underfoot. It pile-drives sounds. It seeks to exalt, to benumb, to charm, to arrest the sensibility. It liberates a new lyricism of gesture which, by its precipitation or its amplitude in the air, ends by surpassing the lyricism of words. It ultimately breaks away from the intellectual subjugation of the language, by conveying the sense of a new and deeper intellectuality which hides itself beneath the gestures and signs, raised to the dignity of particular exorcisms.

For all this magnetism, all this poetry, and all these direct means of spellbinding would be nothing if they were not used to put the spirit physically on the track of something else, if the true theater could not give us the sense of a creation of which we possess only one face, but which is completed on other levels.

And it is of little importance whether these other levels are really conquered by the mind or not, i.e., by the intelligence; it would diminish them, and that has neither interest nor sense. What is important is that, by positive means, the sensitivity is put in a state of deepened and keener perception, and this is the very object of the magic and the rites of which the theater is only a reflection.

TECHNIQUE

It is a question then of making the theater, in the proper sense of the word, a function; something as localized and as precise as the circulation of the blood in the arteries or the apparently chaotic development of dream images in the brain, and this is to be accomplished by a thorough involvement, a genuine enslavement of the attention.

The theater will never find itself again—i.e., constitute a means of true illusion—except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior.

In other terms, the theater must pursue by all its means a reassertion not only of all the aspects of the objective and descriptive external world, but of the internal world, that is, of man considered metaphysically. It is only thus, we believe, that we shall be able to speak again in the theater about the rights of the imagination. Neither humor, nor poetry, nor imagination means anything unless, by an anarchistic destruction generating a prodigious flight of forms which will constitute the whole spectacle, they succeed in organically re-involving man, his ideas about reality, and his poetic place in reality.

To consider the theater as a second-hand psychological or moral function, and to believe that dreams themselves have only a substitute function, is to diminish the profound poetic bearing of dreams as well as of the theater. If the theater, like dreams, is bloody and inhuman, it is, more than just that, to manifest and unforgettably root within us the idea of a perpetual conflict, a spasm in which life is continually lacerated, in which everything in creation rises up and exerts itself against our appointed rank; it is in order to perpetuate in a concrete and immediate way the metaphysical ideas of certain

Fables whose very atrocity and energy suffice to show their origin and continuity in essential principles.

This being so, one sees that, by its proximity to principles which transfer their energy to it poetically, this naked language of the theater (not a virtual but a real language) must permit, by its use of man's nervous magnetism, the transgression of the ordinary limits of art and speech, in order to realize actively, that is to say magically, *in real terms*, a kind of total creation in which man must reassume his place between dream and events.

THE THEMES

It is not a matter of boring the public to death with transcendent cosmic preoccupations. That there may be profound keys to thought and action with which to interpret the whole spectacle, does not in general concern the spectator, who is simply not interested. But still they must be there; and that concerns us.

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THE SPECTACLE: *Every spectacle will contain a physical and objective element, perceptible to all. Cries, groans, apparitions, surprises, theatricalities of all kinds, magic beauty of costumes taken from certain ritual models; resplendent lighting, incantational beauty of voices, the charms of harmony, rare notes of music, colors of objects, physical rhythm of movements whose crescendo and decrescendo will accord exactly with the pulsation of movements familiar to everyone, concrete appearances of new and surprising objects, masks, effigies yards high, sudden changes of light, the physical action of light which arouses sensations of heat and cold, etc.*

THE MISE EN SCENE: *The typical language of the theater will be constituted around the mise en scène considered not*

simply as the degree of refraction of a text upon the stage, but as the point of departure for all theatrical creation. And it is in the use and handling of this language that the old duality between author and director will be dissolved, replaced by a sort of unique Creator upon whom will devolve the double responsibility of the spectacle and the plot.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE STAGE: It is not a question of suppressing the spoken language, but of giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams.

Meanwhile new means of recording this language must be found, whether these means belong to musical transcription or to some kind of code.

As for ordinary objects, or even the human body, raised to the dignity of signs, it is evident that one can draw one's inspiration from hieroglyphic characters, not only in order to record these signs in a readable fashion which permits them to be reproduced at will, but in order to compose on the stage precise and immediately readable symbols.

On the other hand, this code language and musical transcription will be valuable as a means of transcribing voices.

Since it is fundamental to this language to make a particular use of intonations, these intonations will constitute a kind of harmonic balance, a secondary deformation of speech which must be reproducible at will.

Similarly the ten thousand and one expressions of the face caught in the form of masks can be labeled and catalogued, so they may eventually participate directly and symbolically in this concrete language of the stage, independently of their particular psychological use.

Moreover, these symbolical gestures, masks, and attitudes, these individual or group movements whose innumerable meanings constitute an important part of the concrete language of the theater, evocative gestures, emotive or arbitrary attitudes, excited pounding out of rhythms and sounds, will be doubled, will be multiplied by reflections, as it were, of

the gestures and attitudes consisting of the mass of all the impulsive gestures, all the abortive attitudes, all the lapses of mind and tongue, by which are revealed what might be called the impotences of speech, and in which is a prodigious wealth of expressions, to which we shall not fail to have recourse on occasion.

There is, besides, a concrete idea of music in which the sounds make their entrance like characters, where harmonies are coupled together and lose themselves in the precise entrances of words.

From one means of expression to another, correspondences and levels of development are created—even light can have a precise intellectual meaning.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: They will be treated as objects and as part of the set.

Also, the need to act directly and profoundly upon the sensibility through the organs invites research, from the point of view of sound, into qualities and vibrations of absolutely new sounds, qualities which present-day musical instruments do not possess and which require the revival of ancient and forgotten instruments or the invention of new ones. Research is also required, apart from music, into instruments and appliances which, based upon special combinations or new alloys of metal, can attain a new range and compass, producing sounds or noises that are unbearably piercing.

LIGHTS, LIGHTING: The lighting equipment now in use in theaters is no longer adequate. The particular action of light upon the mind, the effects of all kinds of luminous vibration must be investigated, along with new ways of spreading the light in waves, in sheets, in fusillades of fiery arrows. The color gamut of the equipment now in use is to be revised from beginning to end. In order to produce the qualities of particular musical tones, light must recover an element of thinness, density, and opaqueness, with a view to producing the sensations of heat, cold, anger, fear, etc.

COSTUMES: *Where costumes are concerned, modern dress will be avoided as much as possible without at the same time assuming a uniform theatrical costuming that would be the same for every play—not from a fetishist and superstitious reverence for the past, but because it seems absolutely evident that certain age-old costumes, of ritual intent, though they existed at a given moment of time, preserve a beauty and a revelational appearance from their closeness to the traditions that gave them birth.*

THE STAGE—THE AUDITORIUM: *We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theater of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. This envelopment results, in part, from the very configuration of the room itself.*

Thus, abandoning the architecture of present-day theaters, we shall take some hangar or barn, which we shall have reconstructed according to processes which have culminated in the architecture of certain churches or holy places, and of certain temples in Tibet.

In the interior of this construction special proportions of height and depth will prevail. The hall will be enclosed by four walls, without any kind of ornament, and the public will be seated in the middle of the room, on the ground floor, on mobile chairs which will allow them to follow the spectacle which will take place all around them. In effect, the absence of a stage in the usual sense of the word will provide for the deployment of the action in the four corners of the room. Particular positions will be reserved for actors and action at the four cardinal points of the room. The scenes will be played in front of whitewashed wall-backgrounds designed to absorb the light. In addition, galleries overhead will run

around the periphery of the hall as in certain primitive paintings. These galleries will permit the actors, whenever the action makes it necessary, to be pursued from one point in the room to another, and the action to be deployed on all levels and in all perspectives of height and depth. A cry uttered at one end of the room can be transmitted from mouth to mouth with amplifications and successive modulations all the way to the other. The action will unfold, will extend its trajectory from level to level, point to point; paroxysms will suddenly burst forth, will flare up like fires in different spots. And to speak of the spectacle's character as true illusion or of the direct and immediate influence of the action on the spectator will not be hollow words. For this diffusion of action over an immense space will oblige the lighting of a scene and the varied lighting of a performance to fall upon the public as much as upon the actors—and to the several simultaneous actions or several phases of an identical action in which the characters, swarming over each other like bees, will endure all the onslaughts of the situations and the external assaults of the tempestuous elements, will correspond the physical means of lighting, of producing thunder or wind, whose repercussions the spectator will undergo.

However, a central position will be reserved which, without serving, properly speaking, as a stage, will permit the bulk of the action to be concentrated and brought to a climax whenever necessary.

OBJECTS—MASKS—ACCESSORIES: *Manikins, enormous masks, objects of strange proportions will appear with the same sanction as verbal images, will enforce the concrete aspect of every image and every expression—with the corollary that all objects requiring a stereotyped physical representation will be discarded or disguised.*

THE SET: *There will not be any set. This function will be sufficiently undertaken by hieroglyphic characters, ritual costumes, manikins ten feet high representing the beard of King*

Lear in the storm, musical instruments tall as men, objects of unknown shape and purpose.

IMMEDIACY: *But, people will say, a theater so divorced from life, from facts, from immediate interests. . . . From the present and its events, yes! From whatever preoccupations have any of that profundity which is the prerogative of some men, no! In the Zohar, the story of Rabbi Simeon who burns like fire is as immediate as fire itself.*

WORKS: *We shall not act a written play, but we shall make attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works. The very nature and disposition of the room suggest this treatment, and there is no theme, however vast, that can be denied us.*

SPECTACLE: *There is an idea of integral spectacles which must be regenerated. The problem is to make space speak, to feed and furnish it; like mines laid in a wall of rock which all of a sudden turns into geysers and bouquets of stone.*

THE ACTOR: *The actor is both an element of first importance, since it is upon the effectiveness of his work that the success of the spectacle depends, and a kind of passive and neutral element, since he is rigorously denied all personal initiative. It is a domain in which there is no precise rule; and between the actor of whom is required the mere quality of a sob and the actor who must deliver an oration with all his personal qualities of persuasiveness, there is the whole margin which separates a man from an instrument.*

THE INTERPRETATION: *The spectacle will be calculated from one end to the other, like a code (un langage). Thus there will be no lost movements, all movements will obey a rhythm; and each character being merely a type, his gesticulation, physiognomy, and costume will appear like so many rays of light.*

THE CINEMA: *To the crude visualization of what is, the theater through poetry opposes images of what is not. However, from the point of view of action, one cannot compare*

a cinematic image which, however poetic it may be, is limited by the film, to a theatrical image which obeys all the exigencies of life.

CRUELTY: *Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theater is not possible. In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds.*

THE PUBLIC: *First of all this theater must exist.*

THE PROGRAM: *We shall stage, without regard for text:*

1. *An adaptation of a work from the time of Shakespeare, a work entirely consistent with our present troubled state of mind, whether one of the apocryphal plays of Shakespeare, such as Arden of Feversham, or an entirely different play from the same period.*

2. *A play of extreme poetic freedom by Leon-Paul Fargue.*

3. *An extract from the Zohar: The Story of Rabbi Simeon, which has the ever present violence and force of a conflagration.*

4. *The story of Bluebeard reconstructed according to the historical records and with a new idea of eroticism and cruelty.*

5. *The Fall of Jerusalem, according to the Bible and history; with the blood-red color that trickles from it and the people's feeling of abandon and panic visible even in the light; and on the other hand the metaphysical disputes of the prophets, the frightful intellectual agitation they create and the repercussions of which physically affect the King, the Temple, the People, and Events themselves.*

6. *A Tale by the Marquis de Sade, in which the eroticism will be transposed, allegorically mounted and figured, to create a violent exteriorization of cruelty, and a dissimulation of the remainder.*

7. *One or more romantic melodramas in which the improbability will become an active and concrete element of poetry.*

8. *Büchner's Wozzek, in a spirit of reaction against our*

principles and as an example of what can be drawn from a formal text in terms of the stage.

9. Works from the Elizabethan theater stripped of their text and retaining only the accouterments of period, situations, characters, and action.

IX. Letters on Cruelty

FIRST LETTER

To J. P.

Paris, September 13, 1932

Dear friend,

I cannot give you particulars about my Manifesto that would risk emasculating its point. All I can do is to comment, for the time being, upon my title "Theater of Cruelty" and try to justify its choice.

This Cruelty is a matter of neither sadism nor bloodshed, at least not in any exclusive way.

I do not systematically cultivate horror. The word "cruelty" must be taken in a broad sense, and not in the rapacious physical sense that it is customarily given. And I claim, in doing this, the right to break with the usual sense of language, to crack the armature once and for all, to get the iron collar off its neck, in short to return to the etymological origins of speech which, in the midst of abstract concepts, always evoke a concrete element.

One can very well imagine a pure cruelty, without bodily laceration. And philosophically speaking what indeed is cruelty? From the point of view of the mind, cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination.

The most current philosophical determinism is, from the point of view of our existence, an image of cruelty.

It is a mistake to give the word 'cruelty' a meaning of merciless bloodshed and disinterested, gratuitous pursuit of physical suffering. The Ethiopian Ras who carts off vanquished princes and makes them his slaves does not do so out of a desperate love of blood. Cruelty is not synonymous with bloodshed, martyred flesh, crucified enemies. This identification of cruelty with tortured victims is a very minor aspect of the question. In the practice of cruelty there is a kind of higher determinism, to which the executioner-tormenter himself is subjected and which he must be *determined* to endure when the time comes. Cruelty is above all lucid, a kind of rigid control and submission to necessity. There is no cruelty without consciousness and without the application of consciousness. It is consciousness that gives to the exercise of every act of life its blood-red color, its cruel nuance, since it is understood that life is always someone's death.

SECOND LETTER

To J. P.

Paris, November 14, 1932

Dear friend,

Cruelty was not tacked onto my thinking; it has always been at home there: but I had to become conscious of it. I employ the word 'cruelty' in the sense of an appetite for life, a cosmic rigor and implacable necessity, in the gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness, in the sense of that pain apart from whose ineluctable necessity life could not continue; good is desired, it is the consequence of an act; evil is permanent. When the hidden god creates, he obeys the cruel necessity of creation which has been imposed on himself by himself, and he cannot *not* create, hence not admit into

the center of the self-willed whirlwind a kernel of evil ever more condensed, and ever more consumed. And theater in the sense of continuous creation, a wholly magical action, obeys this necessity. A play in which there would not be this will, this blind appetite for life capable of overriding everything, visible in each gesture and each act and in the transcendent aspect of the story, would be a useless and unfulfilled play.

THIRD LETTER

To M. R. de R.

Paris, November 16, 1932

Dear friend,

I confess to you I neither understand nor admit the objections that have been made against my title. For it seems to me that creation and life itself are defined only by a kind of rigor, hence a fundamental cruelty, which leads things to their ineluctable end at whatever cost.

Effort is a cruelty, existence through effort is a cruelty. Rising from his repose and extending himself into being, Brahma suffers, with a suffering that yields joyous harmonics perhaps, but which at the ultimate extremity of the curve can only be expressed by a terrible crushing and grinding.

There is in life's flame, life's appetite, life's irrational impulsion, a kind of initial perversity: the desire characteristic of Eros is cruelty since it feeds upon contingencies; death is cruelty, resurrection is cruelty, transfiguration is cruelty, since nowhere in a circular and closed world is there room for true death, since ascension is a rending, since closed space is fed with lives, and each stronger life tramples down the others, consuming them in a massacre which is a transfiguration and a bliss. In the manifested world, metaphysically speaking, evil is the permanent law, and what is good is an effort and already one more cruelty added to the other.

Not to understand this is not to understand metaphysical ideas. And after this let no one come to tell me my title is too limited. It is cruelty that cements matter together, cruelty that molds the features of the created world. Good is always upon the outer face, but the face within is evil. Evil which will eventually be reduced, but at the supreme instant when everything that was form will be on the point of returning to chaos.

X. Letters on Language

FIRST LETTER

To M. B. C.

Paris, September 15, 1931

Sir,

You state in an article on the theater and the *mise en scène* that "in considering the *mise en scène* as an autonomous art one risks committing still worse errors" and that "the presentation, the spectacular aspect of a dramatic work should not be determined in total and cavalier independence."

And you say in addition that these are elementary truths.

You are perfectly right in considering the *mise en scène* as only a subservient and minor art to which even those who employ it with the maximum of independence deny all fundamental originality. So long as the *mise en scène* remains, even in the minds of the boldest directors, a simple means of presentation, an accessory mode of expressing the work, a sort of spectacular intermediary with no significance of its own, it will be valuable only to the degree it succeeds in hiding itself behind the works it is pretending to serve. And this will continue as long as the major interest in a performed work is in its text, as long as literature takes precedence over the kind of performance improperly called spectacle, with

XI. The Theater of Cruelty (Second Manifesto)

Admittedly or not, conscious or unconscious, the poetic state, a transcendent experience of life, is what the public is fundamentally seeking through love, crime, drugs, war, or insurrection.

The Theater of Cruelty has been created in order to restore to the theater a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigor and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood.

This cruelty, which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so, can thus be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid.

1. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF CONTENT

that is, of the subjects and themes to be treated:

The Theater of Cruelty will choose subjects and themes corresponding to the agitation and unrest characteristic of our epoch.

It does not intend to leave the task of distributing the Myths of man and modern life entirely to the movies. But it will do it in its own way: that is, by resisting the economic, utilitarian and technical streamlining of the world, it will again bring

into fashion the great preoccupations and great essential passions which the modern theater has hidden under the patina of the pseudocivilized man.

These themes will be cosmic, universal, and interpreted according to the most ancient texts drawn from old Mexican, Hindu, Judaic, and Iranian cosmogonies.

Renouncing psychological man, with his well-dissected character and feelings, and social man, submissive to laws and misshapen by religions and precepts, the Theater of Cruelty will address itself only to total man.

And it will cause not only the recto but the verso of the mind to play its part; the reality of imagination and dreams will appear there on equal footing with life.

Furthermore, great social upheavals, conflicts between peoples and races, natural forces, interventions of chance, and the magnetism of fatality will manifest themselves either indirectly, in the movement and gestures of characters enlarged to the statures of gods, heroes, or monsters, in mythical dimensions, or directly, in material forms obtained by new scientific means.

These gods or heroes, these monsters, these natural and cosmic forces will be interpreted according to images from the most ancient sacred texts and old cosmogonies.

2. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF FORM

Besides this need for the theater to steep itself in the springs of an eternally passionate and sensuous poetry available to even the most backward and inattentive portions of the public, a poetry realized by a return to the primitive Myths, we shall require of the *mise en scène* and not of the text the task of materializing these old conflicts and above all of giving them *immediacy*; i.e., these themes will be borne directly into the

theater and materialized in movements, expressions, and gestures before trickling away in words.

Thus we shall renounce the theatrical superstition of the text and the dictatorship of the writer.

And thus we rejoin the ancient popular drama, sensed and experienced directly by the mind without the deformations of language and the barrier of speech.

We intend to base the theater upon spectacle before everything else, and we shall introduce into the spectacle a new notion of space utilized on all possible levels and in all degrees of perspective in depth and height, and within this notion a specific idea of time will be added to that of movement:

In a given time, to the greatest possible number of movements, we will join the greatest possible number of physical images and meanings attached to those movements.

The images and movements employed will not be there solely for the external pleasure of eye or ear, but for that more secret and profitable one of the spirit.

Thus, theater space will be utilized not only in its dimensions and volume but, so to speak, *in its undersides (dans ses dessous)*.

The overlapping of images and movements will culminate, through the collusion of objects, silences, shouts, and rhythms, or in a genuine physical language with signs, not words, as its root.

For it must be understood that in this quantity of movements and images arranged for a given length of time, we include both silence and rhythm as well as a certain physical vibration and commotion, composed of objects and gestures really made and really put to use. And it can be said that the spirit of the most ancient hieroglyphs will preside at the creation of this pure theatrical language.

Every popular audience has always loved direct expressions and images; articulate speech, explicit verbal expressions will

enter in all the clear and sharply elucidated parts of the action, the parts where life is resting and consciousness intervenes.

But in addition to this logical sense, words will be construed in an incantational, truly magical sense—for their shape and their sensuous emanations, not only for their meaning.

For these exciting appearances of monsters, debauches of heroes and gods, plastic revelations of forces, explosive interjections of a poetry and humor poised to disorganize and pulverize appearances, according to the anarchistic principle of all genuine poetry—these appearances will not exercise their true magic except in an atmosphere of hypnotic suggestion in which the mind is affected by a direct pressure upon the senses.

Whereas, in the digestive theater of today, the nerves, that is to say a certain physiological sensitivity, are deliberately left aside, abandoned to the individual anarchy of the spectator, the Theater of Cruelty intends to reassert all the time-tested magical means of capturing the sensibility.

These means, which consist of intensities of colors, lights, or sounds, which utilize vibration, tremors, repetition, whether of a musical rhythm or a spoken phrase, special tones or a general diffusion of light, can obtain their full effect only by the use of *dissonances*.

But instead of limiting these dissonances to the orbit of a single sense, we shall cause them to overlap from one sense to the other, from a color to a noise, a word to a light, a fluttering gesture to a flat tonality of sound, etc.

So composed and so constructed, the spectacle will be extended, by elimination of the stage, to the entire hall of the theater and will scale the walls from the ground up on light catwalks, will physically envelop the spectator and immerse him in a constant bath of light, images, movements, and noises. The set will consist of the characters themselves, enlarged to the stature of gigantic manikins, and of landscapes of moving lights playing on objects and masks in perpetual interchange.

And just as there will be no unoccupied point in space, there will be neither respite nor vacancy in the spectator's mind or sensibility. That is, between life and the theater there will be no distinct division, but instead a continuity. Anyone who has watched a scene of any movie being filmed will understand exactly what we mean.

We want to have at our disposal, for a theater spectacle, the same material means which, in lights, extras, resources of all kinds, are daily squandered by companies on whom everything that is active and magical in such a deployment is forever lost.

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The first spectacle of the Theater of Cruelty will be entitled:

THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO

It will stage events, not men. Men will come in their turn with their psychology and their passions, but they will be taken as the emanation of certain forces and understood in the light of the events and historical fatality in which they have played their role.

This subject has been chosen:

1. Because of its immediacy and all the allusions it permits to problems of vital interest for Europe and the world.

From the historical point of view, *The Conquest of Mexico* poses the question of colonization. It revives in a brutal and implacable way the ever active fatuousness of Europe. It permits her idea of her own superiority to be deflated. It contrasts Christianity with much older religions. It corrects the false conceptions the Occident has somehow formed concerning paganism and certain natural religions, and it underlines with burning emotion the splendor and forever immediate poetry of the old metaphysical sources on which these religions are built.

2. By broaching the alarmingly immediate question of colonization and the right one continent thinks it has to enslave another, this subject questions the real superiority of certain

rites over others and shows the inmost filiation that binds the genius of a race to particular forms of civilization. It contrasts the tyrannical anarchy of the colonizers to the profound moral harmony of the as yet uncolonized.

Further, by contrast with the disorder of the European monarchy of the time, based upon the crudest and most unjust material principles, it illuminates the organic hierarchy of the Aztec monarchy established on indisputable spiritual principles.

From the social point of view, it shows the peacefulness of a society which knew how to feed all its members and in which the Revolution had been accomplished from the very beginnings.

Out of this clash of moral disorder and Catholic monarchy with pagan order, the subject can set off unheard-of explosions of forces and images, sown here and there with brutal dialogues. Men battling hand to hand, bearing within themselves, like stigmata, the most opposed ideas.

The moral grounds and the immediacy of interest of such a spectacle being sufficiently stressed, let us emphasize the value as *spectacle* of the conflicts it will set upon the stage.

There are first of all the inner struggles of Montezuma, the divided king concerning whose motivations history has been unable to enlighten us.

His struggles and his symbolic discussion with the visual myths of astrology will be shown in an objective pictorial fashion.

Then, besides Montezuma, there are the crowd, the different social strata, the revolt of the people against destiny as represented by Montezuma, the clamoring of the unbelievers, the quibbling of the philosophers and priests, the lamentations of the poets, the treachery of the merchants and the bourgeoisie, the duplicity and profligacy of the women.

The spirit of the crowds, the breath of events will travel in material waves over the spectacle, fixing here and there certain

lines of force, and on these waves the dwindling, rebellious, or despairing consciousness of individuals will float like straws.

Theatrically, the problem is to determine and harmonize these lines of force, to concentrate them and extract suggestive melodies from them.

These images, movements, dances, rites, these fragmented melodies and sudden turns of dialogue will be carefully recorded and described as far as possible with words, especially for the portions of the spectacle not in dialogue, the principle here being to record in codes, as on a musical score, what cannot be described in words.

* Here now is the structure of the spectacle according to the order in which it will unfold.

Act One

WARNING SIGNS

A tableau of Mexico in anticipation, with its cities, its countrysides, its caves of troglodytes, its Mayan ruins.

Objects evoking on a grand scale certain Spanish ex-votos and those bizarre landscapes that are enclosed in bottles or under glass bells.

Similarly the cities, monuments, countryside, forest, ruins and caves will be evoked—their appearance, disappearance, their form in relief—by means of lighting. The musical or pictorial means of emphasizing their forms, of catching their sharpness will be devised in the spirit of a secret lyricism, invisible to the spectator, and which will correspond to the inspiration of a poetry overflowing with whispers and suggestions.

Everything trembles and groans, like a shop-window in a

* This fuller development of Artaud's *The Conquest of Mexico* was not included in the French edition of *Le Théâtre et son Double*; it was first published in *La Nef*, March-April 1950, where the whole text was called "Potlatch of mighty hosts for their mighty guests." M.C.R.

hurricane. A landscape which senses the coming storm; objects, music, stuffs, lost dresses, shadows of wild horses pass through the air like distant meteors, like lightning on the horizon brimming with mirages as the wind pitches wildly along the ground in a lighting prophesying torrential, violent storms. Then the lighting begins to change, and to the bawling conversations, the disputes between all the echoes of the population, respond the mute, concentrated, terrorized meetings of Montezuma with his formally assembled priests, with the signs of the zodiac, the austere forms of the firmament.

For Cortez, a *mise en scène* of sea and tiny battered ships, and Cortez and his men larger than the ships and firm as rocks.

Act Two

CONFESSION

Mexico seen this time by Cortez.

Silence concerning all his secret struggles; apparent stagnation and everywhere magic, magic of a motionless, unheard-of spectacle, with cities like ramparts of light, palaces on canals of stagnant water, a heavy melody.

Then suddenly, on a single sharp and piercing note, heads crown the walls.

Then a muffled rumbling full of threats, an impression of terrible solemnity, holes in the crowds like pockets of calm in a tornado: Montezuma advances all alone toward Cortez.

Act Three

CONVULSIONS

At every level of the country, revolt.

At every level of Montezuma's consciousness, revolt.

Battleground in the mind of Montezuma, who debates with destiny.

Magic, magical *mise en scène* evoking the Gods.

Montezuma cuts the living space, rips it open like the sex of a woman in order to cause the invisible to spring forth.

The stage wall is stuffed unevenly with heads, throats; cracked, oddly broken melodies, and responses to these melodies, appear like stumps. Montezuma himself seems split in two, divided; with some parts of himself in half-light, others dazzling; with many hands coming out of his dress, with expressions painted on his body like a multiple portrait of consciousness, but from within the consciousness of Montezuma all the questions pass forth into the crowd.

The Zodiac, which formerly roared with all its beasts in the head of Montezuma, turns into a group of human passions made incarnate by the learned heads of the official spokesmen, brilliant at disputation—a group of secret plays during which the crowd, despite the circumstances, does not forget to sneer.

However, the real warriors make their sabers whine, whetting them on the houses. Flying ships cross a Pacific of purplish indigo, laden with the riches of fugitives, and in the other direction contraband weapons arrive on other flying vessels.

An emaciated man eats soup as fast as he can, with a presentiment that the siege is approaching the city, and as the rebellion breaks out, the stage space is gorged with a brawling mosaic where sometimes men, sometimes compact troops tightly pressed together, limb to limb, clash frenetically. Space is stuffed with whirling gestures, horrible faces, dying eyes, clenched fists, manes, breastplates, and from all levels of the scene fall limbs, breastplates, heads, stomachs like a hailstorm bombarding the earth with supernatural explosions.

Act Four

ABDICATION

The abdication of Montezuma results in a strange and almost malevolent loss of assurance on the part of Cortez and

his fighters. A specific discord arises over the discovery of treasure, seen like illusions in the corners of the stage. (This will be done with mirrors.)

Lights and sounds produce an impression of dissolving, unravelling, spreading, and squashing—like watery fruits splashing on the ground. Strange couples appear, Spaniard with Indian, horribly enlarged, swollen and black, swaying back and forth like carts about to overturn. Several Hernando Cortez's enter at the same time, signifying that there is no longer any leader. In some places, Indians massacre Spaniards; while in front of a statue whose head is revolving in time to music, Cortez, arms dangling, seems to dream. Treasons go unpunished, shapes swarm about, never exceeding a certain height in the air.

This unrest and the threat of a revolt on the part of the conquered will be expressed in ten thousand ways. And in this collapse and disintegration of the brutal force which has worn itself out (having nothing more to devour) will be delineated the first inkling of a passionate romance.

Weapons abandoned, emotions of lust now make their appearance. Not the dramatic passions of so many battles, but calculated feelings, a plot cleverly hatched, in which, for the first time in the spectacle, a woman's head will be manifested.

And as a consequence of all this, it is also the time of miasmas, of diseases.

On every expressive level appear, like muted flowerings: sounds, words, poisonous blooms which burst close to the ground. And, at the same time, a religious exhalation bends men's heads, fearful sounds seem to bray out, clear as the capricious flourishes of the sea upon a vast expanse of sand, of a cliff slashed by rocks. These are the funeral rites of Montezuma. A stamping, a murmur. The crowd of natives whose steps sound like a scorpion's jaws. Then, eddies in the path of the miasmas, enormous heads with noses swollen with the stink—and nothing, nothing but immense Spaniards on

crutches. And like a tidal wave, like the sharp burst of a storm, like the whipping of rain on the sea, the revolt which carries off the whole crowd in groups, with the body of the dead Montezuma tossed on their heads like a ship. And the sharp spasms of the battle, the foam of heads of the cornered Spaniards who are squashed like blood against the ramparts that are turning green again.

XII. An Affective Athleticism

One must grant the actor a kind of affective musculature which corresponds to the physical localizations of feelings.

The actor is like the physical athlete, but with this surprising difference: his affective organism is analogous to the organism of the athlete, is parallel to it, as if it were its double, although not acting upon the same plane.

The actor is an athlete of the heart.

The division of the total person into three worlds obtains also for him; and his is the affective sphere.

It belongs to him organically.

The muscular movements of physical effort comprise an effigy of another effort, their double, and in the movements of dramatic action are localized at the same points.

What the athlete depends upon in running is what the actor depends upon in shouting a passionate curse, but the actor's course is altogether interior.

All the tricks of wrestling, boxing, the hundred yard dash, high-jumping, etc., find analogous organic bases in the movement of the passions; they have the same physical points of support.

With however this additional correction, that the movement is reversed: in breathing, for example, the actor's body is supported by his breath whereas the physical athlete's breath is supported by his body.