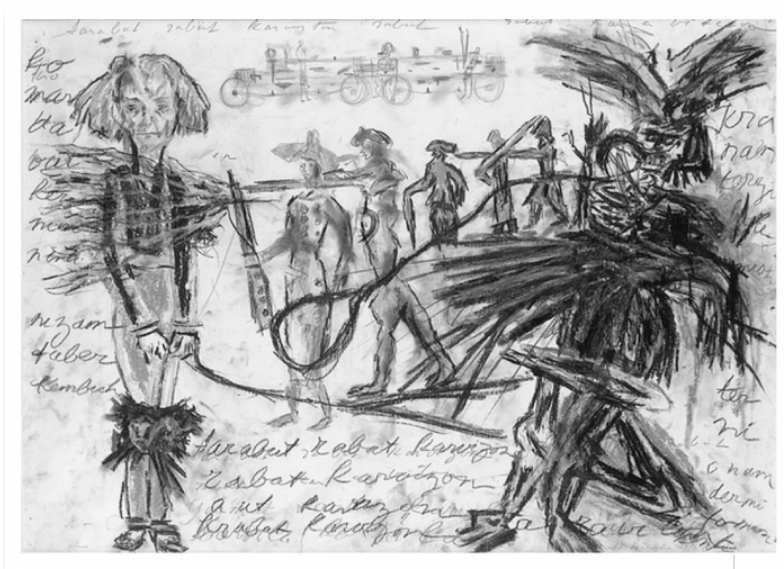


HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

WHO AM I? (Antonin Artaud)



by FULYA PEKER

Dear Reader,

Let's admit it! Some groundbreaking modernist artists and their works, which are essential to the self-pronouncing denunciation of modernity, initiated an undeniable genealogy for our current aesthetic visions. Therefore, by laying upon an autopsy table the work of these figures, which I call Modern Mythologies, it is possible to explore the connection between myth-making and artistic creativity; to activate anew inert knowledge as well as the process and experience of art making; to question what lies behind the act of mimesis and its function; to delve deeper into "the unknown" via metaphors and mythologies. Along with my experiences in Butoh and experimental music, Antonin Artaud's life and art led me to create the Modern Mythologies Project (MMP) in 2006.

For MMP solo performance pieces, I first develop textual scores (a monologue) out of an individual artist's personal writings or letters; then I articulate the monologue through intonation methods inspired by what I imagine would be the sounds of the artist's inner life and environment, which are then presented as either live recitation or pre-recorded scores used during the performance. In addition to this aural aspect, I create movement notations through embodying the images, spoken words, and found objects that represent the artist's work. While rehearsing each MMP piece, I use an exercise I developed called "split and unite," which is inspired by the tension built up over time between the physical and vocal expressions of the body. This is done to: trigger the initial sensory connotations of words and to stimulate the body to freely respond to them once again; to create awareness of the interaction, integration, and interruption that occurs between form and sound. Through these operations, the artist's words become the music through which I set their artworks in motion. With these performances I aim to reverse the process of artistic creation and to revert the mimetic impulse to its formative myth-making state; by doing so, I try to convert art works into modern mythologies.

The monologue that follows was the inaugural MMP solo performance piece. The text for the performance was formed out of Artaud's writings in order to create an analogy between his artistic vision and his existential stance. It is extremely difficult to have a sense of Artaudian aesthetics without exploring his personal strife since, as he stated with finality, he could not conceive of art detached from life. Similar to performing an autopsy, after extensive research on Artaud's journey into the cruelty within himself, namely his body — his I — without organs, I dismantled, rearranged, and composed this monologue using his own words compiled from texts by Martin Esslin, Bettina L. Knapp, Naomi Greene, Charles Marowitz, and Stephen Barber.

As a final note, although I resist talking about my work and prefer that it talk for itself, since the following monologue is about the question of the self, — the I — the rather modernist wording of the first person singular encountered above hopefully fits the work presented below.

*Sincerely,
Fulya Peker*

Here where others offer up their works I

pretend to nothing more than showing my mind. Life is a burning up of questions. I

can't conceive of a work detached from life. I

don't love detached creation. I

can no longer conceive of the mind as detached from itself. It happens that one day, where I

was at and the way I

was, I

was no longer virgin, nor intact, nor free, nor alone, nor at the beginning, nor the beginning itself. Who am I? I

am he, who can dissolve the terror of being a man and go among the dead, for is not my body miraculous ash whose earth is the voice of speaking death? I

was born from a uterus in which I

was in spite of myself and with which I

had nothing to do even before, because this is no way of being born, to be copulated and masturbated for nine months in a gaping membrane which devours without teeth. Ever since my childhood I

have noticed these periods of stuttering and the horrible physical contradiction of my facial nerves and tongue, which came after periods of calm and perfect ease... Spasms of pain in the right side of the neck, which cut my breathing... Limbs, which become numb, begin to prickle, violent itching, which suddenly moves from the arms to the legs, the spinal column full of crackles, is painful at the top. A violent weakness, to drop to the ground, which is an amplification of the unbearable compression of the head and shoulder blades... At times a general cramp, heat, shivering, droning, noises in the ears, pain caused by light... Muscles as if twisted, then laid open; brittle feeling of being made of glass; wincing and cringing at any move or sound. Unconscious incoherence of steps, of gestures, of movements... Willpower, constantly inhibited in even the simplest gestures, renunciation of simple gestures, something or other... Body motions run haywire in sort of death exhaustion. Mind, fatigued at the simplest muscular tension like gesture of grasping — unconsciously clinging to something, holding it together by constant will power.

Who am I

? Where do I

come from? Here where I

stand, a man I

stand what I

myself do, a man I

do, there is nothing more there will be nothing more than that. There is no science, no wisdom, life has been lost from the day one single thing became known. I

am not of your world, mine is on the other side of all that is, knows itself, is conscious, desires and acts. It is entirely another thing. There science, knowledge, envy, desire and its attractions are unknown. As for as, I

have never been able to understand how it could cause erection, suck with the tongue, fill the cheeks, wet the ganglions. It is only the illusionary power of attraction that I

deny. Myself, Antonin Artaud , I

am a pure spirit and make my body rise looking at it as I

do like the asses of the holy spirit of god who believe that man is a double composed of a well rounded spirit and then of a body, an organism that is regulated by the spirit of the master of eternity on high. I

suffer because the spirit is not in life and life not in the spirit. I

suffer from spirit as organ... I

am suffering from this terrible sickness of the spirit. My thought abandons me to all possible measure, from the simple fact of the thought itself to the external fact of the materialization of words. Words, the shape of sentences, the internal direction of thoughts, a simple reaction of the mind. I

have struggled to try and exist to try and consent to the forms, all the forms with which the delirious illusion of being in the world, fallen at last, fallen, risen into the void which I

had rejected, I

have a body which experiences the world and spews against reality. I

could no longer be my body, I

did not want to be this breath turning to death all around it, until its extreme dissolution. Thus wrung out and twisted, fiber on fiber, I

felt myself to be the hideous corridor of an impossible revulsion. And I

know not what suspension of the void invaded me with its groping blind spots, but I

was that void, and in suspension, and as for my soul, I

was nothing more than a spasm among several chokings. Where to go and how to get out was the one and only thought leaping in my throat blocked and secured on all sides. Every wall of charred meat assured me it would be neither through the soul nor the mind, all that is of a former world, without the mind, the mind, the patient.

For a long time now I

have felt the Void, but have refused to throw myself into the Void. I

have been as cowardly as all that I

see. When I

believed I

was refusing the world, I

know now I

was refusing the Void. For I

know that this world does not exist, and I

know how and why it does not exist. My sufferings until now consisted in refusing the Void. The Void that was already in me... If only one could taste one's Void, if one could really rest in one's Void, and this Void were not a certain kind of being but not quite death either. It is so hard to no longer exist, to no longer be in something. The real pain is to feel one's thought shift within oneself.

But thought as a fixed point is certainly not painful. I

have reached the point where I

am no longer with life, but still have appetites and the insistent titillation of being. I

have only one occupation left: to remake myself. We are not yet born, we are not yet in the world, there is not yet a world, things have not yet been made, the reason for being has not yet been found. If I

commit suicide, it will not be to destroy myself but to put myself back together again. By suicide I

reintroduce my design in nature, I

shall for the first time give things the shape of my will. I

free myself from the conditioned reflexes of my organs, which are so badly adjusted to my inner self, and life is for me no longer an absurd accident whereby I

think what I

am told to think... I

can no longer live nor die, nor am I

capable of not wishing to die or live. And all mankind resembles me... I

reflect on life, and I

am the only witness of myself. His who is speaking to you is one who has truly despised and who has known the happiness of being in the world only now when he has left the world, when he is already separated from it. Being dead, the others are not separated. They are still circling around their own centers. I

am not dead. But **I**

am separated. Who am **I**

? Where do **I**

come from? **I**

am Antonin Artaud. And if **I**

say it as **I**

know how to say it immediately you will see my present body burst into fragments and under ten thousand notorious aspects a new body will be assembled in which you will never again be able to forget **I**.

* *dedicated to Sadun Belgin (1947–2014)*