# Circuit Debater – Third Circle – Mimesis

#### We begin our inquiry into the resolution with an event on the 22nd of February 1890 - the so called “surrealist” painter Vincent Van Gogh is shot, and within 29 hours, will be dead. With the help of Antonin Artaud, a French schizophrenic playwright, we begin our discussion of the events surrounding Van Gogh’s tragic demise…

#### Vincent Van Gogh stands in a field of shimmering wheat

#### Across from him stands Antonin Artaud

#### They look into one another

#### They are one

#### and Artaud is the mirror

#### This mirror – Artaud

#### Does not reflect

#### It creates

#### Exposes reality

#### Van Gogh sobs

#### Artaud screams and pulls hair from his skull

#### Van Gogh looks up towards the sky

#### Artaud throws himself to the ground

#### Their actions are the same, no different

#### One and the same

#### Van Gogh paints the face of withered man

#### Artaud paints the face of Van Gogh

#### Van Gogh raises a gun to his chest

#### Artaud does not raise such a gun

#### Van Gogh pulls the trigger

#### Artaud collapses

#### “Why?”

#### He pleads, tears down his face

#### Not at Van Gogh

#### But at the earth, the winds, the sky, at himself, at Van Gogh, at society

#### “They have killed me”

#### “They have killed him”

#### And in the mirror, in Antonin Artaud, the death of Vincent Van Gogh, the man suicided by society, was revealed.

#### Vincent Van Gogh was shot with a revolver, we may never know if he died by his own hand, society’s, or another being. What would it mean to ban a handgun that may have been held by Van Gogh himself, or held to his chest by society? What would it look like to accept delirium as lucidity? How can we attempt such a project?

Antonin Artaud explains…

“Van Gogh, the Suicide Provoked By Society” 1948

**No one is alone any more in dying. But in the case of suicide, an army of, wicked people is necessary to induce the body to that gesture against nature of depriving itself of its own heart. Van Gogh was dispatched from the world, first by his brother telling him of the birth of his nephew, and then by Dr. Gachet, who one day, instead of advising him rest and isolation, sent him out to paint in the open when he really felt that Van Gogh would have done better to go and rest. For you cannot so immediately oppose a lucidity and sensibility of such a quality as that of the martyred Van Gogh. There are some temperaments who, on certain days, would lull themselves for a simple contradiction; and for such a thing to happen there is no need to be a marked and listed madman. On the contrary, it is enough to be in good health and to have right on one’s side. In a similar case, I will no longer put up with hearing someone say to me, as has so often happened, ‘Monsieur Artaud, you are raving’, without committing a crime. Van Gogh heard this said to him. And this is why that knot of blood which killed him twisted itself around his throat.**

#### Antonin Artaud and I affirm the banning of the handgun as a denial of the normalizing societal forces that brought about the shooting of Vincent Van Gogh.

#### Artaud’s mimesis is a creation through copying of Van Gogh that produces a material rendering of his works produced through their effects on our bodies that allow access to spaces of visceral and affectual reality that destroy the boundaries between the synthetic and reality are transcendent to the limited reality of rational perspectives, it exist as intensity rather than pure history, and denies psychiatric readings of madness.

Ros Murray, 2014

Murray is the Leverhulme Research Fellow at Queen Mary University of London, she completed her PhD at King’s College London on the work of Antonin Artaud. “Antonin Artaud – The Scum of the Soul” pg 125-127

To return to Artaud’s frequent references to agricultural activities such as ploughing, hoeing, reaping or sowing to describe how he engages with the surface of the page, these find their inspiration in the work of Van Gogh. Artaud’s 1947 publication Van Gogh le suicidé de la société (Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society) was an enraged response to an article written by a psychiatrist, Dr Beer, published in the weekly journal Arts, in which Beer describes Van Gogh’s work as the work of someone who is mentally ill. Artaud produced this furious, beautifully written homage to Van Gogh’s work, which reads as much a response to his own pathologisation as to that of Van Gogh. This text represents one of Artaud’s most vehement and successful protests against not only psychiatry itself, but also any potential psychoanalytic readings of his own texts, seeming once again to anticipate and undermine such an obvious critical response. Artaud identifies a sense of brooding apocalypse in Van Gogh’s paintings, writing of the way they portray a ‘sensation d’occulte étranglée’ (‘sensation of strangled occult’).19 He transforms Van Gogh’s paintings into bodies, emphasising their synesthetic properties and the visceral corporeal forces they mobilise, they are ‘remise à même la vue, la ouïe, le tact, l’arôme’ (‘restored directly to sight, hearing, touch, smell’).20 Whilst Artaud here seems, as with his adaptations of Lewis Carroll, to ingest and regurgitate Van Gogh’s work to produce it anew, he argues that Van Gogh carries out similarly embodied transformations of his raw material, nature: ‘Van Gogh est peintre parce qu’il a recolleté la nature, qu’il l’a comme retranspirée et fait suer’ (‘Van Gogh is a painter because he recollected nature, because he re-perspired it and made it sweat’).21 In what has since become Van Gogh’s most famous painting, Artaud describes how he sees ‘le visage rouge sanglant du peintre venir à moi, dans une muraille de tournesols éventrés’ (‘the blood-red face of the painter coming toward me, in a wall of eviscerated sunflowers’).22 Van Gogh’s work is rendered violent, interspersed with Artaudian blows, hammering, shredding, collisions, jostling, tearing, welding, nerves and the ‘météorique d’atomes’ (‘meteoric bombardment of atoms’).23 Van Gogh is, according to Artaud, picking and chiselling away at his own subjectile, that of the canvas but also nature itself rendered a surface to be torn through in order to reveal the forces at work behind it. Artaud quotes a letter Van Gogh wrote to his brother in which he describes how he envisages the act of drawing: Qu’est-ce que dessiner? Comment y arrive-t-on? C’est l’action de se frayer un passage à travers un mur de fer invisible, qui semble se trouver entre ce qu’on sent et ce que l’on peut. Comment doit-on traverser ce mur, car il ne sert de rien d’y frapper fort? On doit miner ce mur et le traverser à la lime, lentement et avec patience à mon sens. (What is drawing? How does one do it? It is the act of working one’s way through an invisible wall of iron which seems to lie between what one feels and what one can do. How is one to get through this wall, for it does no good to use force? In my opinion, one must undermine the wall and file one’s way through, slowly and with patience.)24 Yet in Artaud’s vision of Van Gogh’s work, it seems that this invisible wall is not undermined or slowly and patiently filed, but exploded, bombarded onto the surface of the canvas, in an act designed to ‘faire jaillir une force tournante, un élément arraché en plein coeur’ (‘make a whirling force, an element torn right out of the heart, gush forth’).25 Artaud’s subjectile is inspired by Van Gogh’s description of the invisible wall, which recalls the immense boundaries Artaud identified in his early texts between the body, or what one really feels, and its expression in words, through poetry. In fact, Artaud seems at times to read Van Gogh’s work as if it were a linguistic text, the brush strokes or dashes and marks on the canvas becoming forms of punctuation, as he describes ‘l’épouvantable pression élémentaire d’apostrophes, de stries, de virgules, de barres’ (‘the awful elementary pressure of apostrophes, hyphens, commas and dashes’).26 As readers, we might be tempted to read Artaud’s reading of Van Gogh back into his own drawings, and see the dots and lines as punctuation marks, an expression of visual grammar in a move that both merges together and disrupts the relationship between drawing and written word.

#### We are mimesis – a creation through copying. Our performance is an affectual process of world-making that transcribes meaning after it has finished instead of starting from a point of fixed meaning and creating from there. This renders our subjecthood as unstable and able to assume an objective form that mediates our relationship between the subjective and the objective which allows experimentation and openness to new forms of life. *Even mathematics carries shades of insanity with quantum theory and set theory diving into almost incomprehensible divisions and abstractions.*

Gary Peters, 2009

Peters is chair of critical and cultural theory at York St. John University and the author of Irony and Singularity: Aesthetic Education from Kant to Levinas. “Mimesis and Cruelty” in “The Philosophy of Improvisation”.

Although insistent on the necessity of notation and inscription it is significant that, for Artaud, this is the culmination rather than the origination of performance. For all of its strictness or “cruelty” the codification of gestural space is not imposed from a linguistic source prior to the theater but, and these are the crucial words, “made up on the stage.” In some respects these views have some affinities with the Wagnerian notion of fixed improvisation (and Artaud is extraordinarily Wagnerian in so many respects) where the final work, the text, image, composition, or whatever, represent a final fixing of an improvisational process. As Wagner puts it in The Destiny of Opera, the “most perfect form of art” would be a “mimetic-musical improvisation of consummate poetic value fixed by the finest artistic judgement.”38 There is a reversal here, with inscription coming after rather than before improvisation, effectively shifting the state of fixity to the end rather than to the beginning of the work. A major influence on Artaud’s thought is the Balinese theater but, as Berio and Boulez agree, the improvisation that takes place within this context uses the fluidity of gesture to disguise the fixity of its source. The “theater of cruelty” works in exactly the opposite way. Its eventual form emerges out of what Artaud calls the “groping” among the objective material, a series of “experiments” or (we would say) improvisations that are eventually notated and fixed, thus disguising the unfixity of their source. In short, one is fixed then improvised, the other is improvised then fixed: **this is why the “theater of cruelty” is cruel**. If the performers are involved in the improvisations that provide the material to be fixed, then the experience of producing the very structure that will be eventually imposed upon them mercilessly certainly has an element of cruelty quite distinct from the joyous gestures of Balinese, Indian, or flamenco improvisors. The latter are always already within an aesthetic situation that is fixed, whereas within the “theater of cruelty” the performers are responsible for the production of the situation only then to witness its rigorous codification. One might say they see fixity coming into being or witness the beginning of fixity. This reversal has a direct bearing on the distinction signaled earlier between Berio’s “vast reservoir of memory” and Boulez’s “countless generations of fixed rules” in that it allows us to gain a more profound sense of the unfixity of the fixed. In short, it allows us to remember the manner in which our memories become memorable as a cultural tradition and codified heritage. In a sense **we are speaking here of a memory of memory or memory of remembrance that, in trying to think outside of a history of aesthetic forms, raises again the issue of the origin or Being of art and, with it, the possibility of “actual improvisation,” a mode of performance or practice that might give expression to this more essential engagement.** For all of his talk about the necessity of absolute obedience to the newly formulated laws of the “theater of cruelty,” Artaud insists that any performance worthy of attention must have the “passionate pulsation” of life, which raises the question, how is this passion to be expressed outside of the all-too-familiar strategies of individual inspiration? Answering this question brings Artaud and Adorno together. What both want is an art that is expressive but that avoids, indeed critiques, the trivial capriciousness of the inspired individual. This leads them both into the promotion of a mimeticism that is at once expressive and objective. Adorno brings expression, objectivity, and mimesis together in the following way: Aesthetic expression is objectification of the non-objective. Put more precisely, through its objectification expression becomes a second non-objective substance, one that speaks out of the artifact rather than out of the subject. Even so, the objectification of expression, which coincides with art, cannot do without a subject that produces expression and thereby, to use a bourgeois phrase, gainfully employs his mimetic impulses. Art is expressive when a subjectively mediated, objective quality raises its voice to speak.39 What is being remembered here is not a history of forms ever ready to be plundered for expressive content but the originary movement from the nonobjective to the objective that constitutes art and, indeed, provides it with its expressive substance. The importance of mimesis within the context of this originary movement is that the expressive moment is integral to the mimetic act of finding objective equivalents for nonobjective substance. What gives the mimetic impulse expressive power is not its success or failure in fixing subjective intention in an objective artifactual otherness but, rather, in its ability to re-present the dissonance between the unfixed and the fixed, between the “pulsation” of life and the code. The expressive dimension of mimesis then has nothing to do with what it copies but concerns instead its dual nature as that which produces similarities while also satisfying the “powerful compulsion” to become “something else.” It is not feelings but the codification of feelings in objective gestures that is expressive, not because these gestures speak or show this expressive substance but precisely because they don’t. Similarity assumes otherness, and it is this otherness that intrudes into every mimetic act and that makes it pulsate, but it is the pulsation of dissonance that has the “life” required by both Adorno and Artaud, not the dead harmoniousness of an impossible mimetic sameness. Indeed, as Artaud himself admits, where he says “cruelty” he could just as easily say “life”: The idea being that because life, metaphysically speaking, accepts range, depth, weight and matter, it accepts evil in direct consequence and everything inherent in evil, namely space, range and matter. All of which culminates in consciousness and anguish, and consciousness in anguish. Life cannot fail to exercise the blind severity all these contingencies bring or else it would not be life. But cruelty is this severity and this life which exceeds all bounds and is practiced in torture, trampling everything down, that pure inexorable feeling. Therefore I said “cruelty” just as I might have said “life” or “necessity,” because I wanted especially to denote that the theatre to me means continual action and emergence, above all there is nothing static about it, I associate it with a true act, therefore alive, therefore magic.40 Within the context of the “theater of cruelty” the imposition of the masks and gestures arrived at through the contingencies of improvisation is not, then, in any way comparable to the rigors of, for instance, Balinese theater where the “evil” of this “blind severity” is not part of the show. The intensity of engagement Artaud demands is one that requires the performers to continually bare the scars of their own submission to an emerging logic that is “cruel” precisely because it is eternally emerging with an inhuman severity that is not grounded in a genuine strictness that could be definitive or foundational. Certainly, Artaud seeks formulas but he does so from one moment to the next. Yes, he speaks of codifying precise gestures while admitting, in the same breath, their pointlessness: that’s why he’s “cruel.” The main point: to see the relationships, learn the formulae, to find the right formula each and every moment. **To** put useless, pointless gestures back in useful environments, relinking them with primal laws, making them conform with everything.41

#### The role of the ballot is to vote for who best actualizes spaces of affect. Affect is the experiential feeling that comes from the body rather than symbolic or non-material means.

#### Debate is a theater – it is a carved out space of affect in which we are constantly performing. Our voices are machinic whirls, destructive roars, and precise surgeons – each speech is an act of world-making. Our resolutions become points of departure for our experimental improvisation. In this round, there is neither past nor future, only the present immediacy of the performance. We the performers are not static. With each new argument, our subjecthood is fragmented and reformed. We become part of the space of the theater itself.

Josette Feral, 1997

“Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified” in “Mimesis, Masochism, & Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought”

2. First the manipulation of the body, then the manipulation of space: there is a functional identity between them that leads the performer to pass through these places without ever making a definitive stop. Carving out imaginary or real spaces (cf. Acconci's Red Tapes), one moment in one place and the next moment in the other, the performer never settles within these simultaneously physical and imaginary spaces, but instead traverses, explores, and measures them, effecting displacements and minute variations within them. He does not occupy them, not do they limit him: he plays with the performance space as if it were an object and turns it into a machine "acting upon the sense organs."3 Exactly like the body, therefore, space becomes existential to the point of ceasing to exist as a setting and place. It no longer surrounds and encloses the performance, but like the body, becomes part of the performance to such an extent that it cannot be distinguished from it. It is the performance. This phenomenon explains the idea that performance can take place only within and for a set space to which it is indissolubly tied. Within this space, which becomes the site of an exploration of the sub- ject, the performer suddenly seems to be living in slow motion. Time stretches out and dissolves as "swollen, repetitive, exasperated" gestures (Luciano Inga- Pin) seem to be killing time (cf. the almost unbearable slow motion of some of Michael Snow's experiments): gestures that are multiplied and begun again and again ad infinitum (cf. Acconci's Red Tapes), and that are always different, split in two by the camera recording and transmitting them as they are being carried out on stage before our eyes (cf. Chitty). This is Derrida's difference made perceptible. From then on, there is neither past nor future, but only a continuous present-that of the immediacy of things, of an action taking place. These gestures appear both as a finished product and in the course of being carried out, already completed and in motion (cf. the use of cameras): gestures that reveal their deepest workings and that the performer executes only in order to discover what is hidden underneath them (this process is comparable to Snow's camera filming its own tripod). And the performance shows this gesture over and over to the point of saturating time, space, and the representa- tion with it-sometimes to the point of nausea. Nothing is left but a kinesics of gesture. Meaning – all meaning – has disappeared. C) I.) \/ Performance is the absence of meaning. This statement can be easily supported by anyone coming out of the theater. (We need think only of the audience's surprise and anger with the first "stagings" of the Living Theater, or with those of Robert Wilson or Richard Foreman.) And yet, if any experi- ence is meaningful, without a doubt it is that of performance. Performance does not aim at a meaning, but rather makes meaning insofar as it works right in those extremely blurred junctures out of which the subject eventually emerges. And performance conscripts this subject both as a constituted sub- ject and as a social subject in order to dislocate and demystify it. Performance is the death of the subject. We just spoke of the death drive as being inscribed in performance, consciously staged and brought into play by a set of freely intended and accepted repetitions. This death drive, which fragments the body and makes it function like so many part-objects, reappears at the end of the performance when it is fixed on the video screen. Indeed, it is of interest to note that every performance ultimately meets the video screen, where the dernystified subject is frozen and dies. There, performance once again encounters representation, from which it wanted to escape at all costs and which marks both its fulfillment and its end.

#### We should view the world as viscerally material and based in affect. Language and signification bear marks on our bodies. Primal closeness to the body puts us in a position to deconstruct linguistic normalization and open spaces for experimentation with the objects of our thought.

R. Bruce Elder, 1998

Elder is an avant-garde film maker and theorist, he is the Ryerson Research Chair, and a Graduate Program Director, in Communication and Culture at Ryerson University. “The Body Electric: Of Wilhelm Reich and Antonin Artaud – Laying the Groundwork for Carolee Schneemann’s Body Art” in “A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry”, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Like Reich, the French poet, playwright, diarist, letter writer, and polemicist Antonin Artaud displayed strong antipathy towards reason and "advanced civilization." Artaud shared in the radical distrust of language so common among recent thinkers. The homogenizing of experience that is the very project of modernity. the protest against which has been the central theme of this book, has begun to trouble many thinkers as it has troubled numerous artists who have worked over the past several decades. Many thinkers whom modernity's homogenization of experience has troubled have come to recognize that language is a principal instrument in this levelling of experience into a single form; therefore they have sought in the body for traces of raw, primal experience that, in being developed and synthesized, might provide an alternative mode of experience to that which modernity authorizes. Artaud wrote: The domain of the theater is not psychological but plastic and physical. And the point is not whether the physical language of theater is capable of arriving at the same psychological resolutions as the language of words, whether it can express feelings and passions as well as words; the point is whether there are not in the domain of thought and intelligence attitudes which words are incapable of capturing and which gestures. and everything that partakes of the language of space, express with greater precision than words!" Precisely; and this was Artaud's cardinal recognition that Artaud was the first to achieve. Other artists and thinkers who have sought to found an art based on more primal, more somatic, forms of awareness follow a route first travelled by Antonin Artaud. The momentous importance of Artaud is that he was the first person to come to a full recognition of the regulatory function of language in the econ- omy ol somatic experience, to protest against those restrictions and. what is more, to propose that primitive, corporeal ejaculations--dynamic actions. shrieks, gestures, and wailing-should take the place of language in the theatre of the future. Because he was committed to returning speech and writ- ing to the body and to allowing visceral impulses to guide his speaking, we cannot simply take his words for what they say; a straightforward rendering of the explicit themes of his writings-when, that is, there actually are such themes-furnishes few insights. A more indirect approach is required, one that resembles the approach we take when we attempt to discover the latent meaning that surrealist artworks conceal within their manifest forms-an approach similar to that which we took when commenting on Williard Maas's The Geography of the Body. The method resembles that of an analyst when, at the conclusion of an analytical hour, he or she identifies for the analysand, in the form of the interpretation. the recurrent themes buried in what the analysand offered during the session and helps the analysand understand their determinants. This method requires. first. a capacity to think associa- tively, and then the ability to bring those associations under the regulation of a concept. As our method we used when we considered The Geography of the Body did, such analytical methods lead us to consider more primal modes of experience than those we customarily acknowledge. Artaud felt language's betrayal visecrally. as his inability to believe that words have comfortable and unfailing relations with things induced severe torment. Language and thinking were so painful for him that at one point in his Rodez notebooks he plays with the equivalence "euphonie, aphonie ["beautiful sound," no sound--but "euphonie" is also close to his mother's name. "Euphasie." so the equivalence implies that the mother's name is a void, without sound]." His distrust of language led him to argue for an anti- language, anti-psychological theatre. The theatre he wished for would be mystical and hieratic; where language was used it would be language as incantation, or speech manipulated like an object (as language actually became in the glossolaliac poems of Artaud's later years). The events of the theatre he envisioned would not be, as those of the conventional theatre of the West are, subordinate to the written text. He spoke for a return to myth, for a ritual theatre that placed movements and gestures above words, for a theatre whose effects would be so extreme, so "cruel" that they would dis- lodge the audience's rationality. This theatre would exert a primitive power over its audience: to this end, its stage should surround its audience the bet- tcr to produce terror. In this way, the theatre would inscribe its text into the body. The myth of cosmic rhythms mirroring themselves in the ï¬‚ow of human libido would be made real, much in the fashion that Artaud was to experience some years after he first conceived these ideas, in the asylum at Rodez. Artaud proposed that by treating uttered sounds as pure sonic objects we can transform our bodies' vocal emissions into a sort of poor music (musique paw/re). This poor music would be preferable to conventional music because it would he so much closer to the body. Music, like non-pitched sound, inter- ests him for its somatic effects. Discussing the resources of the theatre of cruelty, he states, 'l'he need to act directly and profoundly upon the sensibility through the sense organs invites research, from the point of view of sound, into quali- ties and vibrations of sounds to which we are absolutely unaccustomed. qualities which contemporary musical instruments do not possess and which compel us to revive ancient and forgotten instruments or to create new ones. They also also compel research, beyond the domain of music, into instruments and devices which, because they are made from special combinations or new alloys of metals. can achieve a new diapason of the octave and produce intolerable or ear-shattering sounds or noises?" The emptiness of traditional music follows from its divorce from the body. Artaud strove to bring music back to the body, to redeem it by corporealizing it. 'l'he centrality of this conception of music to Artaud's poetics is evidenced by his poeti-y's taking on an increasingly musical character, as he began to use words more for their sound qualities than for their meanings-or even to find their meaning in their sound qualities. Speech, Artaud proposed, was to become musical in its pragmatics (though not in its form). Language would become material, and have material, perlocutionary effects on the bodies of those who heard it. Meaning would be a matter of corporeal sensa- tion, and therefore an attribute of visual forms and movements, and of non- linguistic sounds, as much as of spoken or written language. What theater can still wrest from speech is its potential for expansion beyond words, for development in space, for a dissociative and vibratory effect on our sensibilities. This is the function of intonations, the particular way a word is uttered. And beyond the auditory language of sounds, this is the function of the visual language of objects. movements. attitudes. ges- tures, but provided their meaning, their physiognomy, their combinations, are extended until they become signs and these signs become a kind of alphabet. Once the theater has become aware of this language in space, which is a language of sounds, cries, lights, onomatopoeia, it must organize it by making the characters and the objects true hieroglyphs, and by utiliz- ing their symbolism and their correspondences in relation to all organs and on all levels."5 Thus Artaud became the first to revise the theory of artistic meaning by founding it on an understanding of artwork's pragmatic dimension: more than that, he became the first to propose the formulation of an artistic semi- otic based on a pragmatic or. more strictly (to borrow a tenn from ].L. Austin), a perlocutionary theory of artistic meaning. This pragmatic conception of meaning, which identifies the meaning of a word or a sound or a ges- ture with its effect on its perceiver, would remain the foundation of Artaud's conception of meaning; indeed, with time he came less interested in the symbolic and hieroglyphic dimension of artistic meaning, and tied artistic meaning ever more closely to the actual stimulative effect that artistic forms have on the body and sensation.