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Artaud's "Daughters": "Plague," "Double," and "Cruelty" as Feminist Performance Practices of Transformation

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by

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Dedication

For PopPop, for seeing all my shows, even the weirdo ones.

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No journey is walked alone. On my path these past years, I have accumulated great appreciation for those who have encouraged me, challenged me, ridiculed me, loved me, and cajoled me to excel in my efforts. I give great thanks to the faculty and my colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin's Performance as Public Practice Program. In particular, I'd like to thank Ann Daly, whose candid conversations with me were revelatory and thought-provoking. I have much respect and sincere gratitude for Jill Dolan, who enthusiastically pushed me to think rigorously; and, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, whose counsel and advice were invaluable, reminding me to acknowledge all the wondrous things I've accomplished amidst the furor of life's hardships and strain. I would also like to acknowledge Allucquére Sandy Stone for her generous and uplifting conversations about many exciting and "cruel" subjects. The ACTlab, under the direction of Dr. Stone, inspired me to approach and then apply my practices and theories into an actualized and physical reality. Pauline Strong, whom I have known since my early years as an anthropology undergraduate student, has been one of my most cherished advisers in the academy. I am so grateful that fate continually threads her into the stitches of my intellectual quilt. Paul Bonin-Rodriguez—who elegantly performs the role of artist-scholar-citizen— is someone who walks the walk and I am continually amazed. Also, Charlotte Canning has provided some of the most invigorating research questions during this process. She tirelessly and gracefully steers a department of eccentrics, passionate academics, and progressive thinkers. I have much admiration for her capabilities as a scholar, historian and compassionate adviser.

listening to my talks about theory when the bills need to be paid and the grants need to be written.

I give great clamor of cheer to the alligator man who likes fruitcakes and mean girls. I have made you into a mythology. That's what I do: I'm an artist.

Thank you, Melinda Rothouse, for your meticulous eyes and patience. Also, I offer a royal bow to snow mountain. I am still watching. To my fellow DbD participants, I thank you for your willingness to make art together under "extreme" circumstances.

I acknowledge the women who have contributed to shaping my life's form, path and ideological musings. These women have guided me towards becoming a more whole, healthy, loving, compassionate and honest human being. Sometimes, I rage; but these women have encouraged me to believe that my rage is informative and that art and expression of myself through art-making can heal these sores and wounds, leaving rugged and proud scar tissue in the healing process.

Dr. Annie Sprinkle has taught me how not to be afraid of my sensual, highly sensitive body. Rachel Rosenthal has taught me how to be fearless and acknowledge the sensitivities of my heart. This, she says, is symptomatic to all artists. "We are sensitive because we create and see the invisible where once there had been nothing," she once said to us during a DbD workshop.

Finally, thank you, Forest. Your childhood glee and wonder pop me into the present truth with joy and lightheartedness during those times when I stubbornly cling to the thickness of my illusions. I love you, son.

Artaud's "Daughters": "Plague," "Double," and "Cruelty" as Feminist Performance Practices of Transformation

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The purpose of this study was to identify Artaudian criteria contained in three different performance practices including (1) a television performance, (2) a live performance, and (3) a workshop performance. These included, respectively, (1) an episode from *The X-Files* television series; (2) *MetamorphoSex*, a live ritual performance with performance artist Annie Sprinkle; and (3) Rachel Rosenthal's DbD Experience Workshop. Core criteria of Artaudian Theater of Cruelty were established through analyses of the relevant literature. These criteria were then coupled with characteristics of French feminist theory and a "shamanistic" perspective to create a theoretical-analytic tool with Artaudian criteria as its centerpiece. Also, performance analysis, experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity, and performative poetics were techniques applied for analytic purposes. Analyses identified a range of Artaudian criteria and feminist and "shamanistic" characteristics in the three performances; these included radical and performative poetics, embodied states of ecstasy and transformation, and non-

reliance on written texts and scripts in performance practices. Among other things, analyses of different performance practices indicates that identified Artaudian performances, as a whole, tend to hinge upon performing "in the extreme" and may inadvertently serve to reinscribe race and imperialist hegemonies through an exaggeration of performing "whiteness in the extreme." Additionally, women performing "in the extreme" are often unfairly characterized as heightened and exaggerated examples of "womanness." Masked behind themes of women's empowerment are cultural and performative archetypes of woman as "goddess," "monster," or heartless "cyborg." Implications of these findings are discussed as well as the creation of public spaces where groups of people gather for an "extreme" performative event that, through dramatic spectacle and purpose, unites them with a particular theme or focus. It is argued that such spaces have the potential to catalyze endeavors seeking transformation and, in particular, transform the social lives of the participants.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"The poet becomes a seer through a long, immense, and reasoned derangement of all the senses."

--Arthur Rimbaud

Antonin Artaud (b. 1896-d.1948) was a French poet, an actor, theater director, playwright, visionary, opiate addict, occultist, and diagnosed schizophrenic.[1] In this introductory chapter, I first offer background information on this 20th century theatrical icon of "madness and modernism"[2] including his major contributions to experimental performance practices as one of many applicable artistic forms described in his internationally-influential work *The Theater and Its Double*.[3] I am interested in Artaud's musings on manifesting immersive, spiritualized, and visceral theatrical spectacles. Next in this chapter, I introduce the method and techniques I used to analyze three case studies. Additionally, I use performance analysis, experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics as foundational interpretive techniques alongside Artaud's concepts of Theater of Cruelty. In total, this dissertation is based on a triangulation of three elements of performance practice: the Artaudian (Plague, Double and Cruelty), the feminist (*l'écriture féminine*) and the "shamanistic."

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[1] In his nine years of asylum incarceration, he eventually sank into tragic madness. At Rodez, he was diagnosed as a schizophrenic, and "was considered absolutely unreachable and incurable. There can be no doubt that in the initial phase of his illness he was completely and utterly insane." John M. MacGregor, *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989) 283

[2] Sass writes that, like many schizophrenics, Artaud "yearned desperately for the impossible goal of a private language." Louis A. Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1992) 187 Also, Artaud is one of several iconic figures in modernism who was preoccupied with "a self-conscious concern with individuality and inwardness" (188).

[3] Further references in this dissertation to *The Theater and Its Double* will display as *T and D*.

Artaud would often exploit cryptic images to explain his concepts, which makes interpretation of his concepts particularly elusive. In this dissertation, I discuss Artaud's ideas on theater as "plague," as "double," and as "cruel," and I use his concepts to interpret three artistic case studies from a feminist and "shamanistic" or transformative perspective; the feminist perspective is derived from Hélène Cixous' notion of *l'écriture féminine* (woman's writing). In this chapter—and throughout the dissertation—I present my key questions as they relate to my multiple positions and approaches as feminist, experimental theater practitioner/performer, arts writer (both performatively and critically) and reflexive-subjective researcher.

ANTONIN ARTAUD AND THE THEATER OF CRUELTY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Due to an infection of childhood meningitis, Artaud's body was riddled with constant nerve pain. Born in the Southern French port town of Marseilles, he was one of two siblings that survived of the seven his mother bore. He lived a passionate and desperate life with few moments of rest in between fits of madness, addiction, physical pain, and social rejection. He was in deep turmoil with himself, his relationship to writing, and the culture that surrounded him. Biographer Naomi Greene writes, "in 1915, only nineteen but already familiar with the tortures of depression and intense headaches, Artaud destroyed all his manuscripts and gave his books to his friends" (17). Artaud understood his condition as a "nervous disease" and even apologizes in a letter to Génica Athanasiou,[4] "I am being a little obscure, perhaps it is difficult for you to understand me" (*Selected Writings* 19). In general, he perceived modern lifestyle and culture (which he often referred to as "Occidental") as a decadent lie, full of false promises, weak souls and sickening pretension.

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[4] Genica Athanasiou is perhaps the only lover with whom Artaud spent any significant amount of his life with, according to Esslin 21, Knapp 22, and Barber 25.

Artaud wanted to expand consciousness and inspire crystalline awareness of present, sensory experience by any means possible: "I would like to write a Book [*sic*] which would drive men mad, which would be like an open door leading them where they would never have consented to go, in short, a door that opens onto reality" (*Selected Writings* 59). During the span of his life and artistic passions, Artaud favored raw experience, trance, mystical archeology, invisible energies and purity of intention in all things. His attachment to the theater as a mode of expression was not his first obsession. In Artaud's youth, poetry was an initial and direct artistic mode of expressing his intense emotionality— with poets Rimbaud and Baudelaire his idols.[5] As he matured, he became enthralled with theater, film, and visual art. He revered these artistic forms because of their capacity to manifest storytelling through gestures and images, in contrast to scripted language or texts. Despite an antipathy to traditional performance styles, Artaud also worked as a struggling actor[6] in plays and films and produced poorly-received work as director, playwright, and screenwriter. Throughout his art and work, he struggled with language, which he considered inaccurate and fraught with misunderstandings.[7] He wrote, "We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and *written* poetry. . . Written poetry is worth reading once, and then should be destroyed" (Artaud *T and D* 78).

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[5] About Artaud's adolescence, see Bettina Liebowitz Knapp, *Antonin Artaud: Man of Vision* (New York: Discus Books, 1971)

[6] His most famous film credits as actor are as a sympathetic priest in Carl Theodor Dreyer's film, *La Passion De Jeanne D'arc*, dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer, Société générale des films, 1928. Also, Artaud played radical French Revolutionary journalist, Jean-Paul Marat in *Napoléon*, dir. Abel Gance, Ciné France Films, 1927.

[7] When Artaud was involved in the Surrealist movement in France (1924), he began a study of the cinema as a means of "escaping the perils of linguistic signification" Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) 125

For those who have an affinity for Artaud's wild and strained musings, his manifestos on the theater in his influential book, *The Theater and Its Double*, contain the most enigmatic and exciting elements from his opus. Here, he offers theater-makers an alternative to traditional and literary representations that model Aristotelian formats. He named his revolutionary theatrical style, "Theater of Cruelty." He described theater's potential potency in multiple metaphorical terms such as: "Theater and the Plague," "Theater and Its Double," and "Theater of Cruelty."[8]

Artaud's Theater of Cruelty is considered "a savage exorcism of the darkest latent forces inhabiting human experience" (Salter 47). In *Artaud's Doubles,* Kimberly Jannarone describes this theater as an "epidemic event," that must "liberate itself from all logic, matter and history," and would "operate on in the realm of myth and image" (1). Artaud's theoretical contribution to the study of theater inspired and expanded twentieth and twenty-first century Western and European concepts of performance to include street spectacles, elaborate rituals, audience participation, and innovative applications of technologies. Artaud posited: theater should be an emotive and sacred spectacle, a kind of festival as a scathingly visceral act— an immersive event that transforms both spectators and actors alike, leaving neither trace nor representation.[9]

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[8] Jacques Derrida emphatically argues that Artaud was interested solely in "killing metaphor," although Artaud himself tended to vacillate between literal definitions of his concepts and metonymic enactments of them. See "*La Parole Soufflée*" in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978)

[9] Derrida has written extensively on interpreting and applying Artaud's texts towards culture, representation, madness, and language. He discusses the inherent "enigmatic conjunction" (Derrida 184) analyzing Artaud's work between "critical discourse and clinical discourse" artistic work. The following is a dense summation of the panorama of Artaud's theatrical vision according to Derrida:"All the limits furrowing classical theatricality (represented/representer, signified/signifier, author/director/actors/spectators, stage/audience, text/interpretation, etc.) were ethico-metaphysical prohibitions, wrinkles, grimaces, rictuses—the symptoms of fear before the dangers of the festival. Within the space of the festival opened by transgression, the distance of representation should no longer be extendable" (244).

This dissertation is based on a triangulation of three elements of performance

practice: the Artaudian (plague, double, and cruelty), the feminist (*l'écriture féminine*),

and the "shamanistic." Said differently, Artaud's ideas are the foundational source

material of this triangulation. My analyses point out that the three case studies described

in this dissertation, albeit, in varying degrees, exhibit these aforementioned elements of

Artaud's concepts. I specifically examine how Antonin Artaud's texts, theoretical and

metaphorical musings on theater, life, and suffering, can be used to interpret transgressive

and radical women's experiences in specific contemporary performative spheres. This is

accomplished by focusing primarily on ritualistic, embodied, and experiential

performance practices evident in three case studies. I ask, for instance, how and why

"Artaud's Daughters," adopt, resurrect, and use inspiration from or demonstrate,

implicitly and explicitly, curative or "spiritual therapeutics" (*T and D* 85) inherent in

theater—all of which are outlined in his influential essays on culture and performance in

The Theater and Its Double, originally published in France in 1938 (translated and

published into English in 1958).

I approach this study of Artaud somewhat paradoxically as I am a radical, "third

wave," (born in the mid-1970's) feminist and thus somewhat uncomfortable in furthering

attention to canonized white, male authors and artists such as Artaud. However, from a

scholarly perspective, given his considerable influence on experimental theater in the 20th

and 21st century, examination of his work using a (French-centric) feminist (e.g., Hélène

Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva) approach is warranted.

I identify with Artaud as a peculiar sort of patriarch. Susan Sontag writes that

despite Artaud's literary status as "an author whom the culture attempts to assimilate but

who remains profoundly indigestible. . . [but] remains rewarding to quote and read bits of

. . . Artaud is relevant and understandable, a cultural monument, as long as one mainly refers to his ideas. . ." (Sontag lix). With Artaud-as-father, whose children are of his intellectual, artistic, and spiritual legacy, I examine a metaphor of conceptual, idealized, and imagined lineage which includes the possibility of transforming his "teachings" in a way that fits the "daughters'" artistic needs.

Why "Daughters"?: Unraveling the Relationship between Artaud and Women Artists

My inspiration for the title, "Artaud's Daughters" is derived from a drawing Artaud sketched and from a phrase wherein he described the women who visited him, learned from him, and listened to his stories in his later years while living at the mental health institution at Hospice d'Ivry outside Paris. In 1995, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris presented Antonin Artaud's works on paper,[10] —a series of drawings, scribbles, stained and tattered letters, portraits—which he created while under psychiatric care at a mental health institution (the Rodez "asylum" as it is referred to during Artaud's time) in the last decade of his life. Of these, a drawing of various women entombed in open coffins was most striking. These women appeared to be of different ages—from crone to maiden—and bore somber and fixed stares. Artaud titled the piece, *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté*: "The Theater of Cruelty," the title of a manifesto he had written ten years prior.[11] In this sketch, the women were heroine archetypes for Artaud, trapped in his imaginative, symbolic, future mythos. They were, as he named them, his "daughters of the heart to be born."

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[10] See Stephen Barber, "Cruel Journey," *Art in America* February 1995.

[11] See Paule Thévenin, Antonin Artaud and Jacques Derrida, *Antonin Artaud: Dessins Et Portraits* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1986)

Figure 1:   "Le Théâtre de la Cruauté," by Antonin Artaud

Artaud mentioned this small group of women who individually and with other Artaud admirers (which also included male friends) visited him in his final years in Rodez (1945-1946). He wrote, "Born gradually this unconscious that I had like the hardest of the hard before the coffin of my six daughters of the heart to be born: Yvonne, Caterine, Neneka, Cécile, Ana and Little Anie" (qtd. in Artaud, Eshleman, and Bador 67). Stephen Barber, a preeminent scholar and biographer on Artaud's work and life states,

"The effusively imaginative creation of Artaud's daughters of the heart gave him a great sense of anticipation and hope, which helped to pull him through his last year at Rodez. It also provided him with allies for his struggle, a new and oppositional family, and a new sexuality" (*Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* 157). Clearly, Artaud depended upon these women for emotional and psychological support and as performative vehicles to express his prolific and wild imaginings

Other scholars have interpreted Artaud's congenial concept of "daughters" differently, perhaps even as a pandering or misogynist term of endearment. Some scholars have been dismissive of Artaud based on a literal interpretation of his texts, which can at times be derisively essentialist and violent. For example, in his intensely imagistic short play, *The Spurt of Blood,* Artaud's stage directions include describing a woman's genitalia with an "enormous number of scorpions" (*Selected Writings* 76) emerging from her vagina "which swells and splits" (76) and "becomes vitreous" (76). However, my analysis and interpretation of the wide range of documents produced by both Artaud as well as other scholars suggests that in his later years Artaud had affectionate and heartfelt mentor/mentee relationships with these particular young women friends. Indeed, Artaud nourished mutual respect and connection with these women during his later years at Rodez, and they continue to reflect fondly upon Artaud until present day. Therefore, by using the term "daughter," it appears that Artaud's relationships with these women could be described as a positive and constructive form of paternalist nurturing and intimacy.

Notwithstanding Artaud's affectionate disposition and paternal kindness, he was also "enormously imposing;" Marthe Robert notes in the documentary *La Véritable Histoire D'Artaud Le Momo,* that some women also viewed him as projecting a slightly crazed and eccentric quality. In this same documentary by Gérard Mordillat (1994),

comprised of interviews with those who knew Artaud intimately, one of the "daughters,"

(Anie Besnard) reads a letter Artaud had written to her. In this letter, Artaud expressed

his sincere respect and earnest kindness towards her. As Anie reads this letter on camera,

she weeps, gently wiping her eyes repeatedly with a tissue, struggling to read the letter

aloud. She apologizes for her swell of emotions that interrupts her ability to finish

reading the letter. She further explains how much Artaud's suffering and artistic passions

affected her as a sympathetic young woman.[12] Marthe Robert remembers, "I described

him my dreams, I could tell him many things." Paule Thevénin claims that Artaud "was

attentive to others," and Robert continues to fondly reflect that, "He was attached to us. . .

. He was an exceptional person" (Mordillat).

Evidently, Artaud's powerful presence energetically dominated this particular

circle of women and they continually returned to him, at times undergoing intensely

physical and vocal actor training techniques that Artaud believed veered close to his

Theater of Cruelty concepts.[13] Both Artaud's writings and testimonials by these women[14]

confirmed that Artaud was a significant mentor and friend to them during this time.

Artaud's letters to the women he loved and admired was replete with honeyed poetry and

delicate phrasing. "My Dear Anie," he wrote, "Whenever I see you, it's the nicest part of

my day." (Mordillat). Or in a letter to Artaud's only long-term lover, Génica Athanasiou,

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[12] See *La Véritable Histoire D'artaud Le Momo*, dir. Gérard Mordillat, 1994.

[13] See *My Life and Times with Antonin Artaud*, dir. Gérard Mordillat, Sami Frey, 1998. The film portrays a semi-fictional account of Artaud rehearsing a particular piece of text with a young woman (an actress) in his room at the Rodez asylum. He bangs on a log with a misshapen mallet, pounding rhythm while screaming with fury as an example of how he wants her to perform the text. She appears on the verge of collapsing in tears, but pushes through Artaud's demands, distorting her voice and body in seemingly agonizing and exaggerated ways. Artaud's obsession with his mallet and log as metronomic performance tools is further documented in Stephen Barber's *Blows and Bombs*.

[14] Many of these testimonials can be found in the documentary, *La Véritable Histoire D'Artaud Le Momo.*

he wrote, "I wanted to tell you only certain special things, very good things, and I wanted to be equal to it" (*Selected Writings* 20).

One of the women ("daughter") closest to Artaud in his later years was Paule Thévenin, who became his literary executor, to whom he left his entire *oeuvre* and drawings. She published many of his works posthumously; this included co-authoring editorial prefaces to Artaud's work with Jacques Derrida.[15] Thévenin continues to express with sympathetic affection and earnest devotion for her time spent with the *auteur*.

In the sketch discussed above as my artistic inspiration for the title of this dissertation, Artaud's daughters seem both alive and dead, as if they were waiting for the right moment to be resurrected or reborn. In this dissertation, I will imaginatively and performatively demonstrate that Artaud's *artistic*, rather than historical legacy "daughters" are present in the twenty-first century and, in many respects, manifest important elements of the Theater of Cruelty Artaud articulated in writing, performing, teaching and playing in multiple spheres of performances, from the stage to video games.

Artaud wrote the following poem near the very end of his life. Here, he alludes to a mystical synergetic connection between speaking his name and his unforgettable legacy. As a ghostly omen of his continuing presence, Artaud dramatically describes the emergence of his resurrected spirit in multiple forms after his death.

Who am I?

Where do I come from?

I am Antonin Artaud

and if I say it

immediately

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[15] See Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998)

you will see my present body

fly into pieces

and under ten thousand aspects

a new body

will be assembled

in which you will never again

be able to forget me.

(qtd. in Artaud, Eshleman, and Bador 323)

As his figurative progenies, "Artaud's Daughters" ensure that his prophetic and

apocryphal texts on theater, film, culture, art, and literature will continue to receive

vigorous theoretical challenge. Many contemporary women artists' work encapsulates

much of Artaud's visions. Rachel Rosenthal,[16] Diamanda Galas,[17] Patti Smith,[18] Lydia

Lunch,[19] Judith Malina,[20] Marina Abramovic,[21] Orlan,[22] Nancy Spero,[23] Yoko Ono[24] and

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[16] Rachel Rosenthal repeatedly speaks of her interdisciplinary work as inspired by Artaud. See Moira Roth, *Rachel Rosenthal*, Paj Books.; Art + Performance; 2; (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 6 .

[17] See interview with Diamanda Galas in which she reveres and tries to emulate Artaud's screed for visceral, auditorial attacks on spectators in Andrea Juno and V. Vale, *Angry Women* (San Francisco, Calif.: RE/Search Publications, 1991)

[18] Patti Smith wrote an article about her affinity for Artaud. "I first learned about Artaud, the Surrealist visionary, from seeing him in the movie, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. I was very taken with his ability to express himself in so many forms -- writing, acting, directing, drawing. Despite his drug abuse, he had a tremendous work ethic." Patti Smith, *On Artaud and Genet*, 1996, Available: http://www.oceanstar.com/patti/poetry/artaud.htm, 12 November 2011.

[19] Lydia Lunch has been performing spoken word and front lining punk bands since the late 1970's in New York City. She typically contorts and screeches with her voice in a macabre sobriety of distinct rage. See Juno and Vale, *Angry Women*

[20] Malina and Julian Beck of the Living Theater built their company's mission from Artaud's concepts of theatrical "cruelty". Their production of *The Brig* (1963) is a specific example of their attempt. See Albert Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*, 1st ed. (New York: Taplinger Pub. Co., 1977)

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even some "riot grrl" rock bands[25] share a commonality: their *art* mirrors, and at times, directly addresses, various incarnations of Artaud's visceral and encompassing Theater of Cruelty premise. Indeed, Amelia Jones begins the first pages of her book, which includes feminist influences, *Body Art: Performing the Subject,* with a quote from Artaud: "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" (*T and D* 96). In many ways, Artaud wanted theater to be a highly metaphysical mode of communication that is volatile, transformative, and penetrating. Artaud imagined the body to be used as a nuanced and manipulated instrument, and in turn, the audience would be unable to elude the performers' body-presence.

CASE STUDIES ANALYSES

For this dissertation, I analyze three case studies that are unique emanations or projections of "Artaud's Daughters." I use Artaud's oft-quoted metaphors of theater as "plague," theater as "double," and theater as "cruelty," to explain the relevance and

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[21] See Marina Abramovic, *Marina Abramovic: Student Body: Workshops, 1979-2003: Performances, 1993-2003* (Milano: Charta, 2003) for information on her collection of endurance performance training, exercises, and artistic creations.

[22] See C. Jill O'Bryan, *Carnal Art: Orlan's Refacing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) For locating information on Orlan's theatrical plastic surgery performances.

[23] Nancy Spero created her series of drawings, *Codex Artaud* (1971) after being inspired directly by Artaud's writings and drawings. In one drawing, (*Codex Artaud* IX) she illustrates between a man's figure, the Egyptian symbol of the Eye of Horus, alluding to Artaud's fascination with ancient magical and symbolic belief systems.

[24] See RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, Rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001) on the connection between Artaud and Fluxus artists, like Ono.

[25] See Gillian G. Gaar, *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll*, Expanded 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Seal Press, 2002) on the history of women as political radicals in rock and roll bands.

impact of several artists' performance practices. For Artaud's concept of theater as "plague," I use a fictional, female virtual-reality avatar named "Maitreya"[26] invented by a female game-programmer character from an *X-Files* television episode on the Fox network; for Artaud's concept of "double," I use Annie Sprinkle's *MetamorphoSex* (Austin, TX, 1995) ritual theater production (in collaboration with Linda Montano and Barbara Carrellas); and for Artaud's concept of "cruelty," I use Rachel Rosenthal's Doing by Doing Experience workshop.

By using Artaud's work as a lens to advance thinking about feminist performance practices, I embrace what is often overlooked in feminist performance theories and dialogue. Jeannette Savona states that revisiting Artaud's work in relation to feminist theory provokes a renewed possibility of engaging with the utility of his legacy:

> Supposing we can define feminine writings or stage experiments and reduce them to a few major trends: should we not also determine what these trends owe to previous avant-garde schools or theories? Instead of excluding masculine writings from their research, as American feminists tend to do, French feminists have stressed the 'feminine' elements in writers such as Mallarmé, Artaud, Joyce or Kleist. Should we also pursue this line of research and apply it to drama? (543)

I use Artaud's work— more specifically for the purposes of this dissertation, his "Manifestos on the Theater of Cruelty,"— as the foundation for understanding particular feminist performance practices, to demonstrate the utility of his work for experiments in feminist stagings of identity; to promote affective social/cultural agency; to empower positive change of self through transformative means, and to challenge the metaphysical

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[26] Maitreya is an iconic boddhistava viewed by certain sects of Buddhism as the "future Buddha" who shall bring the *dharma* or Buddhist teachings back into a troubled world that has forgotten or distorted them.

structures of the dominant, heteronormative, military-industrial, white-male corporate culture.

Research Questions

The case studies I examine herein exemplify the three aforementioned Artaudian concepts of theater as "plague," as "double," and as "cruelty" in their purpose and performance practice. Questions that guided my analysis include: How are Artaud's concepts on performance useful for understanding feminist performance practices? What characteristics comprise a feminist "Theater of Cruelty"? How have female artists, in particular, created proximities to Artaud's performance manifestos? According to my analyses, performances that combine Artaudian concepts with a feminist framework can be generative, transformative and empowering performances practices.

Theoretical Framework of the Dissertation

I explicate the corporeality (head, heart, body, and spirit/ "spiritual therapeutics") of expression as a feminist endeavor using an Artaudian theoretical framework including theatre as "plague", theatre as "double", and theatre as "cruelty." I subscribe to Artaud's theatrical idealism and emotional force in the quality and characteristics of specific performances and techniques. Although I have found numerous examples of Artaudian ideas in various performances, for this dissertation I analyze three case studies. In the final chapter of this dissertation I discuss additional possibilities for future research and scholarship.

Undergirding Artaudian concepts of theater, I integrate Hélène Cixous' (b. June 5, 1937) concept of *l'écriture féminine*, or "woman's writing." In her manifesto, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976), Cixous initiated a political and personal theoretical screed regarding *l'écriture féminine*. I use the ideological frame of "woman's writing" as a

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theoretical bridge to link feminist theory (specifically French feminism), language, and writing as a political-performative act with Artaud.

Cixous writes in a performative manner, similar to Artaud's performative presentation of his conceptual treatment of cruel theater, as if the stage is a page on which she performs, as "text." Cixous has worked professionally as an artistic collaborator with theater director Ariane Mnouchkine and as a university professor.[27] Her "Laugh of the Medusa" is also—like Artaud's "Manifestos on the Theater of Cruelty"—an example of performative writing that I use to analyze the emotional effect of specific performances from the reflexive perspective of a passionate, politically radical, and transgressive feminist.[28] Indeed, such women performance artists—including Cixous as performative writer—embody the kernels, sprouts and fully mature flora of Artaud's imagined fecundity of theater and performance.

A "shamanistic" performative text serves as complementary support to the theoretical-analytical structure used for this dissertation. In his online manifesto, "In Defense of Performance Art," interdisciplinary Mexican-American performance artist, Guillermo Gómez-Peña writes:

In indigenous American cultures, it was the shaman, the coyote, the nanabush

who had permission to cross the dangerous borders of dreams, gender, madness,

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[27] Cixous is currently appointed as the A.D. White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University through the year 2014. She is known more in the U.S. for her feminist discourses, but in France, she is known mostly for her playwriting and novels. See Cixous and Sellers for more details on how Cixous regards her culturally specific chasm of notoriety.

[28] I identify (as of this writing) as a white, radical feminist, pansexual from a low/middle-class, single-mother- household. I have extensive background as a theater practitioner (over twenty years as producer, writer, director, stage manager, actor, and performance artist.) I am Associate Artistic Director of Austin-based theater company, VORTEX Repertory (since 2002), and work as an arts administrator (Business Manager) for Austin Creative Alliance (since 2003). I am also a mother and domestic partner, and skeptically but earnestly committed to spiritual practices that include occult mysticism, Buddhism, and nature-oriented, matriarchal devotional practices.

and witchcraft. In Western culture this liminal space is occupied by the

performance artist, the contemporary anti-hero and accepted provocateur. We

know this place exists and we simply occupy it.

I use this excerpt with curious excitement as a base for the question: how is the

performance artist in likeness to a contemporary shaman, i.e., his/her actions, training and

offerings? I use the term "shamanistic" broadly to describe the "spiritual therapeutics"

that the specific performances I study imbue. That is, the case studies analyzed for the

purposes of this dissertation carry particular ritualistic requirements, trance induction,

acknowledgment of metaphysical forces, visioning, and transformational ecstasy. Such

"shamanistic" traits, in their intention, effort, and effect enact "forces of ancient magic"

(Artaud *T and D* 86) just as Artaud might have demanded. In chapter two, I define further

the distinction I make between "shamanism" and "shamanistic."[29]

In sum, throughout my case analyses, I interlace three theoretical streams with

Artaud's ideas as my primary source and scope of inspiration, including: (1) Artaud's

Theater of Cruelty concepts, (2) Artaud's texts understood as performative and thus

applicable in a generative fashion for understanding how performativity in writing (e.g.,

Hélène Cixous' concept of *l'écriture féminine*) extends to live performance practices, and

(3) Artaud's Theater of Cruelty as reflecting strong similarities to shamanistic practices.[30]

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[29] A grammatical distinction is that shamanism is a noun and "shamanistic" is a descriptive adjective with specific associations attached to the meaning.

[30] Artaud's similarities to a "modern day shaman" are a widely offered suggestion by other Artaud researchers as well, such as Sontag, Bermel, Stoller, Gooddall, and Plunka.

CONTRADICTIONS: IMPOSSIBILITIES AND GENERATIVE FAILURES OF ARTAUD'S THEATER OF CRUELTY

In the following pages I briefly discuss Artaudian theories, themes, biographical and background information essential to understanding the development of my interpretative and theoretical approach to the three case studies. Furthermore, I offer historical references about Artaud and his influence on specific artists and performance makers. I elucidate my engagement with the subject and purpose of my dissertation by demonstrating Artaud's influence on performance studies and theory. I also claim that there is a gap in research on women artists and theorists who have also been influenced, inspired, and challenged by Artaud's concepts and theoretical writing.

Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, though seductively grandiose, bold, hinging on the sacred, revering secret metaphysical transpirations "which must not be divulged," (Artaud *T and D* 87) is almost impossible to achieve, a conclusion theater and performance historians, theorists, and practitioners are quick to point out.[31] Interpretations of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty abound*,* and many have written biographies (e.g., Stephen Barber, Bettina Knapp, Naomi Greene, Martin Esslin), critical essays (e.g., Julia Kristeva, Susan Sontag, Deleuze and Guattari), and philosophical deconstructions of Artaud's works and ideas (e.g., Jacques Derrida, Allen Weiss, Herbert Blau).[32] Numerous artists, in addition to the women I discuss here, have adopted, interpreted, or explored Artaud's concepts of theater as "plague," as "double," or as

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[31] Indeed, it has become a sort of game with critics of Artaud to try and discover the various failures of Theater of Cruelty. The basic question is, if it can be done, why didn't Artaud achieve it? Although he tried at his Alfred Jarry Theater, he never quite succeeded, thus leaving his ideological legacy in limbo for others to speculate how to produce it.

[32] Some primary examples I have used for this project include Derrida's essays in *Writing and Difference* (1978), Ronald Hayman's trajectory of Artaud's influence on theater in *Artaud and After* (1977) and Albert Bermel's *Artaud's Theater of Cruelty* (1977).

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"cruel." To be sure, there are a host of historical precursors that indicate the relevance and influence of Artaud on North American experimental theater since the 1960's. It was during this time, shortly after *The Theater and Its Double* was translated into English (in 1958) that 20th century U.S. avant-garde flourished. Artaud's influences abound in many of these performances.[33] For example, Judith Malina of The Living Theater once said that "the ghost of Artaud became our mentor" (qtd. in Jannarone) in their performance-making. Performance artist Marina Abramovic attested that she was no actor, but rather a performer: "For me, performance is something that is not rehearsed, and is not staged by a director. In performance, there are no scripted cues or stage settings; it is pure and raw" (Abramovic, Thompson and Weslien 29). Indeed, between the "ghost of Artaud," and his esoteric legacy of creating "pure and raw" performances, there is ample evidence in the performance world for me to suggest that Artaud's wish for "daughters of the heart to be born" has come true.

Polish theater director, Jerzy Growotoski, is called "Artaud's natural son" (Hayman 150) because of his attempts to shape a purely physical theatrical practice. He has strived to achieve Artaud's "emotional athleticism" through various rigorous exercises meant to dismantle habitual and unconscious patterns of speech and body influenced by social mores. In *Towards a Poor Theater* (1968), Growotoski writes, "The paradox of Artaud lies in the fact that it is impossible to carry out his proposals. Does this mean that he was wrong? Certainly not" (118). Indeed, this impossibility harbors generative failures that offer glimpses and flashes of a majestic type of cruel theater that Artaud discusses, oftentimes cryptically, in *The Theater and Its Double*. To emphasize

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[33] Tracings of Artaud's influence can be located from rock 'n' roll to visual art to cinema. Jim Morrison of The Doors, David Bowie, and Mick Jagger also admired and tested Artaud's ideas in his songwriting and performances. See Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993) 90

the value of attempting impossible theatrical work, Artioli writes, "But the hunger for the impossible has a tragic grandeur, a paroxysmal fury, which makes Artaud one of the most stirring voices of the modern era," (Artioli 147). Through failures, attempts, and close proximities to Theater of Cruelty, the art of theater-making can be a continual reinvention and experiment in the impossible, which can only enrich and affirm its necessity as a cultural and personal mode of expression.

Artaud's Influence on Performance Studies

It is now widely established that Artaud has had a profound influence on the discipline of performance studies. Some well-known artists he inspired through his writings include Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, performance theorist and director Richard Schechner, and artist and director Robert Wilson.[34] Schechner's invention of "Rasaboxes," adopted from the ancient Indian performance text Natyashatra[35] and Grotowski's intense physical actor training, outlined in *Towards a Poor Theater*, are literal interpretations of Artaud's concept of the actor as an athlete of the emotions as portrayed in his provocative and frequently-quoted text, *The Theater and Its Double*:

> One must grant the actor a kind of affective musculature which corresponds to the
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> physical localizations of feelings. The actor is like the physical athlete, but with
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> this surprising difference: his affective organism is analogous to the organism of

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[34] See Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle H. Cody, *Re:Direction: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2002)

[35] Michelle Minnick writes about her experience using Rasaboxes as a tool for performance training: "Fascinated with the idea of rasa, and challenged by Antonin Artaud's demand that the actor be an 'athlete of the emotions,' my teacher, colleague, and co-artistic director of East Coast Artists, Richard Schechner, designed the Rasaboxes exercise, in which the performer's emotional/physical/vocal expressivity and agility are trained." See Richard Schechner, "Rasaesthetics," *TDR (1988-)* 45.3 (2001).

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. (*T and D* 133)

According to Artaud, the actor is the conduit that transmits information to the audience. If the actor, or performer, is prepared, rehearsed, trained, and ready, she/he will have the ability to rouse the audience's "nerves and heart" as if taken through a journey via a trance. The body is the first mode of gestural communication. Language and words are irrelevant unless the body produces its own sonorous response to its movement. Language is an artifice for the conventionally known, "Occidental" theater of "lies" that Artaud abhors. Paradoxically, Artaud wrote prolifically, as if he were on a quest to uncover some method of communication and meaning deeper than language. Artaud elaborates, "For I make it my principle that words do not mean everything and that by their nature and defining character, fixed once and for all, they arrest and paralyze thought instead of permitting it and fostering its development" (*T and D* 110). In other words, the primacy of the written text submits to muscles, movement, eyes, and senses. Therefore, Artaud urges actors to use gestures and unconventional vocalizations in experimental ways.

The gesture for Artaud is crucial to an expressive theatrical language. In her essay "The Suffering Shaman of the Modern Theater," Gene Plunka writes that Artaud had been "[u]nable to reconcile the divorce between verbal and physical language, [so he] turned to sign language to reveal inner truth. Artaud lauded the value of nonverbal language as intuitive communication, unlike words, which must be deciphered by the mind" (26). For Artaud, words spoken do not express the vault of emotional and psychological honesty that gestures can project in nonverbal precision. A frowning face, a skip, a stumble generate an immediate expression of a feeling much greater than words,

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especially when used in direct confrontation with an audience. A face frowns: we interpret sadness; a skip indicates play; a stumble iterates clumsiness or imbalance. Of course, context and subtleties paint the image, creating more dynamism, if intended dramatically, with a specific gesture.

Rejection of singular emulation of the scripted text and emphasis on experimenting with the body and its vault of expressions has motivated many American theater companies since the 1960's to emulate Artaud's ideals.[36]

CRITIQUES ON ARTAUD, CIXOUS AND "SHAMANISTIC" RACIAL IMPLICATIONS

Paradoxically, to unpack Artaud's ideas as fodder for feminist performance practice, as I do in this dissertation, I argue that Artaud can serve as a symbolic patriarch (*pater*) of theater, much in the same way Bertolt Brecht is semiotically positioned as a male theatrical innovator whose theories can be employed as strategic tools for dismantling and subverting the very structures from which they originated, otherwise recognized as the privileged white man. Despite the inherent contradictions of me "using the master's tools" per Audre Lorde's proclamation, I perversely and hesitantly relate with Artaud's pronominal "we" from this quote—"*we* feel an urgent need for a theater in which events do not exceed, whose resonance is deep within *us*, dominating the instability of the times" (Artaud *T and D* 84)—for a different, but relevant community: a "we/us" of women, of women writing a language unique unto themselves/herselves. This

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[36] Director Peter Brook's *King Lear* (1962) and *Marat/Sade* (1964) were efforts to create Artaud-inspired productions. His book, *The Empty Space* (1968), reflects Artaud's influence, including descriptions of various types of theater practices such as the "holy theater," which bears a resemblance to Artaud's spiritual implications in theater practices. Brook explains, "Artaud maintained that only in the theater could we liberate ourselves from the recognizable forms in which we live our daily lives. This makes the theater a holy place in which a greater reality could be found" Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, 1st American ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1968) 54 . Albert Bermel claims that Eugène Ionesco's surrealism and Jean Genet's absurdities were also attempts to embody on stage Artaud's Theater of Cruelty Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty* 25 .

attempt to create a community through the use of performance is an important element to the overall affect of the Theater of Cruelty and, in particular, how women-identified persons in community can promote change that breaks the bondage of patriarchal constraints and injustices. I attempt to unravel how by combining Cixous with Artaud, their texts can work in collaboration for the same cause: disrupting, in particular, patriarchal artistic and societal insidious and repressive norms.

For this dissertation, I believe patriarchy is one of the primary struggles that performance artists, including myself, confront. Both "men" and "women" contribute to patriarchal structures and systems. Here, "patriarchy" is consistent with Allan Johnson's definition from *The Gender Knot*:

> Patriarchy is not simply another way of saying "men." Patriarchy is a kind of society, and a society is more than a collection of people. As such, "patriarchy" doesn't refer to me or any other man or collection of men, but to a kind of society in which men and women participate. By itself this poses enough problems without the added burden of equating an entire society with a group of people.
>
> What is patriarchy? A society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being *male dominated*, *male identified*, and *male centered*. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women. (5)

I challenge patriarchal ideologies and social systems from the perspective of radical feminism, especially French feminist theory but with less emphasis on

psychoanalysis and Oedipal complexes typical of radical feminist theories.[37] Sue-Ellen Case argues that radical feminism—the strongest claim of ideology I present here— is based on the belief that the patriarchy is the primary cause of the oppression of women. Furthermore, in this context she defines patriarchy as "the system which elevates men to positions of power through the notion of the *pater* or father, placing men in economic and social executive position within the family unit, the market place and the state" (*Feminism and Theatre* 64).

I acknowledge that multiple varieties of feminist theory have been deployed as antidotes to patriarchal systems of oppression. These varieties are based, among others, on one's country of origin, racial identification, sexual identification, societal and economic positionality. Second-wave feminism branched into multiplicities for agentic and ideological purposes. For example, as Jill Dolan states, materialist feminists emphasize that "representation as a producer of meaning also takes into account the reception and interpretation of cultural signs by spectators differentiated by gender, race, class, and sexual preference" (TDR 58). Whereas, French feminist theory first introduced in the late 1970's to American feminists posits that the female body and female sexuality can "write" themselves into patriarchal structures as subversive modes of rebellion, thus creating different, if not "essentialist" (termed by American feminists) and biological ideological strategic modes of representation, textuality and subjectivity.

Returning to the notion of essentialism, Cixous defines "woman" in the context of "her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history" (Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" 876). For Cixous, women or "womanist" identities should write their

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[37] I am not surveying the works from prominent second wave French feminists, such as Julia Kristeva or Luce Irigaray, although their theories have influenced my research.

struggles as well as their dreams as a new language of meanings and signs, bringing their senses of experience, stories, and histories to the forefront of social and political dialogue. However, I acknowledge terms such as "woman," "female," "womanist," and "feminine" are loaded with myriad interpretations and meanings. Judith Butler's observations on the performative aspects of gender shed light on gender construction beyond biological sex, or the "female." She states that gender is essentially drag performed in culture, a malleable identity, fixed only through repetitive acts of performing attributes ascribed to a gender. Gender roles are fluid and acted out in multiplicities depending upon social circumstance and a culturally-inculcated sense of self-representation and performative or "injurious" language.[38]

I suggest that this language that extends to written forms can also include programming language for computer-mediated communications (CMC), and the expression thereof through the medium of performance as described in Chapter Three. In Cixous' terms, "she" (*La*) is an imagined iconographic manifestation of an idealistic radical feminism in which "she" is capable of transforming a language and text, exhorted through writing performatively that, vis-à-vis Artaud, "corresponds to [her] present modes of feeling" (Artaud *Selected Writings* 252). To write with a feminine or woman's language, can also be an expression using the body, or as writing the body in performance practices. Jill Dolan also makes this connection between Cixous and Artaud when she writes, "*L'écriture féminine*'s theorization of the stage space harkens to Artaud's theatre of cruelty, which overturns the authority of the text to privilege the body and gesture and the primordial essence" (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 8). In other words, Cixous and Artaud he propose that the actor can use her body as a site of gestural

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[38] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999)

signification that can transcend, if not strategically collapse, representation as it pertains to the rigidity of patriarchal expectations of performance and the limitations thereof. However, the primary critique of *l'écriture féminine* is the "formation of Woman as a transcendant, universal subject position," (Dolan 9) in which the "hegemony of the feminine becomes invidious" (9). Below, I explain further my purposes in using Cixous as my primary theoretical base from which to relate with and intertextually exchange manifesto grandiosity as it pertains to Artaud's theatre of cruelty characteristics.

Critiques and Applications of Essentialism and Feminine "Difference"

In her essay, "Extreme Fidelity," Cixous explains her meaning of the terms masculine and feminine which are based on two different "libidinal economies" whose origins, on the whole, can be traced back to "the story of *Eve and the Apple"* (132), most profoundly in Western culture. She explains, "What I call 'feminine' and what I call 'masculine' is the relationship to pleasure, the relationship to spending, because we are born into language, and I cannot do otherwise that to find myself before words; we cannot get rid of them, they are there" (132). It is worthy to note that Cixous' most utilized language for her writing is in French which, like other romantic languages, distinguishes nouns with feminine and masculine denotations.

As stated above, Cixous' work is often subject to scrutiny by feminists who view her ideas as essentialist or valorizing of women. However, Cixous' concept of feminine writing is not necessarily exclusive to biological sex. In fact, according to Cixous, writing is revolutionary when the socio-cultural inscriptions of dominant "masculinist" writing are transformed through alternative forms of language and expression.

Despite having a reputation that is ungainly for some feminist scholars, Cixous' essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," has recently been revitalized in journal publications

and conferences.[39] In the July 2011 issue of *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, Kathe Burkhart calls for a reclaiming of Cixous' controversial text at a time when feminism appears to be threatened in deceivingly benign ways, (e.g., postfeminist theory). Indeed, women's rights have expanded since publication of "The Laugh of the Medusa" in 1975. Nevertheless, Burkhart writes, "I would like to reframe about what it might mean to re-frame Medusa now. . ." (Burkhart 259). She describes the potent political-poetic effect of bringing the Medusa "monster" back to life:

> . . . *what it will do*: to liberate language and art practice through the body and memories it houses; to re-position difference; to freak as a woman; to celebrate the linkages between poetry and philosophy and politics, to inhabit the monster, to intervene hysterically—as a misfit, a queer, an immigrant, an invalid, a woman, an(other); to scream out the truth in our work in a world that turns on lies; to speedily escape through the cracks in the wall, to walk the binary tightrope to a place of safety. And last but not least, LOL (to laugh out loud). (259)

I support Burkhart's passionate advocacy for re-vitalizing Cixous' work, specifically Cixous' expansive ideas discussed in "The Laugh of the Medusa" as inspiration and motivation. Specifically, I use Cixous' manifesto as a literary, poetic, and political double (i.e., manifesto format of ideas, ample production of poetry and poetic prose, complex intellectual relationships with language and meaning) for Artaud's manifestos on cruel theater in my analyses of all three case studies discussed in this

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[39] New York University held a conference titled "The Medusa Project: Celebrating 'The Laugh of the Medusa'" in September 2010. The conference was jointly sponsored by NYU's Department of French and Center for French Civilization and Culture, in collaboration with the university's departments of Comparative Literature and English as well as the Department of Art and Art Professions in NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

dissertation. I assert, like Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, that "feminism directly confronts the idea that one person or set of people [has] the right to impose definitions of reality on others" (Stanley and Wise 359). Additionally, I honor the power of emotional "force" as Renato Rosaldo defines the nature of his research experience further in this chapter and "the intellectual alchemy of feelings" (Artaud *T and D* 106) that Artaud argues is foundational for cruel theater. This approach is both a response and a conscious call to fulfill Cixous' request for *l'écriture féminine* practices. She writes:

> [A] feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the "truth" with laughter. ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 888)

For Cixous, a writing woman subverts, as delineated above, the "old property crust" of other writers who speak about/for her experience, pleasure, pain, and circumstance. Because she does not blindly adhere to the standards imposed by male discourses, especially psychological treatises on "penis envy" or "phallic lack," she—

Cixous' radical woman—can disrupt institutional assumptions about woman's state of wellness or wholeness. Cixous maintains that women are fragmentary in their psychology, not because they are lacking, but because "she is a whole. . . composed of parts that are wholes . . . a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 889). The body is complete through a dance of complex pieces moving in endless directions and desires. This movement is a fluid passing that dares to challenge

the frozen statues of tradition and form. To put it succinctly, Cixous creates a feminist discourse situated in the (controversially) polarizing concept of female "difference."

Many French feminists—especially Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous—have reactivated the concept of difference, which they proudly assert as a central part of their dialectic . . . their works promote the expression of the repressed feminine unconscious and female body. . . .Their celebration of woman as multiple sensuous body, triumphant giving mother, and infinite source of forms, images and sounds, and their assertion of a *feminine language* which, like female desire, can be fluid, moving, multiple, discontinuous and open, represent a conscious effort to produce a new imaginary order with matriarchal overtones. (Savona 541)

This "feminine language" that speaks "female," is flowing and shifting, which is perhaps an argument for moving beyond the necessity of revisiting and revitalizing canonical texts. Cixous refers to a stagnation (Artaud *Selected Writings* 259), a staleness of presentation (that Artaud was against as well) in the redundant performing of classic plays for the stage. Stagnation is revitalized through what Cixous calls a "women's imaginary," which consists of the overflowing and inexhaustible reinventions and creations yet to be explored in textual, experiential and experimental performative forms. A corollary to this concept of reinvention is evident in Artaud:

The masterpieces of the past are good for the past: they are not good for us. *We* [italics mine] have a right to say what has been said and even what has not been said in a way which pertains to *us*, which is immediate and direct, which

corresponds to present modes of feeling, and which everyone will understand.

(Artaud *T and D* 252)

Artaud's pluralistic reference of "we" and "us" sets up a community of common assumptions. Artaud implicitly points to people of artistic and social power who produce performances of canonized dramatic masterpieces and philosophies of "quality" circulating within Western (or as Artaud prefers, Occidental) literature and arts to affirm particular ideologies, including theatrical conventions that leave the audience as passive and anonymous spectators in the cozy dimness of the theater.

Ultimately, Artaud called for a disruption in qualitative standards or what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu may have referred to as "taste," [40] which is oftentimes categorically distinct, depending on one's social stature. Artaud writes, "[art] and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences" (Artaud *T and D* 7). Therefore, I question how and what social differences emerge when women, from Cixous' more strategic, essentialist and feminist "difference" perspective, inclined to reject cultural, gendered and patriarchal standards of "taste" that may inherently reject their experience, *perform as text* to be interpolated by an audience. This question is answered in her declaratory charge of experimentation, boldness, and uninhibited writing fueled by the emotional force of life experience she solicits in "Laugh of the Medusa." In this way, suffering and pleasure, pain and joy, for example, are seen as foundational emotional elements in expressing and deducing conclusions instead of objective or distanced analyses. Similarly, for Artaud, the only dependable source of information was his instinct, which he explained in a letter to Louis Jouvet in 1932, "I might be forced to admit that

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[40] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984)

experience can help me verify an hypothesis, but it will never make me give up something I have *felt* to be true. I believe only in my intuition" (qtd. in Plunka 23).

Critiques on Artaud's Racial and Gender Privilege

As noted earlier, use of Artaud's concepts as grounding for my research is seemingly contradictory, because as a performance artist and theorist, I focus primarily on women's work and question the dominance of male artists in both the wider scope of exhibition opportunities and critical engagement compared to women artists. I acknowledge Artaud's gender and racial privilege as a white man, from a working class Greek-French heritage. He was socially connected to the art scene of early 20th – mid 20th century Paris. His career began when he produced a series of passionate and agonizingly emotional letters to Jacques Rivière, editor of the popular *La Nouvelle Revue Française* magazine. Although my research does not specifically focus on Artaud's racial advantage, it is not ignored.

Consider, too, another problematic dimension of Artaud: his Theater of Cruelty manifestos were directly inspired by his encounter with a Balinese dance troupe on tour at the Paris Exhibition in July of 1931. There he witnessed the dancers choreographing "foreign" gestures and "speaking" with them in a way unfamiliar to him. He had no frame of reference for the meanings of these "mechanically rolling eyes, pouting lips, and muscular spasms" (Artaud *T and D* 55); nevertheless, he did appropriate them as expressive physical tools for the theater. Herein lies the complication in which, as Herbert Blau suggests, "techniques are also cultural productions," (79). In short, Artaud generously appropriated the Balinese "techniques" for his own visionary purposes.

However respectful and benign Artaud's intentions were—for he was emotionally moved by the Balinese performance—it is suggested that the opus of experimental theater

practices specifically influenced by Artaud's Theater of Cruelty may be various reassertions of colonial exploits filtered through the sieve of modern and postmodern art and culture. Moreover, Artaud's blatant colonialist approach to achieving "primitive" wisdom was also as evident in such poetic phrasing as "I came to Mexico to make contact with the Red Earth" (*Selected Writings* 537). Often, Artaud is scrutinized for exoticizing his encounters with other cultural traditions foreign to him, including the Mexican indigenous Tarahumara tribe whose sacred peyote rituals, which he imbibed, that had been handed down for generations within the tribe's lineage. He asserted his presence and enthusiasm upon the tribe in a desperate attempt to kick his opiate habit. I have discovered through my analyses of these cases studies that reappropriations oftentimes reinsert dominant tropes masked underneath the guise of "extreme" performance practices, which the Theater of Cruelty imbues. To be sure, the notion of performing "in the extreme," has some discordant aspects with regard to race.

Richard Dyer focuses his keen analysis on white representation in media, films and performance in *White.* In his conclusion to various white-centric performance practices, Dyer summarized the dangerous invisibility of whiteness by depicting whiteness in "extremes" in both film and live performance. By making the image of whiteness extreme, the imperialism implicit in ordinary whiteness became strategically washed out. He explains:

> Most white people, and even most representations of white people, are not
> virginal women glowing in the light, hyper-muscular men sorting out other
> people's problems or privileged marginals transfixed by the dilemma of doing.
> The sketch of white characteristics that has surfaced throughout this book, of
> whites being taut, tight, rigid, upright, straight (not curved), on the beat (not

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syncopated), controlled and controlling, even this sketch would not describe most

images of white people. Yet the extreme, very white image is functional in

relation to the ordinary, is even perhaps a condition of establishing whiteness as

ordinary. (Dyer 222)

Dyer explains that whiteness represented in films and media tends to have similar

characteristics of extreme linearity, hyper-masculinity, and hyper-femininity that are

pristine and angelic. I wonder whether, by conducting this dissertation study, an

unintended consequence may serve to reinscribe Dyer's extension of "whiteness in the

extreme" and thus engendered a myopic perspective on race and privilege. Even though

in *MetamorphoSex*, the women participants are behaving "in extreme," such as through

gratuitous display of genitalia and pleasure for a live audience, a dismantling of

normalized behavior is happening. This dissolution of the extreme does not invite, make

obvious room, nor acknowledge sexuality and desire through a racial lens.

Dyer clarifies that "Extreme whiteness coexists with ordinary whiteness: it is

exceptional, excessive, marked. It is what whiteness aspires to and also . . . fears. It exists

alongside non-extreme, unspectacular, plain whiteness" (222). In other words, in white

culture, behaving or performing in the extreme, however marginalized by whites

themselves, remains acceptable within the constructs of whiteness. Dyer explains that for

non-whites to behave in the extreme has much greater risks and consequences. Within a

white-dominant culture, race is marked through "degrees" of whiteness. Therefore, non-

white bodies are often under more cultural scrutiny and surveillance. When "othered non-

whites" actively call attention to themselves through extreme action, it can be viewed as a

more imminent threat than if whites were performing the same actions. Thus, even

ordinary and non-extreme actions for non-whites, according to Dyer, are not accepted as

ordinary and mundane because of the "always already" marked bodies performing the actions. Dyer explains, "Non-whiteness, on the other hand, is already peculiar, marked, exceptional: it is always, in relation to notions of the human in Western culture, particular and has no ordinariness" (223).

Following Dyer's analysis of white culture in the extreme, I can safely assume that the majority of Sprinkle's, Montano's, and Carrellas's artistic work in *MetamorphoSex* appeals to and may be targeted for white, middle-class, and often well-educated U.S. audiences. This is especially true for Sprinkle's work since her departure from the pornography industry to the "legitimate" art world. As for Rachel Rosenthal, in both workshops I attended for my research, the majority of students were visibly white. Indeed, the initial introduction and motto of the resident theatre troupe was that they themselves were "extreme artists."

The X-Files was primarily a white-focused, white-centric television series with a female in a role typically occupied by men in popular culture dramas: the skeptic. Fox Mulder encapsulated feminine stereotypes such as the tropes of "trusting his intuition," favoring hunches and feelings over hard evidence and facts. Here, both Mulder and Dana Scully portray an "extreme whiteness" that proscribes a decidedly imperialist stance that evokes the exploration of foreign and exotic territories: "the unexplained" and the realm of "unsolved mysteries." Dyer argues that whites working with or fighting against robots, androids and cyborgs are dominant tropes in films and media. "The android as a definition of whiteness [and is] the highest point of human aspiration" (213). This posits that, the lifelessness (no/thing/ness) of androids, robots, cyborgs, for example, "suggest that to be white is to be nothing" (213). "Nothing," in this case, is the (white) absence of punitive consequences for the homicides committed by the creator of the avatar Maitreya who was Phoebe—a white and pityingly sympathetic "poor me" female character.

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Although Maitreya may be physically made of "nothing," her damage is assuredly real and able to replicate itself. She is a virtual cyborg who is also able to replicate her "lifeless" and sexualized whiteness in the extreme. Her extremity in the end of the episode becomes mere amusement rather than an imminent threat which was eradicated by simply tapping a keyboard and releasing a "kill-switch" code. This code was a performative action that initiated a return to (white) normalcy.

Dyer discusses further the complications of whiteness overriding normalcy as another example of privilege. "Whites are the one particular group that can take up the non-particular position of ordinariness, the position that claims to speak for and embody the commonality of humanity" (223). With regard to this dissertation project, I suggest that, for example, although the producers of *MetamorphoSex* claim that their work was powerful, healing and transformative, the show failed to directly address race, class, and national identity. The audience and the participants were involved in white theatre, made by, produced by, attended by and attracted to white artists. Although the show alluded to spiritual empowerment through the act of witnessing, or even by the women participants themselves, there seemed to be an implicit assumption that tends to reproduce white privilege through access, knowledge and cultural appropriation via specifically other-than-white spiritual practices such as the application of tantric philosophies.

METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

This dissertation focuses on my analysis of three different case studies of performance practice. This analysis is conducted by using a three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool that includes (1) the Artaudian (theater as "plague," theater as "double," and theater as "cruel"), (2) feminist (*l'écriture féminine*), and (3) "shamanistic"

(transformative) characteristics. Below is a diagram that visually articulates the basic component form of this tool.

L'ÉCRITURE FÉMININE
(e.g., "woman's writing,"
performative poetics; strategic
essentialism; standpoint
epistemologies; difference)

SHAMANISTIC
(e.g., transformative;
curative; "spiritual
therapeutics")

Case study
of
"Artaud's
daughter"

ARTAUDIAN

(Theater as Plague, Double, Cruelty)
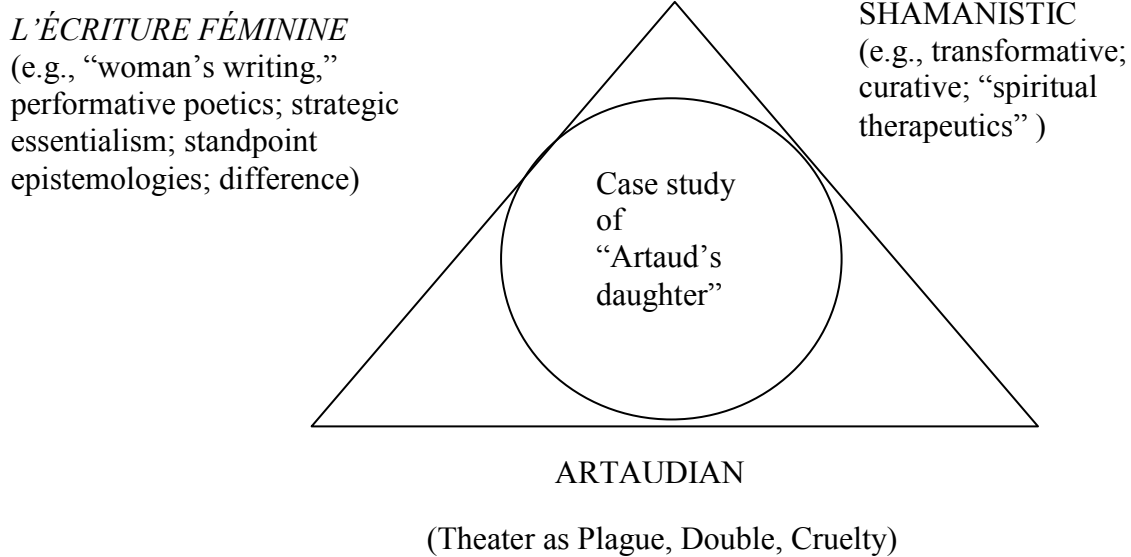
Figure 2:   Diagram of the three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool used for this dissertation.

In addition, in order to examine women artists' performances—or practices of performances—as various incarnations of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, I use three techniques to enhance my interpretations of the three case studies included in this dissertation. These include performance analysis, experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity (specifically "standpoint epistemology") and performative poetics. Performance analysis, an interpretive technique, I use to develop my theoretical conclusions. Performance analysis is a structured and detailed process designed to describe a performance's general details, nuances and meanings. On the whole, this interpretive technique is objective and factual. Experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity are techniques whereby I incorporate research questions into an

introspective, inquisitive and intellectual engagement with the subject material, e.g., the case studies. Performative poetics is the "making" (Greek for "poetry") of a written text that enacts and displays a state of being that conveys feelings, thoughts and critical inquiry in each case study.

In general, my method also includes the use of intertextual readings of interdisciplinary texts by theorists and critics, in such disciplines as ethnographic studies, feminist performance theories, ritual performance theories, and new media studies. This chapter outlines the method and techniques I use to accomplish my analysis and for what purpose. I also offer an overview of my analyses of the three case studies included in this dissertation.

For example, as a model of an intertextual study with performance analysis, Jill Dolan describes specific performances as catalytic site for personal-political empowerment. In *Utopia in Performance,* she describes examples of utopia in performance as temporary community identifications and affectations resulting from specific performances. I suggest utopia in performance can be viewed as an element of cruel theater. Dolan states:

> Perhaps that feeling of hope, or that feeling of desire, embodied by that suddenly hollow space in the pit of my stomach that drops me into an erotics of connection and commonality—perhaps such intensity of *feeling* is politics enough for utopian performatives. (*Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* 20)

In other words, I argue that the "utopian performative" that Dolan describes is also a *cruel* experience from the perspective of Artaud's vision because of its ability to ignite, as Dolan describes, that "hollow space in the pit" of the stomach; indeed, similar

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to Artaud's ideas, a performance devoid of effect, upon both spectators and performers is useless and repetitive; and because performances that truly reach an audience should linger longer than a brief post-show afterglow. Indeed, if theater is considered as "ritual" (e.g., Schechner, Turner, Barba), then what occurs in the theater should and must transform spectators, leaving them at least somewhat changed by the experience that took place.

As noted above, my three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool is based on Artaudian, feminist and "shamanistic" perspectives and constitutes the primary method I use to analyze my three case studies. It is discussed in detail in the following pages.

CRITERIA FOR THEATER OF CRUELTY: DEVELOPMENT OF A THREE-PRONGED THEORETICAL-ANALYTIC TOOL

Although theorists such as Jacques Derrida have outlined what an Artaudian theater is *not*, such as "all non-sacred theater . . .; all theater that privileges speech . . . all theater of alienation" (39), I specifically identify key points and concepts embedded in *The Theater and Its Double*. I also interpret and define Artaud's ideas on theater and performance practices as "plague," as "double," and as "cruel." In short, the criteria described below have resulted from my interpretation and analysis of relevant Artaudian theoretical ideas, his core concepts available in the extant literature. I also weave in other astute interpretations from relevant selections of Artaud's scholarship. Finally, I incorporate the techniques of performance analyses, experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics to illuminate these concepts within the case studies.

I present case studies of specific women artists whose work is emblematic of Artaudian characteristics such as: (1) Non-reliance on the text, "to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (Artaud *T and D* 90), (2)

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sounds and movements prioritized over spoken words—if words are spoken, they are incantations or make word's meaning into mythic purpose, (3) use of symbolism and signs to inscribe meaning, (4) "Direct communication . . . between the spectator and the spectacle" (*T and D* 96), (5) "attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works" (*T and D* 98), (6) embodiment of theater in the flesh: "In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds" (*T and D* 99), and (7) use of trance induction techniques to lure an audience into its own psychological or psychic state for the purposes of personal, direct, transformational, curative change.

Theater as "Plague"

In Artaud's first essay in *The Theater and Its Double*, titled "The Theater and the Plague," he unravels a gory summary of a plague's devastating aftermath in Southern France. He recounts a story: the viceroy of Sardinia had a dream in May of 1720, twenty days before a sea vessel from "the Orient" docked in Marseilles (Artaud's city of birth). In this dream, the viceroy "saw himself infected by the plague he dreamed was ravaging the whole of his tiny state" (Artaud *T and D* 15). When the ship approached the city, the viceroy refused permission for it to dock, by threat of cannon fire. The people of the city thought he had gone mad, that his decision was idiotic and without reason; but once the ship docked, despite his orders, the cargo unloaded was wholly contaminated and consumed the city further.41

The plague was already rapidly spreading in the city, but Artaud connects this particular boat's passage to a "reactivation of the virus" (Artaud *T and D* 17) that subsequently scoured the township's population swiftly. Artaud suggests to the reader, "I

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41 Placed in historical context, Artaud wrote his essay after a devastating war (WWI), leaving men with bruised, broken, amputated bodies for a cause that seemed futile in Artaud's eyes.

believe we can agree upon the idea of a malady that would be a kind of psychic entity and would not be carried by a virus." This "psychic entity" is perhaps a reference to a cultural malaise, a sickness that is more like mob mentality, or an ignorance of oppressive circumstances within a society's systemic dogma.

Sometimes, like the viceroy in Artaud's tale, a dream, perhaps a hunch, or intuition, is enough on an individual basis to heighten our awareness and create a fierce compassionate action, to make a decision, to perform that action, whether felicitous[42] or not, on behalf of that dream, vision, hunch, or intuition. It is to "perform, or else."[43] The choice for the viceroy was on the side of humanity, to save human lives despite possible ridicule, though the people themselves disregarded his performative action.

Artaud then analyzes the "the absolute action of a spectacle" (Artaud *T and D* 23) that the plague unleashes upon a city. All "forms collapse," he writes; "Entire streets are blocked by the piles of dead" (*T and D* 23). To engage with his texts in contemporary contexts, consider the piles of corpses that lined the streets in Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake in order to gather media attention. Unlike a disease that afflicts us internally, it was the Earth's natural cruelty that ignited the funeral pyres. "The stench rises in the air like a flame," writes Artaud. Consider Hurricane Katrina and the rotting corpses that float on waterways that have taken over roads. "There is no maintenance of roads and sewers, no army, no police, no municipal administration" *(Artaud T and D 23).* Consider genocides in Rwanda, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Bosnia, where law and justice and human rights are overthrown by brute force, where women are raped to shame them and children stolen then given drugs and guns to fire upon family and friends under

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[42] See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975)

[43] See McKenzie on the differences between efficacious and entertainment performance styles and forms, such as the performative differences between a healing ceremony and a Hollywood film. Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001)

the command of sociopaths, who have forgotten the difference between sanity and sickness.

Artaud continues, "The dregs of the population, apparently immunized by their frenzied greed, enter the open houses and pillage riches they know will serve no purpose or profit" (*T and D* 23). In our colloquialism today, imbued with racist and classist stereotyping, Artaud's description is similar to looting. Those placed in desperate situations will grasp anything that could possibly release them from the struggle, whether or not the objects taken are futile non-necessities or clean drinking water. The point is that the plague will destroy; there is no hope of survival, no matter what objects or possessions one might lawfully or illegally acquire. Notwithstanding, Artaud shifts back to performance: "And at that moment the theater is born. The theater, i.e., an immediate gratuitousness provoking acts without use or profit" (Artaud *T and D* 24). That is to say, the theater is a desperate act, a final outcry pleading for attention and survival. Great moments, pitted on the climactic confrontation between desperate choices: survive or die? What does one keep? What does one give up? Artaud continues:

> The lecher becomes pure. The miser throws his gold in handfuls out the window.
> The warrior hero sets fire to the city he once risked his life to save. . . . Neither the
> idea of an absence of sanctions nor that of imminent death suffices to motivate
> acts so gratuitously absurd on the part of men who did not believe death could end
> anything. (Artaud *T and D* 24)

The metaphor of theater as plague is provocative and thus applicable to this dissertation as a grand poetic gesture of symbols gone amuck. Artaud writes:

The theater, like the plague is a crisis which is resolved by death or cure. And the

plague is a superior disease because it is a total crisis after which nothing remains

except death or an extreme purification. Similarly the theater is a disease because

it is the supreme equilibrium which cannot be achieved without destruction. (*T

and D* 31)

Here, Artaud suggests that theater is destroyed each time it is produced,

specifically in its ephemerality and its jarring dissolution. In other words, he considers

the countless hours of planning, preparing, writing, rehearsing, and performing a live,

theatrical piece that eventually ends (dies) and thus, the lingering or the grief for a life

that once was, remains. There is no favoritism in the nature of the plague's destruction,

and this is theater's most bittersweet nature: dissolution from the moment of its creation.

Artaud writes:

It invites the mind to share a delirium which exalts its energies; and we can see, to

conclude, that from the human point of view, the action of theater, like that of

plague, is beneficial, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes

the masks to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our

world. (*T and D* 31)

The theater provokes people to see themselves profanely, that is, as impermanent

and mortal, not god-like and omnipotent, and to cause "the masks to fall." The theater

reminds people of death, and thereby, insists they consider the content of their lives with

reverence and humility.

Theater as "Double"

Artaud biographer Stephen Barber suggests, "For Artaud, the enduringly provocative idea of the 'double' was always both that of a force which threatened to supplant and destroy his identity and also that of a counterforce with which he could combatively reassert and transform his identity" (*Artaud: The Screaming Body* 59). The double is like a mirror that reveals more than surface awareness; it is a doubling of that which is latent in the subconscious or it is repressed through internalized fear or trauma. The theater encompasses a space and time of this doubling effect that incorporates thoughts, gestures, ideas, emotions and objects that coalesce and play together in a realm of exploratory, albeit transitory and ephemeral, safety. Artaud writes, "The true purpose of the theater is to create Myths [*sic*], to express life in its immense, universal aspect, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves" (Artaud *T and D* 122). Kimberley Jannarone states that "Artaud posited that the double of theater was life; that the theater came first, and it had the ability to create a new reality" (2). In its liminal state, between ordinary life and the "chimera" of dreams and myths, the "double" can be created and explored.

Theater as "Cruelty"

Artaud's cruel theater is replete with performance affects and effects that indicate human mythic struggles. By immersing audiences into the *mise-en-scène* with the intention to ignite spectators into an awakening consciousness or an instant quickening, Artaud's theater is transformational and profoundly enmeshed in the treatment of a generalized psychopathological social disorder. In fact, some might claim this theater as therapy; for Artaud, this is a symptomatic necessity, provoked by repressive Western civilization and its ideologies. He writes:

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. . . 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. (*T and D* 87)

Based on an "urgent need," Artaud's "cruelty" is a "demonstration of the

profound unity of the concrete and the abstract" (*T and D* 108). In a letter to "J.P." dated

November 9, 1932, Artaud writes:

[Theater of Cruelty] is not at all a matter of vicious cruelty, cruelty bursting with

perverse appetites and expressing itself in bloody gestures . . . on the contrary, a

pure and detached feeling, a veritable movement of the mind based on the

gestures of life itself . . . the theater is act and perpetual emanation, that there is

nothing congealed about it, that I turn it into a true act, hence living, hence

magical. (*T and D* 113-14)

Although his concept of "cruelty" has often been superficially dismissed as

violence or destruction through theatrical acts, Artaud views it as a method of opening

audiences up to recognizing their innate, primordial, human selves, and arousing them

from complacency. According to Artaud, examples of cruelty (such as feats endured in

ritualized rites of passage) as performance events were meant to break people (or

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audiences) out of stale, meaningless habits, to help them become aware of their ignorance and myopic illusions of security and safety. He demonstrates how such dispositions cause harm to self and others and harbor psychological or social illnesses that plague people's ability to connect truthfully with one another. He proposes a theater where people "must reassume [their] place between dreams and events" (*T and D* 93); where people consider the magical metaphysics of life, art, and culture. He writes for a resuscitation of the theater:

> The theater will never find itself again—i.e., constitute a means of true illusion— except by furnishing the spectator with the truth 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. (*T and D* 92)

In *Sensuous Scholarship* Paul Stoller explains that, "For Artaud, the Theater of Cruelty was the solution to social asphyxiation, for it constituted a space of transformation in which people could be reunited with their life forces, with the poetry that lies beyond the poetic text" (123). Indeed, Cruel Theater is an amalgamation of poetics, visceral punctuations of life's wretchedness and pleasures through performance, and mythical expansiveness. Theater of Cruelty intends to lacerate all predispositions that hinder ephemeral expressions associated with our human mortality. Artaud admits his solipsistic desire for this theatrical form but also includes the grandiosity of a generalized sense of cultural, social, and spiritual oppression. For Artaud, the theater can be construed as a source of liberation.

But "*Theater of Cruelty*" means a theater difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And, on the level of performance, it is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other's bodies . . . but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theater has been created to teach us that first of all. (*T and D* 79)

According to Jacques Derrida, Artaud defines "the sense of *cruelty* as *necessity* and *rigor*" (238), "cruelty is consciousness" (242), or an utter dismissal of life that attaches itself to conceptual discursiveness. Cruelty, writes Artaud, in the theatrical form is a direct method "to get us out of our marasmus, instead of continuing to complain about it, and about the boredom, inertia, and stupidity of everything" (Artaud *T and D* 83). In brief, Cruelty according to Artaud is "cruel" because it demands an epiphany-like response from feeding ourselves after having been spiritually malnourished due to the "boredom" of Western industrial artistic and social homogeneity. This necessary act of theatrical (spiritualized and metaphysical) replenishment and consumption jettisons spectators with a rejuvenating energetic force, puncturing their flaccid acrimony towards life's majestic beauties and atrocities.

L'ÉCRITURE FÉMININE (WOMAN'S OR FEMININE WRITING): SECOND METHOD FOR THREE-PRONGED THEORETICAL-ANALYTIC TOOL

In the following pages I discuss the second prong of my theoretical-analytic tool, including Cixous' theories, themes and background information; this is essential to understanding the development of my theoretical-analytic approach to the three case studies. In her 1975 manifesto "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous notes that "[w]omen must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing"

("The Laugh of the Medusa" 875). For Cixous, the fecund subjects for women are their lived or fantastical experiences that employ sexual difference for the purpose of opening themselves up without doubt or fear of speaking their truths. She calls for a feminine poetics as expressed through feminine or woman's writing, which she refers to as *l'écriture féminine*. Cixous argues that through an essentialist strategy of believing, "women are closer to a feminine economy than men," (Sellers xxix) and that feminine writing "will bring into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression" (Sellers xxix). Cixous' manifesto essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," is her best-known expression of this type of writing.

Also, I described in my analyses of all three case studies the common emphasis on *women as monsters* or goddesses. Among Artaud's many reasons for resigning from the Surrealist Movement in France, he was disgust for his peers' "imagery of ideal communities and adoring, subservient women" (Barber *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* 32). In fact, one of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty criteria includes use of powerful images such as those found in deity myths, legends, and folklore. To point, the Balinese dance troupe that inspired Artaud's Theater of Cruelty would have most likely been performing an excerpt from heroic tales that included gods and goddesses as either wrathful or beneficent otherworldly beings.

Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa," is titled after a Greek goddess who had once been a beautiful woman who had turned monstrous after the jealous goddess Athena cursed her. Medusa's mythology is an apt metaphor for women seeking to find empowerment in a patriarchal worldview. She is "laughing" because she realizes that she is not a monster; however, the culture views her as monster because she refuses to submit and frame her identity as a "phallologocentric" form. Similarly, in *MetamorphoSex*, the women onstage explored their sexual identities in a container that encouraged them to

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literally "play with" themselves with less constraint as typically imposed upon them by patriarchal and puritanical dominant "masculine" culture. The drama (from the Greek word meaning "action") inherent to the production is not presented in typified literary and dramatic narrative structure with a scripted climax that marks a significant release of tension. Rather, the dramatic climax in *MetamorphoSex* was in extreme corporeality that blatantly revealed the performers' actualized and embodied exaltations of climatic ecstasy. The women's sexual identities could be seen as hidden and shameful "monsters" that were nourished, and transformed into "goddess-like" persons of power, complexity and depth.

Indeed, in the Judeo-Christian heritage of the United States and Western religion, the female body and her desire have been repeatedly devalued. She is the harbinger of evil through her first disobedient performative action of desire: to bite an apple from a forbidden tree that was regulated and monitored by a patriarchal father/God. Her "extreme" insubordination is without recovery and caused irrevocable damage that has scarred the purity of man for eternity.

Cixous often muses upon this tale because it clearly signifies "woman's" difference in holy and early literature. According to Cixous' interpretation, humankind has a choice "to win or lose life" (132). She offers us an example of extreme behavior with these terms, "The stakes are extremely simple, it is a question of the apple: does one eat it or not? Will one enter into contact with the intimate inside of the fruit or not" (132)? For the DbD workshop, the monster was the monster within. It is the identification as "woman" who has inculcated a culture of misogyny within her flesh through being repeatedly convinced that "she" is less than "man." By reaching into the depths of this pain, the monster symbolizes the necessary charge for transformation. The monster could provide "woman" with a source of energetic fuel to her cause. Thus, it may behoove her

to make friends with monster instead of destroying it. There is much to learn from what the monster has to share. However, in my fantasies, I have high hopes that performance is a means whereby these myths that poise woman as "monster," whether through ironic mimicry or storytelling, can mend, if not completely dissolve these negative stains of obscenity and impurity imposed upon "woman." It remains to be seen whether women performers, behaving "monstrously" can impact a culture that seeks to subsume the message into a profitable product of sensationalism, such as Lady Gaga with her "Mother Monster" personae she portrays in the video of her song "Born this Way."

The avatar character, Maitreya, in the "First Person Shooter" *X-Files* episode is marked as both a monster capable of mass annihilation as well as an indestructible goddess. She is also a cyborg, created by a woman in *her* own image, yet in an "extreme" representation of woman. Maitreya is revered and feared because of her skills, but also is a disturbing reminder of the wildfire path of rage and fury, which are powerful emotions, shared by many who have suffered under the tight noose of injustice for centuries.

"SHAMANISTIC" PRACTICE AS PERFORMATIVE TRANSFORMATION: THIRD METHOD IN THREE-PRONGED THEORETICAL-ANALYTIC TOOL

In the following pages I discuss the third prong of my theoretical-analytic tool, "shamanistic" themes, along with Artaud's experiences in his search for transformational healing, also essential to understanding the development of my interpretative and theoretical approach to the three case studies. I start from the self as my first step, as Artaud used his own suffering as his springboard for creativity, and as Cixous urges women to look within themselves through the process of writing to reclaim their power, intellect, and creative force.

I also draw connections between the more esoteric and shamanistic potential of performance as a technique to heal and transform, not as psychological therapy but rather

as metaphysical experience, as Artaud suggests. I have worked with several of the artists I write about, becoming an ally, participant-observer, and active student of their craft and political-artistic agendas.

To discuss performance art as shamanistic forces me to face my own ideas of self and healing; this becomes more apparent throughout the unfolding of the following three chapters. My experience inspires opinions and claims. On a more esoteric level, I ask how performance as an embodied art can become an exercise in healing. How might an audience, or a participant in a workshop setting with one of these artists benefit? What is gained or lost through the process of witnessing or participating in artistic-spiritualized techniques, performances, and texts? How might performance art be useful beyond aesthetic appreciation?

Another common thread described in all three cases, as it relates to "shamanistic" affect, was the use of *improvisational* performance practices that appeared to enhance overall tension and effect upon spectators and participants. For example, in *The X-Files* "First Person Shooter" episode, video game players were in a constant negotiation between the givens of the game space, as well as their own knowledge and skills within that space. "Actors" as avatars reacted and made instant decisions based on the virtual circumstances and available choices. In *MetamorphoSex*, the women followed a loosely structured outline for the performance but maintained an open and improvised reactive state. They were free to make decisions as they saw fit, based on their own level of comfort. For the DbD Experience, the entire workshop was built on performing improvisationally, "instantly," as a means to become graceful and aware in our lives outside the safe wall of the theater space. In all these cases, improvisation means performing on the spot by trusting oneself, or at the very least, not permitting doubt to overpower courage. From Cixous' perspective, this is an accomplishment for "woman's

writing," because she is able to "write herself into the world," rather than following the social scripts imposed upon her, with its limiting barriers, walls and socio-economic-cultural scripts in both language and behavior, that are not safe, but suffocating, repressive and abusive.

"Shamanistic" Acts

Mircea Eliade, an anthropologist who focuses heavily on shamanic traditions and historical traces of the practice through the course of human evolution, describes the etymology of the word "shaman" as a originating from Siberia, from the Russian Tungusic *saman*. He describes a shaman as having many aspects of priest, magician, medicine man, musician, drummer, seer, doctor and sorcerer, but he/she is primarily someone trained in techniques of ecstasy (4). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ecstasy is defined as *the state of being 'beside oneself', thrown into a frenzy or a stupor, with anxiety, astonishment, fear, or passion.* From the Greek, the word means "outside one's self" or "beyond stasis." In other words, ecstatic states are extraordinary events that are characterized through fleeting moments of intense presence and awareness, beyond ordinary perception. Further, Eliade addresses blanket universalism of applying the word "shaman" to all indigenous and religious traditions that have a community "healer" of sorts: "As for the shamanic techniques of ecstasy, they do not exhaust all the varieties of ecstatic experience documented in the history of religions and religious ethnology. Hence any ecstatic cannot be considered a shaman" (5).

One can be in ecstasy in the heat of anger, through paroxysm release, or sudden shock from a trauma and this does not preclude any shamanic associations. However, what I am describing is shaman-like or meaning that "shamanistic" has "some" similar qualities. Put differently, to describe a "shamanistic" quality as associated with

performance art, I return to Artaud's insight on Balinese dance that triggered his
fascination with performance as an ecstatic expression:

> Everything in this theater is immersed in a profound intoxication which restores to
> us the very elements of ecstasy, and in ecstasy we discover the dry seething, the
> mineral friction of plants, vestiges and ruins of trees illuminated on their faces.
> (Artaud *T and D* 66)

Gestures, movements, dance, sound, expression, vocalizations, and projections
that, for Artaud, expressed magical intent, acted as forces that could disengage spectators
from their passive stupor and into a realm of dreams, symbols, and myth. He passionately
exclaims: "Who after the formidable battle between Arjuna [the Balinese mythic hero]
and the Dragon, will dare to say that the whole of theater is not on the stage, i.e. beyond
situations and words" (Artaud *T and D* 67). The performer's duty, in an Artaudian
landscape of "cruelty," is to become the "double" dream of our ourselves, performed to
stir up our most archetypical and heroic struggles and illnesses, to reclaim our right
towards living humanely, not blinded by the onslaught of war, propaganda, and
commercial culture that cheapens the human experience as a commodified story to sell
for a theatrical house. Artaud writes on the theater and the plague as an observation about
our most underrated organs in such a crisis:

> [O]nly two organs really affected and injured by the plague, the brain and the
> lungs, are both directly dependent upon the consciousness and the will. We can
> keep ourselves from breathing or thinking, can speed up our respiration, give it
> any rhythm we choose, make it conscious or unconscious at will. . . . We can
> similarly accelerate, retard, and give an arbitrary rhythm to our thinking—can

regulate the unconscious play of the mind. We cannot control the filtering of body

fluids by the liver or the redistribution of blood by the heart. . . .Thus the plague

seems to manifest its presence in and have a preference for the very organs of the

body, the particular physical sites, where human will, consciousness, and thought

are imminent and apt to occur. (*T and D* 21)

Here, he speaks about the kinds of contemplative practices that combine

conscious breathing and the application of will: in other words, magic or sorcery, or even

shamanism, which depends on its practitioners being aware of the intricacies of breathing

techniques and altered states of ecstatic consciousness in order to reach a desired (willed)

purpose. Whether for healing or harming, a shaman understands the link between

breathing and will as an internalized, alchemical process to create change.

Performance art, I suggest, bears similarities to shamanistic procedures, as

Antonin Artaud had so desperately wanted of his Theater of Cruelty, but certainly not

without problematic assumptions around cultural appropriation and "Orientalist"

tendencies. Rather than considering certain performance artists *as* shamans, I am

applying certain techniques and experiences that are similar in both shamanistic practices

and performance art practices. For example, a common quality of many performance

artists, like shamans, is the endurance of personal, at times death-defying tragedies and

sublime ecstasies, recovering from them alive, intact (mostly), and with a supernatural

type of wisdom that mundane knowledge cannot sufficiently supply (e.g., Marina

Abramovic, Chris Burden, Ron Athey).

The Performance Artist as Shamanistic Healer

Artaud felt tortured by Western civilization and its dogmatism, its rational logic,

and its inhumane, materialist, capitalist industrialism. He met with astrologers, occult

black magicians, self-proclaimed sorcerers and other fringe religious movement leaders, including Aleister Crowley, the infamous high ceremonial magical priest of the Ordo Templis Orentis. Evelyne Grossman writes in a preface to a collection of Artaud's drawings, or imagistic incantations, "50 Drawings to Murder Magic":

> For Artaud, as we know, art was always indistinguishable from magic. If we fail
> to get clear what 'magic' meant to him, however, we shall be liable to invent
> completely chimerical connections between Artaud and the cabbala, or the Tarot,
> or astrology, or alchemy and so on. (*50 Drawings to Murder Magic* vii-viii)

The inseparability of art and magic created Artaud's own cosmological order of art and life as he was dissatisfied with his contemporaries reverence for particular intellectualized art forms. Eventually, Artaud sought out indigenous American shamans as well as Eastern and Asian spiritual traditions to provide him with answers, relief, and insight.[44] He travelled to Mexico (January - November 1936) with the help of a modest cultural ambassadorship to imbibe in peyote eating rituals[45] with the Tarahumara Indians. By participating in shamanic healing practices with the Tarahumara, Artaud hoped to receive insight he had been craving for so long while living in Europe. During his time in Mexico, Artaud suffered from heroin withdrawals as he intentionally cleansed his body of toxins before the rituals, hoping to be cured of his addiction. He wrote about that time

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[44] See Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud*, Penguin Modern Masters. (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) Naomi Greene, *Antonin Artaud: Poet without Words* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970) Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*

[45] The practice of consuming entheogens (etymologically meaning "the god inside") for religious or spiritual purposes is closely associated with spiritual and religious rites in a wide array of indigenous cultures. See Daniel Pinchbeck, *Breaking Open the Head* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002) Pinchbeck narrates his own (culturally appropriated) journey into African and Central American indigenous practices of ingesting hallucinogenic plants in the hopes of gaining wisdom or spiritual insight into one's personal purpose in life.

with a rekindled lucidity not displayed since *The Theater and Its Double*, which he had written two decades prior.

Artaud's yearning for meaning in a Western culture that he regarded as vacuous was on occasion fulfilled by his experiences with the Tarahumara Indians:

> I took peyote in the mountains of Mexico, and I had a dose of it that lasted me two or three days with the Tarahumara, and at the time those three days seemed like the happiest days of my life. . . . I realized that I was inventing life, . . . and that I suffered when my imagination failed, and Peyote gave it to me. (Artaud *The Peyote Dance* 82)

Artaud returned to France with non-specific but provocative insights and wisdom that he believed himself to have acquired through the Tarahumara rituals. Inspired by the psychological effects of these rituals on his psyche, Artaud explored more deeply the effects of sound, body, language, and emotional force on an audience. This sparked a reunion with his Cruelty manifestos by claiming theater as capable of manifesting the "forces of ancient magic" (Artaud *T and D* 86). He conjures images of death, necromancy, Incan gods, a rejection of his human-born origins, and nonsensical incantations in sporadic bursts of glossalalia, most dramatically expressed in his recorded, and promptly censored, radio play, *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* (1947). In it, he speaks in ghastly surges, moans in agony, hiccups sound with word-ticks, morphs sentences with resounding vocal modulations and bangs objects in a disharmonic cacophony. The sounds emanate a kind of pedantic gospel-horror show with images of war, the violence of imperialist colonization, and revolting profanity.[46]

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[46] To listen to the radio play in its entirety, see Antonin Artaud, *Pour Finir Avec Le Jugement De Dieu*, 1947, Radio play, Available: http://www.ubu.com/sound/artaud.html, 13 November 2011.

Artaud's Suffering and Pain

Artaud's physical nerve pain and his supposed schizophrenic illness were debilitating and hindered his ability to produce clear theories and discuss their practical implementation. However, Artaud regarded his demand for opiates as required and necessary, as pain management tools. In a letter directed to a legislator,47 Artaud calls him "an ass" (*Selected Writings* 68) and other "dictators of the pharmaceutical profession in France," (*Selected Writings* 70) "a pack of impotent curs" (*Selected Writings* 70) and demands that "sick addicts" (*Selected Writings* 68) (like himself) "be left the hell alone" (*Selected Writings* 68). He claims, "I am the master of my pain" (*Selected Writings* 68). It was opium that would cure the "Anguish which drives men to suicide/ Anguish which condemns them to hell/ . . . Anguish which violates life" (*Selected Writings* 70). His anguish bled into his personal life, his artistic productivity, and his mannerisms around other people.48 Artaud's social struggle was his ostracism and his martyr-like sentiment that resulted from being ignored by his peers as a self-proclaimed prophet/healer, and alchemical magician of art. Undoubtedly, he was megalomaniacal and self-aggrandizing.49

Artaud, the *person*, I employ in this dissertation was a kind of "crazy wisdom" teacher[50] who was overlooked by his contemporaries due to his eccentric and chaotic

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[47] See "Letter to the Legislator of the Law on Narcotics" (1916) in *Selected Writings* 68.

[48] Artaud's ravings and refusal to submit to group conformity with the Surrealists is what eventually led to him being kicked out of the movement. See Knapp, *Antonin Artaud: Man of Vision*

[49] Artaud has compared himself to great saints and martyrs, relating their social struggles and ideological evangelism with his own. For example, he wrote fervently about St. Augustine's description of God's admonition against man that manifested as the plague. See Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958)

[50] As Buddhist teacher and founder of Naropa university, Chögyam Trungpa was fond of defining "crazy wisdom" in reference to gurus and spiritual teachers who teach through somewhat unconventional means in order to wake students up to see with clarity their delusions and ignorance.

tendencies. In fact, Artaud's later works are remarkably similar to contemporary Western Buddhist scholarship on consciousness and control of the mind's discursive thought patterns. Artaud revealed his antipathy of the spiritual emptiness he saw around him in "Letter to the Buddhist Schools," wherein he calls on Eastern spiritual practices (that had recently emerged in the European West), to heal the West's obsession with progress and materialist gain.

> We suffer from a rottenness, from the rottenness of Reason. Logical Europe crushes the mind endlessly between the hammer blows of two extremes, she opens the mind only to close it again. But now the suffocation is at its peak, we have suffered too long under the yoke. The mind is greater than the mind, the metamorphoses of life are many. Like you, we reject progress: come, tear down our houses. (*Selected Writings* 105)

Artaud's life was wrought with a general distaste of being alive; reiterating this is consistent with Susan Sontag's claim that Artaud gave us a "phenomenology of suffering"(Sontag xx.). For him, life was an endless stream of suffering, associated with "Logical Europe," his extensive physical nerve pain, his mistreatment from salacious doctors (including Jacques Lacan, hungry for experimental methods of psychiatry at various asylums) and his condemnation of contemporary culture and its pretense of civilized life.[51] At one point during his stay at the Rodez asylum, he received fifty-one

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[51] Renowned psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, was once Araud's doctor. Stephen Barber writes, "Some connections (notably, the concern with disunity and multiplicity, and the conflict between surface and interior) are evident between the works of Artaud and Lacan. But, in the contact they had during the period 1938-9, the two men were unambiguously hostile." Furthermore, Lacan in fact denied treating Artaud more closely, and warned Artaud's followers and friends against "'inflaming themselves' in Artaud's manner; if they did display such passion, they should be 'calmed down.'"Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (13-14)

electroshock treatments within a year time span by his doctor (Barber *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* 146).

Artaud's suffering was piercingly physical, which can complicate one's urgency for ease. When in physical pain, as opposed to emotional or mental anguish, the body receives full concentration, as Elaine Scarry explains in *The Body in Pain*:

> Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the contents of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and subject. (35)

Scarry further explains that physical pain can be an essential part of a "world-ridding, path clearing logic," (Scarry 34) that is much like an initiatory, rite of passage process of recovery and rebirth of the self. This method of healing "explains the obsessive presence of pain in the rituals of large, widely shared religions as well as in the imagery of intensely private visions" (34). She states that many "forms of worship climax in pain ceremonies," which also explains "why in the brilliant ravings of Artaud some ultimate and essential principle of reality can be compelled down from the heavens onto a theater stage by the mime of cruelty" (Scarry 34)

In post-WWII France, Artaud rejected romanticizing the horrors of war and the insatiable machinations of capitalist materialism, and he aimed his vapid disrespect towards the overly zealous Americans "For Americans," he refuted, "want at all cost and by every possible means to make and manufacture soldiers" (Artaud *Selected Writings* 555). As if prophesying the next half of the twentieth century and beyond, Artaud

foresees the eventual rise to power of the United States and the continual demise of indigenous cultures:

> Yes, I am saying something bizarre, that contrary to everything we have been led to believe, the pre-Columbian Indians were a strangely civilized people and that in fact they knew a form of civilization based exclusively on the principle of cruelty . . . [In this instance, cruelty meant] eradicating by means of blood. . . the bestial accident of unconscious human animality. (Artaud *Selected Writings* 569)

Without ignoring Artaud's blatant ignorance and colonialist imprint, he interprets the "pre-Columbian Indians" as "strangely civilized." His assertion of "strange" was because he had assumed a "primitivism" perspective so popular among his Modern contemporaries. But he looked further, to proclaim that these cultures were onto something that appeared as an almost-utopia that hinged on various levels of cruelty. In the last performance of his life—the radio play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*—Artaud asks, "And precisely what is consciousness? That is precisely what we do not know. It is nothingness" (*Selected Works* 563). Throughout his texts, he searches for the "void" and "nothingness" by rejecting cultural assumptions about mind and spirit, such as the inseparability of our emotional body from the spiritual and other human-invented dualisms. He required a complete dissolution of the self, perhaps as a method to release his own suffering.

PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS: A TECHNIQUE FOR PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION

In this dissertation, I noted that I draw on performance analysis, which is similar to textual analysis techniques for rhetoric and literature studies. In this dissertation, it is used to unpack meanings and themes contained in three case studies of performance. This

analysis includes factual descriptions of the performance, the space and time where it took place and the meta-meaning of the performance in cultural or intellectual contexts, such as Artaud's Theater of Cruelty. In addition, performance analysis is used to understand how these three case studies emulate and reflect my three-pronged theoretical- analytic tool. To write a performance analysis is to capture on the page the aesthetic qualities of the performance as "text." The writer's opinions undoubtedly seep into this analysis because of their varying degrees of knowledge and preferential presentation mode.

Furthermore, I take inspiration in writing performance analysis from Jill Dolan's claim that, "The Artaudian plea for breathing new life into the theater through the female body-presence is more poetic than practical, since it is impossible to translate theatrically without getting caught in the contradictions of women's place in representation" (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 97). Dolan refers to the complex and contradictory nature of bodies, particularly female bodies, poised in performance practices. Performance presentation is not always the best or most practical means of messaging a political or emotional idea. In fact, female bodies on stage may reinscribe the assumptions, judgments and oppressions the producing-artists' may be arguing against.

Thus, the concept of representation for women in performance is a road to traverse cautiously, as Peggy Phelan also argues in *Unmarked*.[52] However, despite the range of criticisms associated with this approach, I engage my performance analysis technique with the controversial notion of female difference as another useful lens. With regard to Hélène Cixous (whether in bodies, philosophies, and language), I conduct performance analysis through the influences and awareness of women's bodies

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[52] See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993)

perpetually in staged representations of female difference in public as well as artistic performance practices. In essence, I integrate performance analysis with other techniques such as experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics as additional techniques to enhance and vividly illustrate such complexities of performance practices.

EXPERIENTIAL AND EXPERIMENTAL REFLEXIVE-SUBJECTIVITY: A TECHNIQUE FOR PERFORMATIVE ANALYSIS

When describing performances or acting within a performance, I use thick descriptions, oftentimes from a reflexive-subjective position, that describe the environmental as well as emotionally effective schema of a particular performance. By choosing to consciously write performatively at opportune moments, I choose, as Della Pollock suggests in *Performative Writing*, "to write in excess of norms of scholarly representation, to write beyond textuality into what might be called social mortalities, to make writing/texuality speak to, of, and through pleasure, possibility, disappearance and even pain. In other words, to make writing perform" (79). I write about and engage intimately with performance in an inquisitive, performative way. There is little separation between my body's embrace and consumption of a performance and my rhetorical, critical claims and interpretations of performance. Victor Turner writes, "Feelings and desires are not a pollution of cognitive pure essence, but close to what we humanly are . . . ." ("Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology" 82). More broadly, the feelings I experience during and after performance tend to link up with both my spiritual awareness and performance curiosities.

Thus, I experiment by mirroring both Artaud and Cixous' challenging and writing styles, which is often performative and inherently subjective. Furthermore, I apply a phenomenological approach, or a relational "standpoint epistemology," that favors

experience and proximity over distance and objectivity. Like so many fertile feminist theories, "standpoint" has been discussed as controversial by various ideological critics and social activists. This theory emerged in the 1970's and 1980's as a "feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power." (Harding 1) A standpoint epistemology acknowledges and accepts the role of experience in the production of knowledge, and most commonly, the experience of marginalized or disenfranchised persons (Harding 1). *Indeed, my choices of subject material, in general and as a performance studies scholar for this dissertation, are not always the most popular, critically-accepted or acknowledged forms of awareness and expression in performance studies. My experiment is the facilitation and manifestation of a fresh critical and personal perspective to subjects that have been repeatedly degraded or ignored because of their controversial attributes.*

The importance of reflexive-subjectivity as technique is also discussed in the work of anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, whose essay, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," explores the impact of what he labels as emotional "force" on research itself. Rosaldo explains how his ethnographic study of a perplexing headhunting tribe shifted significantly due to a sufferable event: "Only after being repositioned through a devastating loss of my own could I better grasp that [this headhunter tribe of] Ilongot men mean precisely what they say when they describe the anger in bereavement as the source of their desire to cut off human heads" (10).

Rosaldo's "devastating loss" (10) was his wife's death, which occurred suddenly and accidentally during fieldwork. This incident became a pivotal experience for Rosaldo that expanded his perspective and deepened his empathic connection with the Ilongot men he had been researching. His own rage and suffering pushed him to an emotional level capable of understanding exactly what had been missing from his observations. It

took him fifteen months after his wife's death to be able to write again. He admits that the writing, which suddenly poured out of him with great, tidal emotion, became cathartic. He writes:

> My use of personal experience serves as a vehicle for making the quality and intensity of the rage in Ilongot grief more readily accessible to readers than certain more detached modes of composition. At the same time, by invoking personal experience as an analytical category one risks easy dismissal. (11)

Rosaldo approaches his research with a vulnerable timidity, not because he wants to challenge his discipline's methodology, but because he knows no other way that makes sense during his grieving and healing. He writes, "The human sciences must explore the cultural force of emotions with a view to delineating the passions that animate certain forms of human conduct" (19). Only after having experienced "powerful visceral emotional states" (19) and the "deep cutting pain of sorrow almost beyond endurance . . . the trembling beginning in my abdomen and spreading through my body," could he be "in a position to grasp the force of what Ilongots had repeatedly told [him] about grief, rage, and headhunting" (19)[53]. In other words, Rosaldo intellectually understood the powerful reasoning that the headhunters enacted for their grief rituals by enduring overwhelming emotional grief himself. Subsequently, his research became a heartier study by embracing, rather than dismissing, his subjective and emotional experiences during fieldwork.

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[53] *In all honesty, I could not have conducted my dissertation study without having lived through personal experiences as woman, mother, performer, director, arts critic, wife/domestic partner, student, teacher, daughter, struggling scholar, and spiritual adventurer.*

In this dissertation, my performance on the page-as-stage, with the product of writing as stage for reading the writing in a private, intimate and literary performance, I refer to lived experiences that may mysteriously, concretely and scholastically link up with my interests in feminist performance art practices. This experiential and experiential and experimental reflexive-subjective approach is consistent with Cixous' suggestion that "women write themselves" and Artaud's notion that the theater must "pursue by all its means a reassertion not only of all the aspects of the objective and descriptive world, but of the internal world, that is, of [wo]man considered metaphysically" (Artaud *T and D* 92).[54] For me, this requires that I maintain a desire to know myself and all my parts— ugly and beautiful, plain and dramatic, the faults and the mysteries. Artaud delineates, "The true purpose of the theater is to create Myths, to express life in its immense, universal aspect, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves" (Artaud *T and D* 122). Toward this end, by working closely with specific performance artists, I have become more confident that my experiences and my expression of my experiences are both valid and needed in this world. Victor Turner remarks, "To be reflexive is to be at once one's own subject and direct object" ("Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology" 93). Hélène Cixous urges, "And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 879). Similarly, Silja J.A. Taivi recounts in her research on a feminist playwright's script, "No journey in a woman's life is more significant than that which questions and challenges her sense of self, allowing truisms of identity to be reshaped or to crumble and be rebuilt"(qtd. in Bell "Orchids in the Arctic: Women's Autobiographical Performance as Mentoring" 307).

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[54] Brackets are my own to emphasize that I am consciously re-applying and appropriating gender specificity in order to clarify how Artaud is useful for feminist scholarship on performance theory.

Trained initially as an actor, my springboard to creation is my body (embodiment) as instrument, with poetry and performance art as the keys to my own healing. Therefore, I use work by artists and writers who could help me open up paths and discoveries to this process of healing. Deborah Hay, lauded American dancer, in *My Body, The Buddhist,* writes, "Long ago I stopped sitting at a desk surrounded by books, gathering information. My research happens in the experiential realm: dancing, standing on two feet, moving, listening and seeing" (xxv). That is, writing grows from the process of dancing, playing, and living through the lessons and wisdom cultivated by lived experiences, moving into the musicality of written expression. In this dissertation, at times I write performatively, using reflexive-subjectivity and poetic written expression as interpretive techniques and consciously weave personal narrative, experiential perspective, self-reflection, and emotionality.

At times, I must be physically still but mentally vibrant in between piles of books, whilst when away from the desk, I swallow the richness of everyday living. I make decisions not only about my life in the realm of the mundane, the "daily grind," but also as a living performer performing my life's unique, specific, heroic, archetypical story. As an able performer on the stage, I make choices while studying and acting a role. This includes research based on a character's scripted story born from the playwright's imagination and textual suggestions. If I am a performance artist, whose art is based on lived experience or, as Artaud suggests, "the double" life, then what is the topic or the inspirational seed for a performance artist's work? The answer lies within the ever-deepening quest to know the self. Sue-Ellen Case in her book, *Feminism and Theatre*, describes how artists use "material" from their own lives for their performance art:

Women performance artists often develop their pieces from their own diaries.

Diaries are commonly considered girls' books. In speaking the words of her diary,

the performer performs herself, speaking in the most personal language of the self

to the subject. By performing her own life, she becomes the woman as subject, as

her own self, in the public space of performance. (Case *Feminism and Theatre* 59)

The endeavor to perform oneself, as "woman as subject," teeters between narcissism, solipsistic naivety and at times involves taking extraordinary risks. As a feminist performer, I believe I am "constantly risking absurdity," as American Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti once wrote (248), as someone who takes risks, sometimes uncalculated and foolish, in order to understand myself, my identity, and my purpose in this world—I write this to *become into* myself.

Similarly, Hélène Cixous challenges objective and distanced forms of writing techniques as part of her political and personal activism. Abigail Bray, a scholar on Hélène Cixous, writes:

Cixous's refusal to conform to the traditional boundaries of academic writing, her

championing of a profoundly 'feminine' style of thinking which is both rigorous

and intimate, intellectual and defiantly personal, has opened up many creative

possibilities for how we think and write about sexual difference, philosophy and

literature. . . Cixous's work continually comes back to the importance of

grounding knowledge in a humble recognition of the power of the quotidian

forces in our lives. In effect, this means recognizing the possibility of subverting

larger power structures through a revolutionary change on an embodied everyday

level.(27)

In this dissertation I am also bending "traditional boundaries" through a distinctly intimate and personal frame of analysis, while simultaneously asserting the "importance of grounding knowledge" in my experiences and research interpretations.

Relatedly, Susan Sontag explains in her introduction to Artaud's *Selected Works*:
Art becomes a statement of self-awareness—an awareness that presupposes a disharmony between the self of the artist and the community. Indeed, the artist's effort is measured by the size of its rupture with the collective voice (of "reason"). The artist is a consciousness trying to be. (*Selected Writings* xix)

How does one seek out this "consciousness trying to be?" I ponder this question through an experiential and experimental performative technique. Paul Willis explains his research practice, which is similar to the practices I use for my dissertation study:
At bottom, you could say that in this book I am trying to outline an experimental, *profane* theoretical methodology. Imagine that I am a bit of an academic vandal, in the nicest possible and disciplined way. I take, develop or invent ideas (while immersed in data) and throw them, in a 'what if?' kind of way, at the ethnographic data—the real world of the nitty gritty, the messiness of everyday life—to see what analytic points bound out on the other side, pick them up again, refine them and throw them again. The problem with many empirical data, empirically presented, is that they can be flat and uninteresting, a documentary of detail which does not connect with urgent issues. On the other hand the 'big ideas' are empty of people, feeling and experience. In my view well-grounded and

illuminating analytic points flow only from bringing concepts into a relationship

with the messiness of ordinary life, somehow recorded. (xi)

I believe that to create analytical or lived problems and to experiment with the

"what ifs," as Willis queries above, to make art "a statement of self-awareness," as

Sontag suggests, is to discover the relevant questions. To ask questions that may not have

definite answers is a method whereby I dismantle what Cixous characterizes as the sick

"arm of parental-conjugal phallocentricism" (Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" 876).

Artaud writes, "Life consists of burning up questions. I cannot conceive of work that is

detached from life" (*Selected Writings* 59). I am experimenting with the notion that to

question garners fruitful results through deemphasizing results and accenting process.

That is to say, by embracing and honoring lived experiences, and inherent lessons of

suffering, I am able to extract, magnify and thus dismantle the perpetual yearning for

patriarchal attention responsible for feelings of unhealthy unworthiness.

Cixous writes in "Laugh of the Medusa," "Who, feeling a funny desire stirring

inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't

thought she was sick" (Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" 876)? To disassemble what

Cixous calls the "phallologocentric" stronghold in discourse, writing, and thought, I

employ an interpretive technique. This experiential and experimental reflexive-

subjectivity technique has been incorporated three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool

(Artaud, l'écriture féminine and shamanist practices) and applied towards virtual reality

fantasies (in Chapter Three), a "womanist" performance ritual (in Chapter Four), and

improvisational theatrical performance (in Chapter Three).

It is in my nature as an artist to attempt the impossible, to experiment and

experience a range of possibilities, to court the edge of disaster, to create wonder and

beauty through my work, within the constraints and requirements before me. Disaster is
feasible with every word written, but, as with most radical acts, the attempt is often
generative and revealing.

In retrospect, I have always learned most profoundly when I have lived a lesson,
or experience, and usually more than once. Consequently, it is not enough for me to read
a book or article to fully understand a topic, in this case Artaud's Theater of Cruelty. In
fact, I have come to understand "cruelty" by walking through suffering, as many of us
undoubtedly confront in our lives.

Cixous questions the propped-up differences of the flattened, literal divisions
between theory and practice, or, stated differently, between the value of embodied
experience and theoretical discourse. Conley explains: "Cixous' concerns are political,
but textually political, and states the premises (and limits) of her enterprise: to read and
write texts in order to displace the operating concepts of femininity in major discourses
governing (Western) society" (5). In other words, Cixous' agenda is ideological, using
the body as a kind of text or as an instrument for such experiments in theory and with
passionate and poetic idealism.

I also match experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity with
performance analysis. Indeed, as Elizabeth Bell states in her essay, "Orchids in the
Arctic," "Research agendas that reconcile theory with practice, academic feminism with
feminist activism and performance as a lived, and political practice combine to provide
hope and sustenance for feminist performance work"("Orchids in the Arctic: Women's
Autobiographical Performance as Mentoring" 311). If Cixous' poetic "enterprise" is
extended to include the realm of performance, the question is: Can a woman's body
become a text that is read by herself, as well as by spectators, and by other women within
the sphere of feminist critical spectatorship? In other words, "writing the body" is a

performative action that signifies the body as flesh made into text through the awareness and exploration of body-presence and what it represents. I use Elizabeth Grosz's notion of the "text" thus:

> [T]he products of any kind of discursive practice, whether poetic, literary, philosophical, scientific, visual, tactile or performative—that is any tangible network of signs that exhibits a "grammar" and "syntax," and finds its context or milieu in other texts within a broadly similar sign system. (100)

To frame her definition for purposes of this dissertation, a "text" can include not only the text on the page, but the body and practices of a performer in a performative context. However, returning to Artaud, he asserts, "Beneath the poetry of texts there is poetry pure and simple, without form and without text" (*Antonin Artaud, Selected Writings* 255). What is this ineffable, formless, textless space Artaud imagines? In this dissertation, I work to uncover traces of Artaud in feminist performance practices in which texts, bodies, philosophies and politics melt into each other as rivulets into the sea.

Deb Margolin, Yale professor, performance artist, playwright, and co-founder of Split Britches feminist theater, teaches her students to embody their speech into their writing, as one does when writing performatively. In an interview in *Radical Acts: Theater and Feminist Pedagogies of Change* she explains:

> There are many beautiful forms of writing—you can write a poem, you can write a novel, you can write a short story—you can work on and perfect those forms, but nowhere is the embodied voice except in the theater. That embodiment of language is the singular province and glory of the theater. And there is an inherent

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eros the minute you put the language into the body. It comes from the body, it returns to the body. (55)

This suggests an allowance, if not encouragement, of permitting private desires and experiences of a writer to seep through into a text without necessarily limiting oneself to refined semantics or structure. Evidence of my experimentation with "writing the body" in this dissertation is indicated by italicized that embody a curative mode of writing that is in alignment with the modes of expression inherent to the theoretical-analytic approach I use for my three case studies.

Cixous insists that a "feminine practice of writing" is impossible to define, "for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which does not mean that it doesn't exist" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 883). In other words, to practice *l'écriture féminine* is a performance of self as "woman" writing herself, as boundless and fluid, ecstatically theorized and understood through a practice of experiential knowledge. For the purposes of this dissertation, I write curatively, a writing that begets a "return to the body" (Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" 880) which has been—through years of abuse and censorship—subtly or overtly, harnessed and cocooned to repress voice and action brought on by patriarchal and systemic intimidation. I discuss the notion that Artaud's Theater of Cruelty can be a particular manifestation of an acutely feminist, radical, and transgressive mode of expression via performance, either through written or staged texts.

In short, I include experiential performative descriptions within my performance analyses based on my reflexive-subjective experiences, as a "standpoint epistemology" by putting forth my "ethnographic imagination." Or, as Della Pollock offers, "The writer and the world's bodies intertwine in evocative writing, in intimate coperformance of language and experience" (81).

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PERFORMATIVE POETICS: A TECHNIQUE FOR PERFORMATIVE INTERPRETATION

The performative poetics and descriptive reflections that I use in this dissertation to describe my case studies have been inspired by Artaud's mystical imaginings of an expansive, majestic scope of performance. I have also been inspired by Hélène Cixous' encouragement to write my truth with fluidity and instinctual insights. I offer poetic diversions to describe what prosaic language fails to articulate. I too am one of Artaud's "daughters," trusting at times—as illustrated by Artaud and Cixous—an innate, sometimes surreal, intuition and life experiences more than discursive deductions. Some might describe this approach as "contemplative studies," which includes other dimensions of learning such as meditation practices, lived experiences, mystical encounters, and the "methods human beings have found, across cultures and across time, to concentrate, broaden and deepen conscious awareness."[55]

In the introduction to *Selected Writings*, Susan Sontag describes that what Artaud "bequeathed was not achieved works of art but a singular presence, a poetics, an aesthetics of thought, a theology of culture, and a phenomenology of suffering" (Sontag lvii). This "phenomenology of suffering" is his foundational physical, intellectual and metaphysical emotional catalyst to creating his art and work, just as Cixous, disgusted by sexism and lack of women's agency in patriarchal systems, uses "suffering" as her fuel for creativity and expression. My personal journey to understand Artaud's daughters,

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[55] Quoted from a newly established Summer Intensive (2011) brochure as part of Brown University's Contemplative Studies Initiative. The program includes meditation instruction, performance events, and a film series. Although this is a pilot program for Brown, Naropa University in Colorado is the preeminent accredited university in the United States with a contemplative studies core curriculum. In an interview (on the Interdependent Project podcast series with Ethan Nichtern, Judith Simmer-Brown, a religious studies professor at Naropa University, suggests that contemplative studies accepts the notion the heart can provide part of an intelligent inquiry into a theory or question. This moves in a different intellectual direction from purely theoretical research or book knowledge and into the realm of experiential knowledge. See Ethan Nichtern, *Interview with Judith Simmer-Brown*, New York, 2010.

which I have engaged contemplatively, intellectually, and performatively, has enhanced my ability to explicate the work of the performances described in this dissertation. Admittedly, this was accomplished with substantial self-doubt and fear. In her essay "Orchids in the Arctic: Women's Autobiographical Performances as Mentoring," Elizabeth Bell writes, "The academy is often a hostile place for women, a hostile place for performance work, and a hostile place for feminism. Put all these together and they spell disaster" (302).

Artaud tells us that "without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle," (*T and D* 99) or a sense of living through the atrocities and horrors that provoke us to look within and attempt to recover, "the theater is not possible" (*T and D* 99). Artaud explains "in our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds" (*T and D* 99).

My feet, blood, breath, bones, and body must trek through each of life's challenges, subtleties, ecstasies, and tiny miracles before I grasp the core of my experience.

In a similar vein, Paul Stoller argues that in some non-Western societies, "learning is understood not in terms of 'reading' and 'writing,' but in the gustatory terms of bodily consumption" (6). Humans "eat" their wisdom through their "internal digestive processes" (6). In Stoller's ethnographic research, he learned to understand African Songhay sorcery through the body, by being completely consumed by that particular society's constructions of illness and healing.

Karen Brown, an anthropologist who researched Vodou practices in Brooklyn for her dissertation, writes that in order for her to have access to insight and data of Voudou, she must undergo and be initiated as priestess herself. Indeed, her primary subject of study, a Voudou priestess named Alourdes, initiated Brown. In her book *Mama Lola*—

based on her dissertation— she explains why this had to be the way for her to conduct research.

> The drama of Vodou . . . occurs not so much within the rituals themselves as in the junction between the rituals and the troubled lives of the devotees. People bring the burdens and pains of their lives to this religious system in the . . . hope of being healed. . . . The only way I could hope to understand the psychodrama of Vodou was to open my own life to the ministrations of Alourdes. (*Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* 10)

Likewise, I have grasped what Artaud's Theater of Cruelty might be and feel like through intellectual and emotional consumption of embodied experiences. In order to relate these experiences to a reader, I incorporate a stylistic choice of writing in a performative poetic style.

Like Stoller and Brown, in recent years, on my own path towards understanding what I call "shamanistic and cruel feminist performance training," I have delved deeply, sometimes selfishly, hungrily, and passionately, into intimidating, emotional, physical, and spiritual waters. I have exposed myself, perhaps dangerously, to spiritual practices that teetered on the edge of my own personal ethics. In effect, I have begun the process of uncovering my hidden parts, the hurt parts, the frighteningly beautiful parts, and the violent parts. I worked with spiritual teachers who taught me tools and techniques to help me open up to the world, to teach me how to unwrap myself from my cocoon of fear and unworthiness.

In my formal training as a performer, I have studied with people I consider to be gurus (the word translated from Sanksrit means "the heavy, weighty one") on my parallel

path of scholarship as related to Artaudian cruel theater practices, including Rachel

Rosenthal, Richard Schechner, and Jean Claude van Itallie[56] (from the Open Theater,

another Artaud-influenced company), all of whom are meticulously impeccable in their

approach to live performance techniques, skills, wisdom, and innovation.

In my pursuit of knowledge, I have applied Artaudian concepts in my own art-marking to understand its potential power. In an essay about "textual performance of research" (Wolf 348) and scholarship, Stacy Wolf writes, "[R]esearch requires and is a performance." (349). Indeed, I have made choices that have moved me towards an Artaudian performative, a theater that provokes and encourages transgression and ecstasy to induce the laborious project of personal change. This entire process provides the intellectual and psychic grounding for this dissertation.

To illustrate, I have performed in a re-enactment of The Performance Group's historical experimental show, Dionysus in '69 *(Sides and Darlington) with its original director, Richard Schechner, assisting us with clues to missing parts not located in archival resources during dress rehearsals. In the presented production, the audience would sit on scaffolds all around the main playing space, as it did in the original Performance Group's production. As a performer, I was free to move around, through, with, and into the audience's space that is traditionally severed from an actor's access. In this production, I exposed myself fully naked, moving, and touching with gentle seduction, in ecstasy with strangers. I have grazed and felt bodies without using words and I have employed poetry's precise capture of emotions to express the sublime through an embodied expression of an adaptation of Euripedes' Classical text,* The Bacchae.

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[56] In 2004, I went on a writer's retreat on van Itallie's land in western Massachussettes he calls Shantigar. Here is where I wrote the majority of my script for my original production *Wake for the Dark Poet: The Antonin Artaud Project* (Austin, TX 2004).

Subsequently, I have achieved a broader relevance of re-staging the above mentioned historical performance in a time and cultural space that increasingly depends upon networked and new media communications. Under the pretense that physical human-to-human distance is rapidly becoming the norm for experiencing and engaging in intimate relationships, the theater is now being primed to emerge once again as a place to vividly display our fragile and at times unstable human being-ness.

In addition, as performer in Dionysus in '69*, I offered my body, my energetic and emotional "force," and my alert presence, to an audience for a specific goal: to re-ignite the immediate intimacy and ecstasy of live performance. This production used minimal technology, relying upon the rawness of poetic language, environmental theater space, audience interactivity, and elements of deity worship as ritualized drama to induce an immersive environment that enraptured and seduced audiences to appreciate the splendor and sensorial stimulation of live dramatic performance. This, too, has emulated an Artaudian spectacle and one that I have learned to understand through rehearsals, meticulously detailed labor, set-building, and nightly performances with live audiences. Kimberly Jannarone historicizes Artaud's Theater of Cruelty as a connection to "primitivism" and the modern avant-garde: "While primitivism forms a crucial foundation for much of the avant-garde, Artaud's writing reveals a desire not for a utopia but for a re-encounter with primal forces and energies closely akin to those of the brutal Dionysos of Euripedes's* Bacchae*" (33). All the more interesting to note that Artaud wanted to stage an adaptation of* Bacchae *in 1946, which would have ended his long absence from theatrical production (Artaud Selected Writings 660). The project never manifested with his death only two years later in 1948.*

As such, I invite the reader to immerse herself/himself in the experience of the text-as-performance that I exercise poetically to accent emotional affect, through styles of

passion that are personal, unique, intuitive, and poetic. For example, it may be useful to describe the *experience* of the color red, which acts as a performance through experiencing texture or a kiss or the sounds of a nearby fire, all of which are performative actions in various manifestations, rather than by simply staring at the color or applying a typical substitution like visualizing an apple. And, as linguist Ferdinand de Saussure has offered, meaning comes from contextual differences, based in emotional and psychological resonances associated with a particular word, otherwise defined as *langue*.[57] The poetic expansion of language can take on a performative action of discovery with anecdotal insight as follows: *Red: when you discover your lover has rejected you. Red: closed eyes in a dark room with fear pumping in your blood. Red: meat sizzling on a grill. Red: a silent scream in a locked basement. Red: juicy kisses on a hot summer day.*

Cixous also highlights the power of language in maintaining or revolutionizing social structures. In her interpretation of Cixous, Verena Conley writes, "To change existing social structures, the linguistic clichés that purvey them and make them appear as transparent, immutable truths must be detected, re-marked, displaced" (44). Poetry or writing with a highly performative style, as she creates in her "Laugh of the Medusa" manifesto, is the primary textual mode of subversion for Cixous, as it was for Artaud in his manifestos. In poetry, language is free to be emotionally interpreted, dense, and passionate, or as I understand it, an elegant manifestation of life's mysteries and experiences.

In *The Ethnographic Imagination*, Paul Willis discusses the complexities of using language to write about experience, "You could say that the whole ethnographic writing

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[57] See Paul Bouissac, *Saussure: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2010) 90

enterprise is . . . a struggle against language in language to produce sensuous reconstructions in the reader's mind" (Willis 22). This suggests that Hélène Cixous' particular emotional and intellectual forces inherent in her writing style are appropriate influences for this dissertation. Cixous conveys in complex subjective multiplicities, her perspective, one that challenges the constricting and suffocating forms of language and meaning. In 1976 Hélène Cixous wants a "war of liberation." She writes:

> I've seen them, those who will be neither dupe nor domestic, those who will not
>
> fear the risk of being a woman; will not fear any risk, any desire, any space
>
> unexplored in themselves, among themselves and others or anywhere else. They
>
> do not fetishize, they do not deny, they do not hate. They observe, they approach,
>
> they try to see the other woman, the child, the lover—not to strengthen their own
>
> narcissism or verify the solidity or weakness of the master, but to make love
>
> better. . . she thrills in our becoming. And we'll keep on becoming! (893)

Similarly, in my personal urge to metaphorically and perhaps literally, "make love better," this dissertation provides an opportunity for me to *become*, to dance, to open, to blossom, to reach for the glass ceiling and sing a high note that shatters its presence. Fundamentally and with aspiration, I may achieve this through applying performative poetics alongside the above techniques to interpret three case studies within Artaudian, feminist, and shamanistic methodological concepts.

OVERVIEW OF METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

Artaud's Theater of Cruelty is the centering concept for the three case studies described and analyzed in this dissertation. In addition, under the umbrella of *l'écriture féminine*, the writing on these pages *is* an embodiment of performance as public practice,

as evidenced through my engagement with exploratory methods of inquiry and "experimental" scholarship. I experiment with interpretive techniques similar to what Paul Stoller has described as "sensuous scholarship." He used this analytical frame within his own radical methodology of anthropological research (specifically on African sorcery). Stoller discusses his necessary departure from pure objectivity in his research thus:

> To accept sensuous scholarship is to eject the conceit of control in which mind and body, self and other are considered separate. It is indeed a humbling experience to recognize . . . that we do not consume sorcery, history or knowledge; rather, it is history, sorcery, and knowledge that consumes us. To accept sensuousness is . . . to lend one's body to the world and accept its complexities, tastes, structures and smells. . . . And so sensuous scholarship is ultimately a mixing of head and heart. It is an opening of one's being in the world—a welcoming. Such embodied hospitality is the secret of the great scholars, painters, poets and filmmakers whose images and words resensualize us. (xvii)

For this dissertation, I have directed attention towards, as Stoller notes, "head and heart," as well as corporeally, in order to understand Artaud's concepts of theater as "plague," "double," and "cruel." I do not ignore my emotional experiences, but rather use such experiences as qualitative, reflexive-subjective information, and thus consider my experience as valuable and viable. I dig into myself through my experiences, through a "sensuous scholarship," and report my performative poetic interpretations in this dissertation.

Structurally and textually, each of the case studies analyzed in this dissertation (Chapters Three, Four and Five) is like a "daughter," borne from the convergence of performance analysis, experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity, and performative poetics. Each chapter bears its own style, tone and purpose and each chapter has been corporeally and intellectually influenced by the topic of the section which, in turn, is linked to the artistic style I employ for analysis. In Chapter Three, I offer a somewhat linear and dialectic approach. Here I emphasize intersections between "cyberfeminism" and the pleasures of virtual reality in the "First Person Shooter" *The X-Files* episode. I also focus on theater as "plague." I ruminate on dramatic metaphors at play in archetypical stories that demonstrate the power of fantasies, vis-à-vis mythical stories that are potentially politically transformative and "viral." In, Chapter Four I analyze *MetamorphoSex* using feminist ritual theory, textual analysis, and reflexive-subjective and speculative approaches with an angle towards theater as a "double." In Chapter Five I analyze Rosenthal's DbD Experience Workshop primarily using reflexivity and performative poetics (with attention to emotional and visual detail) with an emphasis on "cruel" theater.

I strategically include snippets of biographical reading and scholarship related to Artaud which I then juxtapose with French feminist theory, specifically Hélène Cixous' notion of *l'écriture féminine* as demonstrative of both reflexivity and performative poetics. I prop up Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* with the performances and teachings by women artists who reflect his ideas. In this dissertation, I argue that a cruel, feminist and shamanistic theater exhibits rebellion against hegemonic, patriarchal oppression, which propels cultural and personal, and possibly spiritual, transformation towards liberation. I explore aspects of Artaud's theatrical cruelty that are found in Artaud's "Daughters'" art. I ask, if renowned Polish experimental theater director, Jerzy

Grotowski, has been considered "Artaud's natural son" (Hayman), who might Artaud's "Daughters" be? Succinctly, each artist addressed in this dissertation illustrates my interpretation and execution of Artaud's concepts through performance. As if looking through a spectrum of ideas, such artists have captured various colors of Artaud's theatrical vision. Through piecemeal and collage, together they have forged templates for what could be considered Artaudian spectacles.

CASE STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

In Chapter Three, the first of my case study presentations, I primarily use my three-pronged theoretical-analytic technique of performance analysis for an *X-Files* television episode. This case highlights a television-performance example of an Artaudian "daughter" at play. This chapter also addresses a range of critical questions: Is there a means to achieve Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, in the sense of theater as "plague," through the use of digital, immersive environments such as those in virtual reality games? How does "performing" writing relate with language and codes for women who work as programmers and who create the "game space?" What gender gaps exist in video game culture and industry? How can Artaud's concepts of theater as cruelty and as plague recuperate some of these gaps? This chapter weaves feminist performance art practices that hinge upon theories of embodiment in the virtual play-space of computer mediated communications (or CMC) with the latent fear that technology and trendy terms such as "post-humanism" or "transhumanism"[58] will override the emotional impact of live performance. In addition, I question how semiotics and meaning inherent in technology discourse such as "coding," "programming," and "avatars" carry multiple meanings when

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[58] See Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture," *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, ed. Michel and Charles Caramello Benamou (Milwaukee: Center for Twentieth Century Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1977).

applied to an examination of women's work in the digital performance sector. Furthering notions of the virtual/real body, embodiment, and difference, I touch upon Elizabeth Grosz's discourse in *Volatile Bodies* that focuses on a feminist understanding of corporeality. I also question future Artaudian performances: What might the future of a feminist-Artaudian performance look like? I use Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," and other work by feminists in new media/cyber studies (Sadie Plant, Sherry Turkle, Mary Ann Doane, and Allucquére Stone) to understand the placement and complexities of the body in virtual realms as uniquely Artaudian performance immersions.

In Chapter Four, my second case study, I use my three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool as well performance analysis, experiential reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics. I describe emotional information culled by witnessing the performance of the ritualistic, all-female cast, performance piece, *MetamorphoSex*. I use a reflexive-subjective perspective and maintain a steady dialectic approach in order to explore this ritualistic, erotic performance event, produced once, with four performances only, in Austin, Texas, in 1995. This production was created by ex-pornography film-star-turned-performance artist—she now has a Ph.D. in Human Sexuality—Annie Sprinkle, performance artist Linda Montano, and sex educator Barbara Carrellas, along with 26 women participants from the Austin community.

In Chapter Five, my third case study, I explore my experiences with eighty-three year old performance artist Rachel Rosenthal and her Doing by Doing three-day "instant theater" workshop. In addition to my three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool, I intentionally incorporate more densely my experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity that includes personal introspection and performative poetic prose in a spirit akin to Cixous and Artaud. In many ways, the Doing by Doing workshop with Rosenthal reflected much of the "emotional athleticism" Artaud described and Jerzy Grotowski

executed. But the goal of the DbD experience was not simply to entertain an audience (there was no other audience, only we, the workshop participants). The goal was, as Rosenthal explained, to teach us how to become better human beings by using her techniques of performance that leave no one unscathed from the emotional and artistic depths of the experience.

SUMMARY

In summary, I use my theoretical-analytic tool and employ performances analysis, experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics as techniques to interpret my case studies in this dissertation about Artaud's "Daughters." Artaud and his concepts of Theater of Cruelty as generative texts serve as the foundation to my three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool, which also includes an examination of the case studies through *l'écriture féminine* writing practices (i.e., feminist interpretation), and a "shamanistic" lens with an emphasis on transformation, ecstasy, and ritual. I offer my reflective experiences, in varying degrees, with performative poetics in each chapter as means to express an embodied practice of performance theory.

Specifically, in each of the following chapters, I use my three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool including: (1) Artaud's concepts of theater as "plague," theater as "double," and theater as "cruelty," (2) the performance practices of "woman's writing" (*l'écriture féminine)* and (3) shamanistic performances of transformation to analyze the three different performance practice cases. In Chapter Three, I evaluate an *X-Files* television episode as an example of Artaud's "plague." In Chapter Four, I describe and analyze *MetamorphoSex,* a highly explicit theatrical ritual in the vein of Artaud's "double." In Chapter Five, I explore a case that introduced me to the phenomenon of gaining wisdom through performance events that include endurance, ecstasy, and

"spiritual therapeutics" in the visceral and "cruel theater" approach of Rachel Rosenthal's

DbD Experience Workshop.

Chapter Two: The "Plague" of (Dis)Embodied Agency within Virtual Reality Performance Practice

> The theater, like the plague, is in the image of . . . carnage and . . . essential separation. It releases conflicts, disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these powers are dark, it is the fault not of the plague nor of the theater, but of life.
> --Artaud, "The Theater and the Plague"

In this chapter I employ the three-pronged theoretical-analytic structure described in the introduction of this dissertation to examine a case study. Here I analyze one episode from *The X-Files* television series titled "First Person Shooter." I apply the following theoretical-analytic tools: (1) Artaud's criteria of Theater of Cruelty, with specific emphasis on his metaphor of theater as "plague"; (2) feminist theories on "woman's writing" in relation to Hélène Cixous' *l'écriture féminine*, specifically her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa", and (3) characteristics of shamanistic performance practices inherent within the *X-Files* episode. This chapter ends with a brief summary of the case study.

Indeed, Artaud's concepts can be used to analyze contemporary performance media forms such as television and video games. In fact, near the end of his life (1948), Artaud's obsession for cruel performance was achieved through the medium of recorded sound in his radio play, *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*. With this recording, Artaud captured screams, cacophonic percussion, and, at the same time, performed scathing criticisms of Western culture through poetry and by use of distortions of voice and noise, outrageous laughter, and a macabre atmosphere of sadness, pity and mystical nightmares. The recording was to be aired on 1 February 1948; however, the director of the radio station banned its transmission (Barber *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* 207).

In essence, Artaud's *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* was his final performance work in which, like his Theater of Cruelty essays, language is "reduced and sharpened to express his need to cut into, destroy and reformulate the body" (Barber *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* 203). Barber states, "Artaud's language is fragmented; simultaneously, the desire it carries for physical transmission and transformation sutures the pieces together again for the listener" (204). In other words, Artaud applies his theoretical imaginings to the new media of his time, including silent cinema to rectify the impending inundation of technology hybridizing with art. Thus, Artaud's involvement with cinema and sound was "primarily tactical" (Hollier 161).

Artaud writes, "In the cinema we are all [blank] --and cruel." (Artaud *Selected Writings* 181). Although a word is missing from Artaud's manuscript, one can surmise the meaning of an absence of words as silence. For Artaud, silent films in particular, captured his demand for "phantasmagorical" (181) and "psychic" films (181). Stephen Barber explains that in Artaud's vision, "the image aimed for and the spectator aimed at would be in a state of magnetic, negative interaction" (Barber *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* 51) Artaud suggests that in the commercial cinema of his time, "the actor is merely a living sign," (Artaud *Selected Writings* 182) who cannot escape the cult of celebrity, no matter the character she/he portrays, i.e. Charlie Chapman, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Artaud's attempts to remedy the nullifying emotional a/effects of cinema were, for example, his screenplay and subsequent film, *The Seashell and the Clergyman*, directed by Germaine Dulac.[59] Although Artaud was outraged at Dulac's interpretation of his screenplay, explicit images related to horror, chaos, desire, suffering

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[59] *The Seashell and the Clergyman* was banned by censors at the time of its release; however, the following year, Luis Buñuel's infamous Surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* was lauded for its disconnected and threatening dreamlike imagery. Artaud had claimed that Buñuel had adopted "displacement techniques and hallucinatory imagery" (Barber, Blows and Bombs 44) from *The Seashell and the Clergyman*.

and dreams endure, by avoiding "the spoken word as something constructed . . . using instead an imagery compacted together from chance, control and the body" (Barber *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* 51). Artaud explains:

> Once the stage is eliminated, the spectacle can spread to the entire theatre and, taking off the ground, will surround the spectator in the most physical ways, leaving him immersed in a constant pool of lights, images, movements and sounds. (qtd. in Hollier 166)

For purposes of this dissertation, analysis of a television show, a *newer* form of media, as compared to Artaud's media, is valuable for understanding and interpreting Artaudian themes of cruelty in contemporary contexts. In fact, an examination of the above quote reflects the basic elements of Virtual Reality. For example, a player's "immersion" within an environment comprised of scripted/programmed lights, movements and sonic effects emulate Artaud's spectacle of a groundless and stageless theatrical experience.

Now, I offer background information on *The X-Files*[60] series as well as descriptive detail of the "First Person Shooter" episode's plot and characters. The "First Person Shooter" episode is about an actual or *real* (as opposed to virtual) murder that occurs mysteriously in a simulation tactical digital environment or immersive virtual reality video game (VR).[61] The killer is a female vixen virtual avatar[62] (a video game

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[60] Chris Carter, the show's creator, has discussed the two veins of narrative within the series: the first and foundational narrative is of Mulder's search for his alien-abducted sister and a government conspiracy to hide alien interactions with humans. The other narratives consist of side-plots, or secondary case-studies that focus more on the "monster-of-the-week." See *Inside the X Files*, dir. Glen Kasper, Glen Kasper, Chris Carter, Frank Spotnitz, Chris Carter, David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson and William B. Davis, Ten Thirteen Productions, 1998.

[61] Lister defines Virtual Reality, as a "simulated reality, more or less a fantasy world we can step in and out of by virtue of the technologies that allow humans to access it." And "immersion" is "term is used to

character) that— mysteriously, far-fetchingly—kills human players— in reality. This game character is a programmed artistic creation inspired by the secret desire of a woman programmer who worked at the game design corporation. This programmer, named "Phoebe," harbored revenge fantasies against the "rampant testosterone" work environment that prides itself on violence, destruction, relentless competition, and one-up-manship in video game design and play. For example, to express aggression, her male colleagues jokingly retort while playing games that the "bloodthirst is unquenchable." Special FBI agents Dana Scully and Fox Mulder (the *X-Files* television series' protagonists) are on assignment to solve this unclassified "X-File" before the First Person Shooter game's release date to the public.

The "First Person Shooter" episode is undoubtedly loaded with multiple, intersecting, and overlapping layers of critical inquiries for possible discussion such as reception practices of female audiences, economic and social classes represented or ignored in the series, thinly disguised reenactments of colonial exploits under the guise of "unexplained" phenomena. However, in this chapter, I unravel selected layers that are pertinent and applicable to understanding Artaud's criteria of cruel theater in the contemporary, machinistic, entertainment culture of video games and media. Here, I specifically compare my line of argument that the video game character that kills humans is one of "Artaud's Daughters," in virtual form, according to Artaud's metaphor of

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describe the experiences of the user of certain new media technologies (particularly VR, but also videogames) in which the subjects loses any sense of themselves as separate from the medium or its simulated world" Martin Lister, ed., *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003) 22.

[62] Jordan describes an avatar as a "stable online personality" as it relates to online virtual environments such as MUDs and MOOs (Multi-User Domains such as text-based role-playing chat online chat and games spaces.) An avatar usually becomes a virtual stand-in identity for the human player, with the ability to qualitatively adjust the avatar according to whatever the player designs the avatar to display and act. Tim Jordan, *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 59

theater as likeness to a plague (*la peste*). This episode works as an emulation of Artaud's

notions of Theater of Cruelty, as an enactment of a plague.[63] I also use feminist notions of

embodiment and agency associated with *l'écriture féminine* performance practices. By

approaching the "First Person Shooter" episode within the frame of feminist critique(s)

and discourse(s), I am again working a polemic that engages with feminist possibilities of

interpretation and subjective identification of a male-dominated/created artistic form.

Finally, I elucidate the qualities of transformative processes related to shamanistic

performance practices according to new media theories on the post-human/cyborg body

as imbued with magical and metaphysical capabilities (or metaphysics of the flesh, both

virtual and real).

To be clear, the immersive kind of Virtual Reality (VR) game presented in "First

Person Shooter" episode is not commercially available to the public, if one similar to this

game even exists.[64] Therefore, a slippage of reality/fiction is already inherent in the

episode's narrative. This complicates analysis since there is not any grounding in the

"real" from the onset. All characters are fictional, but a typical *X-Files* episode usually

has some resemblance to an arena of possibility, however far-fetched. Alien abductions

may not be scientifically sound but— as the show suggests through Dana Scully's

constant skeptical interrogations—are in the realm of "extreme possibilities" (Kellner

163). And through a relentless search for understanding the unknown, the show's

mythology is represented in the title credits with the slogan, "The truth is out there."[65]

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[63] As an interesting side note, one of the mythologies at play within the main episodic storyline of the
series is of a government conspiracy that covers up a covert "virus"--or plague--that infects people through
pores in the skin, and then leaks into their eyeballs, shading them in a black, oily substance.

[64] According to my research, this type of wholly immersive Virtual Reality game is not available for
consumers.

[65] The "First Person Shooter," episode strands apart from most other *X-Files* episodes because of the
celebrity writers and the application of a stronger suspension of disbelief, according to show creator Chris

The X-Files: Background Information

In February of 2000, the *X-Files* television series aired its seventh season. The show maintained steady success since its modest premiere on the Fox Network in 1993.[66] FBI agents Fox Mulder (played by David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (played by Gillian Anderson) were the main characters in another female/male duo buddy-cop genre show. However, unlike typical crime television series, these protagonists investigated crimes related to paranormal or government conspiratorial activities. Scully was the scientific skeptic in opposition to Mulder's unyielding belief that all things strange were possible. Throughout the series, the duo "became the thinking person's sex symbols" (Haggins 9). By blending conspiracy theories, alien abductions, unexplained phenomena, and other disturbing situational events (e.g., a family's disclosure of in-bred mutations, deadly sewer creatures, a boy who can spontaneously harness lightening, a man who can predict other people's deaths), the show's "postmodern pastiche" (Kellner 163) style—adopted from multiple entertainment genres—gelled with fans (Howley 259). A cult following similar to the fandom phenomenon of *Star Trek* blossomed. Indeed, *X-Files* conventions were touring the country in the 1990s and up to the early 21st century. (I myself attended an *X-Files* convention in November 1995. I met Frank Spotnitz, one of the show's predominant writers.)

The series exemplified and propelled innovation in television production, fueled by a devoted fan base, combined with the show's sophisticated use of high production values and cliffhanger storylines. The phenomenon of *The X-Files'* success had much to

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Carter. On the DVD release of Season 7, Carter explains in voice-over commentary about the uniqueness of the "First Person Shooter" episode compared to other shows in previous seasons.

[66] The first episode aired of *The X-Files* finished in ratings as number 102 of 108 shows, but continued to rise in popularity, with the average viewing audience of about 13 million viewers per season. See Bambi L. Haggins, "Apocrypha Meets the Pentagon Papers: The Appeals of the X-Files to the X-Phile," *Journal of Film & Video* 53.4 (2001): 9.

do with popular culture zeitgeist and timing. The show premiered during the first

technological convergences of instant interactivity with audiences and fans (who had

usually been passive television spectators). The audience's use of Internet networks, chat

rooms, listservs, and newsgroups kept conversations about the show vibrant and robust

while the country reveled in the high-tech bubble of prosperity.[67] The media-hyped

uncertainty of the approaching millennium (such as the year 2000 "bug" paranoia of a

technological apocalypse) intensified specific cultural imaginations for a particular

technologically able viewing audience niche. Indeed, Kevin Howley writes, "*The X-Files*

addresses fundamental concerns over social, psychological and political control and is an

expression of deep-seated cultural anxieties toward various forms of control

technologies" (258). The series struck a chord with a paranoid, government-suspicious,

intellectually vibrant audience base. The show's success reflected the mindset of a

particular era:

> The *X-Files* is as complex and controversial a phenomenon as the medium of
>
> television has produced in many years; not only because the series has dared to
>
> suggest (with great seriousness) that the government of the United States is
>
> involved in a vast conspiracy with former Nazi and Japanese scientists to assist
>
> alien beings in performing experiments—including, perhaps, genetic
>
> hybridization!—on American citizens, it also has experimented—televisually,

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[67] Charles McGrew conducted a survey of 364 respondents who regularly watched *The X-Files*. Of these, 40% were between the age 25 and 34, with 60% having earned Bachelor's degrees, and a third either graduate students or with terminal degrees. Most viewers were from the United States. 60% of the audience was male, and 40% female. Unfortunately, demographics on race were not conducted for this survey. 80% of the respondents had access to Internet technologies. See Charles and McGrew and Shana Walton, *The Viewer Survey*, 1994, Available: http://www.cs.rutgers.edu/~cwm/NetStuff/Old-Me-Postings/alt.tv.x-files/viewer-survey, September 5 2011.

narratologically, semiotically—with the medium in innovative ways. (Lavery,

Hague and Cartwright 3)

The "First Person Shooter" episode aired in the show's seventh season, on February 17, 2000; its plot centered on an "industrial accident" in a high-tech game development corporation. One of the surprising narrative-based innovations in this episode, as described in the above excerpt, is that Chris Carter— the show's creator and primary writer and director—hired famed "cyberpunk"[68] author William Gibson and science fiction writer Tom Maddox to co-author the script (most episodes were written by Carter and his handful of rotating writers). This was the duo's second telescript for the show. William Gibson, who wrote the lauded future-tech novel *Neuromancer* (1984), famously coined the term "cyberspace." Tom Maddox is another successful "cyberpunk" author. Both writers have considerable clout within science fiction literature circles, especially Gibson, who has been subsumed under a cultural and literary cyber-fetish mythos. In short, with Gibson and Maddox engineering the script, this particular episode brought heightened respectability as well as more critical and intellectual scrutiny to the "First Person Shooter" episode.[69]

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[68] Writer Bruce Bethke first coined the word "cyberpunk" in 1983 with the publication of his short story of the same title, "but it became recognised through its use a year later by journalist Gardner Dozois to characterise the predominantly dystopian (anti-utopian) science fiction sub-genre incorporating writers such as William Gibson, Bruce Sterling and John Shirley." Typically, the term describes a culture that is replete with technological dependences, anarchistic spirit, "dark futuristic narratives" (Collins 165) and human relationships negotiating between the pull of commerce, mythology, and hacker computer culture. See Karen Collins, "Dead Channel Surfing: The Commonalities between Cyberpunk Literature and Industrial Music," *Popular Music* 24.2 (2005): 165.

[69] Considering the potential implications of the popular media representation of computer hackers from 1968 to 2008, Gordon writes that "hacker movies are misrepresenting what hackers do and the types of threats they pose to organizations." Damian Gordon, *Hakers and Hollywood*, 2010, Available: http://hackersandhollywood.blogspot.com/2010/02/irish-times-reeling-in-hackers.html, 18 November 2011. He developed a data set whereby he unraveled the various misconceptions hackers have received from the film industry. Of his list of hacker films, only 10% were female hackers, which Gordon indicates is an accurate statistic in the technology and chip industries.

Descriptions of "First Person Shooter" Episode

Opening Scene

Loud sirens and red lights permeate a closed metal structure where three men dressed in über-military protective gear with giant blaster guns pump themselves up into a frenzied state. An amplified computer (female) voice counts down authoritatively, "T minus 9, 8, 7, 6…." Tension rises as one of the men exclaim a whooping roar of adrenaline-fueled excitement.[70]

Figure 3:   The three male players from the opening scene. They carry "laser blaster" guns and wear stun suits that can generate an electric shock to simulate death. They wear a headpiece that displays the virtual images in the game.

Cut to: a computer screen flashes body sign statistics such as heart rate and temperature. The anxious players' suits have sensors attached to them that monitor their

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[70] The opening sequence (before the first commercial break) of the *X-Files* has a specific structure with the intent to hook the audience through dramatic suspense to return to watching after the commercial. Something fantastical or extremely curious happens within the first couple minutes of the show. The "First Person Shooter" episode in Season Seven is no exception.

health and breathing patterns. The camera pulls back to reveal a woman tapping a keyboard in front of a computer screen. She intently monitors the statistics. A man sits next to her, also working the numbers, charts, and game data. The woman, who we later learn is named Phoebe, comments that they better let the guys out of the chamber "before they kill each other."

Back to the game: a metal door opens and the men flank forward to a secure triangular barricade. They wait cautiously before a long, dark corridor that blocks escape between tall, abandoned warehouse buildings. "They're out there, boys. Ready to fry your *houevos,"* says the apparently most aggressively tactical player to the others. The typically technologically-educated *X-Files* viewing audience realize now that this is some kind of game space. The helmets worn by the players include an eyepiece, indicating a prototypical cyborg/virtual eye, which projects images onto the players' scope of vision.

A roaring gang of motorcycles come barreling forward toward the men. The players unload their ammunition in an egregious rain of flash pulses. One by one each motorcycle rider explodes and disappears into a digital splatter. Once all the enemy players are killed, the next level of the game loads as more bunkers erupt into the space.

The players run to the next protected spot, spraying their bullets in excessive bursts, aiming at the Gestapo-like soldiers in the building's windows. The players separate from each other through the chaos. One is shot and lies "dead" on the ground, unable to rise due to the low-voltage electric shocks his suit produces to simulate death. One of the other players moves down into a sub-section of the game. In the shadowy corridors, while he is looking for his teammates, he hears the click-clack of shoes on the pavement. The show's music shifts into an eerily sweet melody. Black, shiny stiletto heels enter the camera frame. This player sees (as we as the audience sees) in the faded light a silhouette of somebody— a woman—approaching him. She stands before him,

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eyes fixed on him, emotionless. The camera angles from below her back side to reveal

her barely covered derrière and seductively arched back. She wears a black vinyl, shiny,

one-piece fetishistic outfit, like a dominatrix's costume. He kneels down to her in gallant

supplication. She offers him her hand in royal indignation. He kisses her hand.

"Who are you?" He asks in complete bedazzlement.

"I am Maitreya. This is my game," she answers, while flipping her hand over to

reveal a flint pistol. She shoots. Then, in a wavy, dizzy digital fade out, she disappears.

Begin opening credits.

Figure 4:   Maitreya's first appearance in fetishistic leather wear.

Description of Scene Two

In another scene in the *X-Files* "First Person Shooter" episode, a new character

enters the game design company headquarters. He is Daryl Musashi, an accomplished

number one gamer, "the original guru" (says Mulder) from Japan who attempts to

conquer the "bug" in the game.[71] When he enters the iron clad, elevator-like enclosing as the countdown begins, he quickly flips and loads his blaster game-guns in Western movie fashion. He is the ultimate cool gamer king.

He aces the first level of the game with the oncoming motorcycles in record speed. The team behind the monitors, including the geeky, hacker characters known as The Lone Gunmen, cheers him on. He then moves stealth-like into the same area where the first player met his doom. He hears a noise, looks up, and sees Maitreya wielding an enormous broadsword. Maitreya speaks in Japanese, "Forgive me for what I am about to do." Then, in one sweeping gesture, she slices both his hands clean off the bone. Musashi screams in agony. Next, she beheads him. The others watch behind the safety of the monitors; they freeze, aghast and stunned. Maitreya, the Virtual Reality avatar, has killed another real human.

Description of Scene Three

The final scene with Maitreya is the climax of the "First Person Shooter" episode of *The X-Files*. In an attempt to annihilate the destructive game character Maitreya--who continues to kill human players—Fox Mulder enters the game-playing arena, wearing the same militarized industry outfit as the others. His Lone Gunmen pals are trapped in the game-playing arena, when suddenly the game starts on its own accord, without the command of the operators. Mulder manages to safely rescue his buddies from the game space, but he's stuck to defend himself against the deadly enemy. The game setting shifts to a Western, ghost town theme, with Maitreya wearing holsters and flapping leather pants, boots, and a cowboy hat. Her shirt, however, is overtly feminine with busty ruffles

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[71] Undoubtedly, the stereotyping of Asian male as the ultimate geek/cybernaut is recognizably blatant in this particular scene. His Asian identity lends more romantic lure in an "Orientalist," Toyko-techno-chic way.

and blood red in color. She soon strips down to a black vest with her firm and flat belly partially exposed.

Figure 5:   Maitreya as she clones herself in the Wild West shoot-out scene.

Mulder blasts his pistol repetitively, but she suddenly can clone herself, making her destruction all the more impossible. He finds himself vulnerable without ammunition. Scully, who watches behind the monitors, goes to rescue him. The metal door opens and Scully blasts away as she enters the game. She dons the techno-military garb of the other male players. Maitreya is now able to replicate herself, cloning herself seemingly endlessly, and still shoots repeatedly at Mulder and Scully, exhausting Scully's efforts.

Figure 6:   Scully enters the game to save her FBI partner, Mulder.

Inside the control booth, Phoebe and her partner argue about how to destroy Maitreya. To kill her would mean the destruction of the game and all their efforts, and subsequent riches behind it. The Gunmen, who watch in horror as their friends face potential death, demand to know the code for the kill switch that will end the mayhem. Phoebe, who stands between her male co-worker, Ivan, and the trio, ponders intently on what to do. Finally, she succumbs and names the code: "Shift-Alt-Bloodbath." One of the Lone Gunmen types the code quickly onto the keyboard. A bright whiteness flutters on the monitors, then crashes into darkness. Mulder and Scully are found in the game arena, hair tousled, utterly exhausted, on their backs (suggestive of post-coitus ecstatic denouement). Mulder says wryly, "Now that's entertainment."

Figure 7:   After the duo has destroyed the avatar, Maitreya. Their stun suits are stained yellow from the fake "blood" to simulate injury in the virtual game.

ARTAUD'S PLAGUE (*LA PESTE*) AND THEATER

In this section, I unpack how the "First Person Shooter" episode reflects particular traits of Artaud's notion that theater is akin to a "plague." I focus on Artaud's metaphor: the plague (*la peste*) as (dis)embodied empowerment, a force that sprouts out of necessity, without—upon initial examination—revealing its symptoms. The plague is like the "force" of emotions, or a silent intuition that can burst unexpectedly in volcanic eruptions. Sometimes, when pushed against a proverbial wall, a person must announce "Enough is enough!" And then, the action—the theater of survival—initiates. Survival takes precedence over all social and familial structures. For Artaud, the sole objective is a fight for life by any means necessary. Artaud writes, "Once the plague is established in a city, the regular forms collapse" (*T and D* 23). Violence is enacted by those inclined toward or forced without choice into violence:

Between the victim of the plague who runs in shrieking pursuit of his visions and

the actor in pursuit of his feelings; between the [wo]man who invents for himself

[or herself] the personages [s]he could never have imagined without the plague . . . the action of the theater like that of the plague [is] on the level of a veritable epidemic (*T and D* 24).

Characters are born and created out of desperation to escape the plague's devastation. Horror, bloodshed, mangled bodies, absence of generosity; these dissolute qualities become the *mise en scene* in the theater of Artaud's plague.

In the introduction to the dissertation, I more thoroughly describe Artaud's articulation of the theater and the plague in metamorphic terms. Below, I summarize and recapitulate some of his core ideas. Artaud describes the effects of the plague (*la peste*) in graphic, gory detail, a macabre list of putrescence that today would be fitting for a Hollywood horror film, or, as it pertains to this chapter, a violent video game:

The gall bladder…is full, swollen to bursting with a black, viscous fluid so dense.
. . . On the inner surfaces of the stomach membrane, innumerable spurts of blood.
. . . the hardened pus must be virtually torn, as in certain human sacrifices, with a sharp knife. . . . the injured lungs and brain blacken and grow gangrenous. . . . the brain melts, shrinks, granulates to a sort of coal-black dust. (*T and D* 20)

This visually dramatic story of a human body's impending decrepitude and death is repulsive but may also be oddly intriguing. Step by step, the organs fail and the body becomes a shell of hollowed substances, "the body without organs."[72] We can see the effects, the breaking down, but still there is no apparent cause. Where is the source of the scourge? How does one contain and decontaminate the contagion?

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[72] The concept of the "body without organs" has been discussed in depth and deconstructed through psychoanalytic philosophies by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *Anti-Oedipus.*

The order of things is turned upside down, and spontaneity coupled with fear induces unexpected, outrageous feats. This desperately overtaken state of being, metaphorically described by Artaud as the devastating catalyzing effects of a plague, "is identical to the state of an actor entirely penetrated by feelings that do not benefit or relate to his real condition" (*T and D* 24). In other words, according to Artaud, the actor, in a desperate need to survive the penetrating, consumptive hunger of an audience (the plague as unquenchable spectators), "invents for himself personages he could never have imagined without the plague" (*T and D 25*). But unlike a truthful person who, out of desperation and with reasoning that made sense in the scope of prevalent violence, committed real murder to survive a ravaging plague, the actor who portrayed a murderer had only to imagine the act, and the impetus for the nefarious action "dissolves into universality" (25). Thus, "we must recognize," he summarizes, "that the theater, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative" (27). But what is communicated and to whom? And to bring us back to the analysis of the *X-Files* episode: what if an avatar stands in for the action on behalf of the "actor" or the one who acts because of a need for decisive action?

In some ways, I am alluding to an underlying fear of theater's obsoleteness in a culture driven by technological gadgetry and immediate demand for personalized entertainment content. In her "Millennial Artaud" essay Elizabeth Sakellaridou suggests:

[P]ost human age and post-dramatic theater pose the greatest threat as they definitely announce the death of the theater, the art of life par excellence, and legitimize its total replacement by the products of cybernetic and digital technology. It is at this conspiratorial junction between contemporary theory and technology for the murder of a corporeal theater striving in sweat and articulation,

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that the recuperation and reconstitution of Artaud's double-faced Theater of

Cruelty is of the most crucial importance. (50)

In other words, as Sakellaridou discusses, theater practices are at a crossroads in their form and presentation in relationship to technology. With the rapid expansion and utilitarian use of digital media to present performance work, theater seems under threat. The invention of cinema also created a similar anxiety amongst theater makers; however, theater's most obvious advantage is its corporeality and ability to house sensoriums of delight or cruelty. Cybernetic technology enters theater in a space between the limits of the human body and the slick perfection of the cyborg body.

Returning to Artaud's criteria, the potential for a virtual reality game (as theatre) to invoke a complex "theater and the plague" environment is perhaps more acute as compared to live performance. Indeed, as Chris Salter writes in *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*:

Artaud described theater's relationship to alchemy, the medieval practice of

transforming base metals into gold. Whereas alchemy sought to use symbols as

stand-ins or doubles for the real process of transformation, the theater also

engaged in a similar process of doubleness. The theater was not a representation

of real life, but in Artaud's exact words, instead a *la réalité virtuelle* (virtual

reality), one that evoked the alchemical process of transforming matter from

mind. (46)

Literally, video games—much like any other art form—are "alchemical" products manufactured by "transforming matter from mind." The "matter" is the game itself,

created usually through a collaborative team of designers and programmers to create virtual, immersive worlds.

THE "FIRST PERSON SHOOTER" EPISODE OF *THE X-FILES:* AN ARTAUDIAN ANALYSIS

Criteria of Cruelty

In this section, I elucidate in detail how the "First Person Shooter" episode specifically emulates Artaud's Theater of Cruelty. Examples of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty include the following: (1) Non-reliance on the text, "to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (*T and D* 90), (2) sounds and movements prioritized over spoken words—if words are spoken, they are incantations or make word's meaning into mythic purpose, (3) use of symbolism and signs to inscribe meaning, (4) "Direct communication . . . between the spectator and the spectacle" (*T and D* 96), (5) "attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works" (*T and D* 98), (6) embodiment of theater in the flesh: "In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds" (*T and D* 99), and (7) use of trance induction techniques to lure an audience into its own psychological or psychic state for the purposes of personal, direct, transformational, curative change.

The improvisational format of a video game space is one in which choices and scripts are unpredictable within a set of parameters. Binary codes and programming languages in general create patterns of numbers (zeros and ones) that are not meant to be literal or spoken aloud. But through their execution in programming software, a digital object can directly express sweeping gestures. *The program itself is between the "gesture and thought."* The "thought" is generated by the programmer, who engineers the "gesture," or the action of the object or simulated player, such as Maitreya. Maitreya

embodies, in digital representation, a compendium of Phoebe's frustrations. Maitreya's energetic source--her battery in a sense—is fundamentally the force of emotions fueled by the violent energetic output of revenge, rage, and injustice. Maitreya's actions and motivations—the vicious cutting of hands with a sword on another player, or the inability to express emotion at all by being a machine—are actually Phoebe's thoughts, hyper-realized, digitalized, and animated.

Artaud writes that the "interpretation" of Theater of Cruelty "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" (*T and D* 98). Artaud seems to suggest creating a performance quite similar to holographic imagery, or at the very least, a specific code and format that adheres to set rules "like a code." I suggest this is similar to both computer programming and its results in game design and all the languages (or codes) associated with "hypertext" (above text).

Hypertext is non-sequential writing, a form of linking documents to one another so that readers find their own "path" towards narrative connections in the murk of data. Development of the World Wide Web was based on this model.[73] This "language" is much like the fragmented writings of Artaud, a kind of schizoid distraction disorder that impairs solidifying themes into concretized theories. Like "interactivity," the word hypertext is often used in new media studies but rarely defined: "To declare a system as interactive is to endorse it with a magic power" (Lister 30). The language of interactivity is essentially a language beyond scripted texts due to the spontaneity of the negotiations between player and computer.

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[73] See Lister, ed., *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. on the development of the WWW based system common on the internet. The author suggests that hypertext was credited to Ted Nelson in the 1960's.

In virtual reality, the environment itself is prioritized over spoken words; images and sensations of the experience take precedence over speaking. But, if words are spoken, they typically carry suggestive clues to the game's strategy or offer clues to the player. By stating her name aloud, Maitreya announces she is ready to perform her violence. In the scene with Daryl Musashi, she speaks to him in Japanese, "Forgive me for what I am about to do." Her preceding gestures are wrought with mythic purpose, alluding to romantic and sexualized notions of Samurai codes of conduct. Her movements are linked to her words in a stylized and violent manner.

Maitreya's outfit and body shape symbolically represent clichéd notions of sexual desire and violence. Her hyper-femininity, accented by acrobatic fighting skills, signify a lustful terror from multiple gazes and consumers. The avatar herself is an embodied symbol of Phoebe's desire for agency and revenge.

The avatar character's body shape and form is an exaggerated representation of a scanned image of a real woman who happens to be a voluptuous exotic dancer in the fictional "real" life of the show. In the game space, the avatar woman's costume consists of a black thong leather dominatrix outfit reminiscent of infamous virtual woman *Tomb Raider*'s Lara Croft, as well as other highly sexualized and physically strong comic book and video game female protagonist personas. The avatar resembles the disproportionally "deformed" (Poole 153) female video game character, similar to Lara Croft's "stereotypically Western, chesty-and-wasp waisted fashion" (153). Steven Poole writes in *Trigger Happy* about the displaced desire for the unrealistic representation of avatars, especially female ones, in video games:

> For Lara Croft is an abstraction, an animated conglomeration of sexual and
>
> attitudinal signs (breasts, hotpants, shades, thigh holsters) whose very blankness

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encourages the (male or female) player's psychological projection, and is exactly

why she has enjoyed such remarkable success as a cultural icon. A good

videogame character like Lara Croft or Mario is, in these ways, inexhaustible.

(165)

Maitreya clearly demonstrates how animated and virtual female bodies are most typically

represented in consumer culture. The most economically successful game characters

hinge on their ability to be slightly "unreal" from "real" humans, which feeds into a

desire for something other than what is obtainable or feasible in reality. To create a

symbolic representation of a woman in a video game, she essentially must be slightly

beyond the realm of what is possible in the "real" world.

The video game is <u>a personal experience between the player and the game itself;</u>

<u>the player is in "direct communication" with the spectacle of the game space</u>. Continuing

with the show's semiotic traits in motif, this episode complicates literal notions of the

real and "virtual" since this avatar does actually kill players. When Scully investigates the

crime scene and point blank says, "This man's been shot," the other game developer/

Silicon Valley entrepreneur replies, "No, that's impossible. If he were shot, there would

be an actual *gun* involved." Scully shows him the giant blaster, "What do you call this?"

He explains it emits only frequencies, nothing lethal. She then shows him the blood

coming from the dead body. He replies, "I get it. He's dead." Thus, the mystery begins

and Scully and Mulder must uncover the clues to how a "virtual" enemy could kill a

corporeal human being. There is therefore an unresolved complication of bodies at play

in virtual reality. An actual human death, as opposed to a virtual death, is an excessively

real and extremely "direct communication" between the game environment and the

players.

The FPS game hints at other popular culture techno-mythologies and fantasies through its game environments. Such landscapes stage familiar settings, from barren industrial wasteland reminiscent of the futuristic-android film *Blade Runner*, to Nazi soldiers hiding in empty warehouses as sniper enemy targets, to the western-themed landscape of the Wild West. The game space also combines these environments with anachronistic overlaps to include tanks in the ghost town. The staging in video games can be an extraordinarily precise simulation to affectively present exactly what the programmer or player desires for "entertainment."

Virtual reality is an interactive theater in the flesh combined with the use of vector graphics, headgear, and "stun suits" that can simulate death. Peter Lunenfeld defines two types of interactivity, one being "extractive" hypertextual navigation, such as searching the World Wide Web or using computer technologies for database information and storing; the other is immersive navigation in which the "goals of the immersed user will include the visual and sensory pleasures of spatial exploration" (Lister 21). This suggests that users of interactive technologies expect a fully visceral experience, or at least, an interactive engagement with technology. A completely interactive world is all-encompassing as "theater in the flesh" with a player's senses heightened. In other words, "Immersive interaction occurs on a spectrum from 3D worlds represented on single screens through to 3D spaces represented through the head-mounted displays of virtual reality technologies" (Lister 21).

Through such devices that immerse spectators wholly into a video game, virtual environments magnetize players into a kind of hypnosis. Thus, they willfully engage in a trance-like state, slightly removed from actual reality. Players engage in a dynamic relationship with a game while simultaneously negotiating their emotions in an

ephemeral world. In 1985, with the dawn of video game and video game culture, Sherry Turkle writes:

> Video games are a window onto a new kind of intimacy with machines that is
> characteristic of the nascent computer culture. The special relationship that
> players form with video games has elements that are common to interactions with
> other kinds of computers. Thus, the holding power of video games, their almost
> hypnotic fascination, is a form of computer holding power. The experiences of
> video game players help us to understand this holding power and something else
> as well. At the heart of the computer culture is the idea of constructed, "rule-
> governed" worlds. (*The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* 67)

Turkle's description of the video game as having "holding power" is precisely the kind of trance state that Artaud may have applied to his Theater of Cruelty affect. To play a video game, the player must be completely immersed in the actions, strategies, and interactivity with the game. The player, in a sense, loses herself while still maintaining active mental processing. The mind is not passive, as in watching television, but is deeply involved in problem-solving situations. In the "First Person Shooter" episode, Phoebe and the other characters feel a connection to Maitreya similar to the "hypnotic fascination" Turkle describes. They are in awe of the capabilities of this pseudo-artificial intelligent avatar, as well as obsessed with finding a means to destroy her before she destroys the "rule-governed" world of the first person shooter game. In her book *Reality is Broken,* Jane McGonigal argues that this kind of trance-like focus on game spaces can actually be

applied to solving real world problems by utilizing game-play as a vehicle to strategize and explore an array of solutions to actual dilemmas.[74]

L'ÉCRITURE FÉMININE AS "CYBERFEMINIST" ACTIVISM IN MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Using textual analysis of specific scenes in the "First Person Shooter" episode, in this section I examine how and why the virtual reality avatar, Maitreya, and her programmer, Phoebe, paradoxically promote bleak futuristic narratives and dramatically endorse feminist notions of agency, play, and identification in cyberspace. I discuss this episode from a cyberfeminist perspective, which includes arguments about embodiment and the virtual in feminist performance practices. I use Hélène Cixous' notion of *l'écriture féminine* as the theoretical underpinning to my arguments.

Sadie Plant defines cyberfeminism as "an insurrection on the part of the goods and materials of the patriarchal world, a dispersed, distributed emergence composed of links between women, women and computers, computers and communication links, connections and connectionist nets" (274). Cyberfeminism also has the capacity to disrupt the patriarchal flow of capital and its associative hold on computer-mediated communications. In fact, the Old Boys Network, a loosely affiliated group of cyberfeminists formed in 1997 in Berlin, asks, "If Cyberfeminism uses the Net as a strategy and medium for political, cultural, and social action within decentralized information and communication networks, what could the monstrous consequences be?" (Reiche and Kuni 17)[75] Indeed, the monster is like Maitreya, the unleashed and autonomous cyborg, who embodies in virtual form extreme emotional and psychological

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[74] See Jane McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011)

[75] The Old Boys Network can be located on the Internet at www.obn.org. This group reclaimed the definition of the old boy network, which signifies an interrelated group of men who graduated from colleges and schools with high esteem and prestige.

expressions in order to eradicate social injustice. However, the monster is without law—other than her subjective violent law— which eventually destroys everything, like the plague, without discrimination and concern.

I apply Nina Lykke's notions of triple-threat metaphor, "Goddess/Cyborg/Monster," to elucidate the anxieties and complexities of female identifications associated with technological representations and subjectivities. Lykke distinguishes feminist deconstructions of the sciences as they function in academic dichotomies (hard/soft) through a triangulation of the monster/goddess/cyborg mythology in culture.[76] Her approach to cyberfeminist discourse is a useful analytical tool to unpack both the semiotic and material in the "First Person Shooter" episode by positioning "Matireya" in likeness to Lykke's Monster/Goddess/Cyborg metaphor.

Donna Haraway's oft-quoted, "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess," also bridges Lykke's notions, in addition to feminist theories in new media studies. In her "Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway makes the claim that the cyborg as a woman represented in social reality (as opposed to virtual reality) is a "condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (Haraway 22). For the dismayed programmer, Phoebe, her daily labor includes working with mostly men in a social space that does not necessarily welcome her imaginative desires, although the writers of this *X-Files* episode fail to reveal what other alternative game-spaces she might have invented before the she-devil avatar stirred havoc in VR. Her labor as female minority in a male-dominated company extends Haraway's argument for a Marxist-feminist approach to technology and labor

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[76] See Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996)

consciousness. Her use-value as a programmer may be equal to her co-workers, but her secret wish to claim a space for herself in this environment is disproportionate.

I set aside, but do not dismiss, William Gibson's position as a white accomplished male co-writer of the "First Person Shooter" *X-Files* episode and the relevance of that fact. However, I use feminist discourses that emphasize deconstructing the semiotics and representations in text itself—in this case, the specific scenes with the avatar and her creator, Phoebe, to reveal feminist features of the show.

Women Gamers' Identification and Representation in Video Games

The "First Person Shooter" episode is—at its dramatic core—about a fantasy virtual reality game with characteristics that suggest a highly charged, gendered masculine space. These qualities are exemplified through extreme militarism, enormous weapons, obscene violence, aggressiveness, and relentless death to the enemy urges. Although it would be irresponsible to suggest that women players would not enjoy or play this type of violent game, the show emphasizes the obviously gendered economy of the gaming industry: first person shooter games are meant for men. In this *X-Files* episode, Phoebe as woman, and as virtual reality video game programmer, had a secret desire that involved *writing* and thus artistically creating her desires into computer code.

Phoebe "wrote" the avatar Maitreya into a separate and private game space for her own amusement. But Phoebe's avatar creation that symbolized her surge of desire, extended further than what Phoebe had intended: the avatar "jumped programs," as a plague can randomly move between locations; meaning Maitreya had managed to incorporate herself into another video game. Maitreya became the "bug" in the commercialized "First Person Shooter" game the company had been beta-testing. Theoretically, this game-space leaping is possible with the advent of artificially

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intelligent avatars who are housed in the same mainframe. In this fictional universe of the *X-Files,* the avatar's intelligent behavior has somehow managed to take over and in fact destroy another game, demonstrating the power of Phoebe's "writing" beyond her original motivation for an expressive outlet to vent her frustration.

Phoebe, the female programmer in the "First Person Shooter" episode, had scripted albeit in computer code, an attempt at what I would consider *l'écriture féminine* by responding to her desires and motivational drive for equanimity and representation of her emotional rage and fury through the symbolic avatar, Maitreya. Hélène Cixous writes in "The Laugh of the Medusa," "Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a . . . divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 879). This monster is her cruel double, the double that rebels and activates her rebellion through virtual empowerment, through an avatar as her double life. From where do Phoebe's anger and her need for revenge and cathartic release come? Phoebe reveals her secret to Scully in a blunt outpouring of her confusion in the following dialogue:

> Scully. But Phoebe, she is still a killer. I can't explain it, but she is. And you put her in that game.

> Phoebe. No I didn't. I was creating my own game in my own computer. It was totally secret. I never told anyone. But somehow she jumped programs and she's feeding off the male aggression. It's making her stronger and stronger.

Phoebe's secret drive to create a game that appeals to her alone is similar to how Cixous discusses women's writing about her daily lived experiences. For Hélène Cixous,

the mirror image, or the double of women's quotidian performances, can be unraveled in the creation of a new language constructed through her lived experience and daily perceptions which inspire her to manipulate language in such a way that her experience truthfully matches with the language used to express it. Cixous writes about woman's secret desire to write, and that this desire is often kept secret due to a sense of appearing "silly" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 879) in the face of "great men" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 876). Cixous continues:

> Besides, you've written a little, but in secret. And it wasn't good, because it was in secret, and because you punished yourself for writing, because you didn't go all the way; or because you wrote irresistibly, as when we would masturbate in secret, not to go further, but to attenuate the tension a bit, just enough to take the edge off. ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 876)

Furthermore, Phoebe's code writing "in secret" was a means for her to maintain sanity, and to "take the edge off," amidst a frenzy of mostly male co-workers who become overly flooded with adrenaline, more than Phoebe can endure.

On the female and queer-gamer focused website,[77] *The Border House,* posts by various authors argue for feminist-oriented games and game characters. On this blog, a contributor sarcastically writes about a recently released game called *RamaCity* that the game producers actively promoted as a game meant for men:

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[77] The descriptor for the website's theme reads: "The Border House is a blog for gamers. It's a blog for those who are feminist, queer, disabled, people of color, transgender, poor, gay, lesbian, and others who belong to marginalized groups, as well as allies. Our goal is to bring thoughtful analysis to gaming with a feminist viewpoint and up-to-date news on games, virtual worlds, and social media." See Tami "Cuppycake" Baribeau, *What Do You Think: Objectification of Men in Games*, 2011, The Border House, Available: http://borderhouseblog.com/?p=5436, 20 November 2011 2011.

So apparently what brings men in to this game is visually stunning graphics and

sophisticated gameplay. Women need their games simplistic, both in looks and

mechanics. Women need games that are cute and cuddly, and men like to build

things and create masterpieces. It's a fucking simplified *SimCity* in a browser. I

personally know many women (including myself) who played the shit out of that

game.

We're constantly bombarded with advertisements for traditional console games

featuring male protagonists, shallow over-sexualized female throwaway

characters, guns, action, boobs, violence, edginess, grittyness as the basic standard

for male-targeted gaming. And don't get me wrong, that offends the heck out of

me. However, I would like someone to tell me why a city-building casual game is

being spun as a game for men. (Baribeau)

It seems that the gaming industry may have caved into a male-focused marketing niche.

However, as evidenced by female gamers, such as those who submit their critiques on

The Border House, players of First Person Shooter games can, and do, actively cross

gender borders and sometimes without a direct identification with primary characters in

the game. Complicating the issue of secret or underscored desires for representation,

Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins explore the "girls' games" movement. They write, "As

women gain control over the means of cultural and technological production, they are

having to struggle with how to translate their ideals into material practices" (Cassell and

Jenkins, 4). And, as they further argue, ideas generated from women game designers are

often rejected by their male cohorts because of implicit assumptions about what is a fun product to play, and for whom.

Reception practices for the gaming industry are focused on male, white, heterosexual consumers, although this statistic is slightly changing with the release of games such as *Dragon Age II* that wove a gay narrative into the storyline, or the slowly rising number of female programmers in the gaming industry. *World of Warcraft* is a medieval-themed, multi-player *Dungeons and Dragons*-type strategic role-playing game. *Call of Duty* (the most popular First Person Shooter game to date)[78] has players in various souped-up military coup d'etats inspired by actual wars, such as the World Wars, Desert Storm, and the Vietnam War. *Duke Nukem* is a hyper-masculinized, cigar-smoking, muscle man with an arsenal of automatic weapons and grenades who undertakes missions that require copious deaths and stealth knifings.

In *From Barbie to Mortal Combat,* Cassell and Jenkins emphasize, "Female game designers consistently complain that their ideas were rejected because they did not conform to their company's often implicit assumptions about what made for a 'good game' or a 'fun' product" (Cassell and Jenkins 26). The political implication suggested in this *X-Files* episode is that Phoebe makes up the gap of entertainment media for women through bloody body counts, a violent revenge and retribution enacted by her avatar, Maitreya.

Interestingly, the most used gaming console by women, in particular, is the Nintendo Wii, which is more interactive in its design, allowing players to actively participate in the game space through dance (*Dance Dance Revolution*) or sports games (*Wii Tennis, Golf, Bowling*). In other words, the Wii provides the player an opportunity to

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[78] See Zach Waggoner, *My Avatar, My Self: Identity in Video Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009)

get off the couch and use more than thumbs and joysticks to control the actions of the avatars on the screen. It is the closest thing to embodied virtual reality without wearing a sense-enhancing helmet or glasses, as do the players in this *X-Files* episode. Thus, one could speculate that interactive and immersive virtual reality video games might in fact equalize the gender gap in game design and players.

From a programming perspective, Phoebe's role as laborer in the gaming industry is outnumbered in terms of gender, especially in the programming sector. Most jobs for women in the high-tech industry of Silicon Valley are distinctly sexed, raced, and classed in menial and low-pay chip manufacturing production (see Alexander and Mohanty). Women are few and far between as game programmers. A salary survey by *Game Developer* magazine shows that women make up only ten percent of the job market as game programmers, but women gamers (as players) consist of between forty-three to fifty-one percent (depending on the kinds of games being surveyed). This disproportionate number suggests that although game playing may spread more widely across the gender spectrum, the actual ideas, images, and storylines of games themselves remain in the dominant domain and control of men.[79]

The "Plague" of (Dis)Embodied Agency

In an interview in the book *From Barbie to Mortal Combat* (Cassells and Jenkins), Aliza Sherman astutely and ironically points at the most obvious missing combination of qualities in entertainment game design. This triple combination, or what is lacking in most video games today, is (1) games with strong female characters, (2) spectacular adventure, *and* (3) a political slant that alludes to fighting for women's equality and ascension to power. Of course, there is always a danger inherent in

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[79] I do not have the scope here to offer in depth research on developers across race, class, ability, or sexual orientation.

marketing strategies and reception of games with political issues. The "entertainment" aspect of the game may diffuse or numb efficacy towards political agency in the women players' actual lived experiences outside the computer gamer interactivity. The game may provide only a blank cathartic experience rather than a call to action, or as Dana Scully tells Fox Mulder in the *X-Files* episode, "It's to get your ya-ya's out."

Using avatar identification as a mirroring of "secret" desires is perhaps the first step to understanding and creating the kinds of games women want to play. When Scully confronts Phoebe about Maitreya, Phoebe cowers in apology for creating the vengeful destroyer avatar:

> Phoebe. You don't know what it's like—day in and day out, choking in a haze of rampant testosterone.
>
> Scully. I wouldn't be so sure.

In addition to the television episode's portrayal of Phoebe's frustration, there is a general sense of female-gamer rage and retribution as reactions to the vapid virtual abuse suffered by anyone who identifies herself as female. (*Anger brews in me as well, like a poisonous revolt, as I examine screenshots on a website that explicitly addresses the rampant sexism and hate speech that confronts female players if they reveal their sex*.) Below are some screenshots from women gamers that the players captured during game play. These images are from the website *Fat, Ugly, Or Slutty* (fatuglyorslutty.com), with the tag line on the top of the page: "You play video games? So are you fat, ugly or slutty…?" An illustration of a savvy woman winks on the upper right corner. The website name alludes to the general tone of most of the insults aimed at the women gamers, especially if they beat their male game competitors. Moreover, these screenshots of

insults aimed at women gamers are exacerbated by the gaming industry's repeatedly demeaning representation of women characters in games. Such phrases as, "I hope you get rape [*sic*] tonight!" or "How about you get off your fat ass and do something with your life!" fuel desires for anti-hate speech revenge.
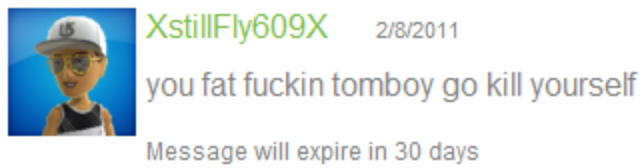
Figure 8:   Screenshot text: "You fat fuckin tomboy go kill yourself."
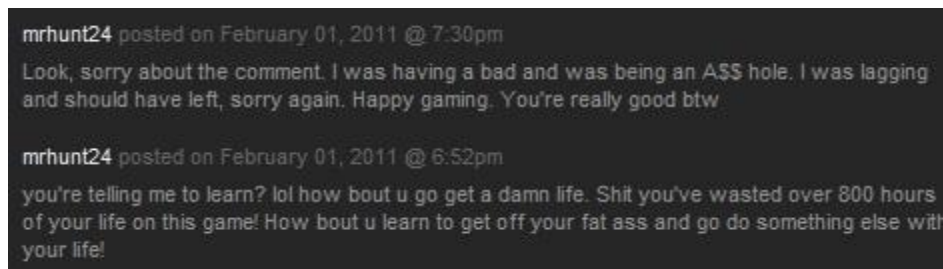
Figure 9:   Screenshot text: "how bout u learn to get off your fat ass and go do something else with your life."

Figure 10:   Screenshot text: "i hope you get rape tonight"

Figure 11:   Screenshot text: "ur bad. ur not worth the food stamp bitch"

Regarding issues of female body shape, representation and misogyny in video games, in 2009, Sony released a game called *Fat Princess* in which multiple players attempt to rescue an overweight female (the "princess") by feeding her excessive numbers of cakes and sweets, making her impossibly large for the enemy village to carry her away. Another game often targeted as not only sexist, but egregiously racist, is the Playstation console game *Grand Theft Auto*. In the game, players are encouraged to steal cars, randomly shoot, hit, punch, and kill people on the streets of an urban cityscape. One player can hire prostitutes and make drug deals as mission assignments that earn player points. This particular game blatantly portrays social decay and community violence through exaggerated gestures and representations of poor, urban and raced youth. In

another website blog titled *The Nuclear Unicorn: One Woman's Quest to Accidentally Destroy Us All*, writer Quinnae Moongazer astutely expresses the overall sentiments of marginalized groups in the gaming industry:

> Every video game's fantasy society expresses a certain theory of that society's existence. However fantastic and unreal it may first appear, it is always expressing some theory, great or small, of human social organisation. This implies structure, yet structure is often absent. The reason for this has much to do with the great problem that vexes a lot of us who critique video games from a social justice perspective. (Moongazer)

To put Moongazer's opinions into context, why does examining the gaming industry from a social justice perspective matter? Because the gaming industry nets more than $10.5 billion in sales revenue in the United States, not including subscriptions, merchandise, or gaming consoles and paraphernalia.[80] The average age range of game purchases by all genders is thirty-four years old. This statistic raises questions about time and labor in relationship to entertainment in households within adult populations; to put it bluntly: who does the laundry in a household with adults who play video games and is game-play time negotiated fairly between adult occupants? There are a lot of video game players out there, spending hours upon hours in virtual theatrical simulations. These statistics raise questions about the representational and identificatory social effect video games programmed by/for/with women, queers, trans-people, and persons of various racial and social varieties have on a capitalistic, patriarchal, heteronormative culture.

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[80] Statistic from NPD global marketing research group's 2009 study on the gaming industry's metrics. See *Npd Sales Figures*, 2011, Available: http://vgsales.wikia.com/wiki/NPD_sales_figures, 20 November 2011.

Time and labor are not invisible and abstract concepts in video game environments any more than they are in real life. Zach Waggonner writes in *My Avatar, My Self* that he reconciles and relates his game play as another aspect of identification, desire, and pleasure that parallels alongside his "real life" (or "RL"). He writes, "Clearly other players enjoy video games as much as I do. But do other v-RPGers[81] care as much about their avatars as I do about mine? Am I alone in my virtual obsessions, having contracted some sort of virtu-virus or technoschizophrenia" (Waggoner 4)? If these obsessions with gaming, spending time to game, and feelings of great sympathy with an avatar are like a "virtu-virus" in which the player is inexorably linked to the avatar's actions, then what if this game play became a means to transform culture? What if, like Artaud's plague, this obsession could extend into reality? A plague, as an eradicating force of justice, rather than of sickness, could spread and infect like a much-needed reality hack.

A reality hack is a popular culture term associated with hactivism (a combination of the words *hack*, or manipulation of technology beyond its original intent and *activism*). To create a reality hack is usually an artistic endeavor that alters an image, slogan, or cultural assumption to illuminate political or ideological injustice and oppression. Similarly, Artaud's theories and writings demonstrate his renegade attitude towards culture and aristocratic lifestyles. He could be considered an early incarnation of reality hacking before the advent of computers, high-tech culture, and globalization. He used theater as his primary hack source, and then turned to writing, altering standards and forms of writing, in order to extend his vision beyond the safety of traditional forms and restrictive modes of expression.

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[81] V-RPG means Virtual Role Playing Game in which players create and manipulate avatar characters in a virtual, computer game environment.

An avatar provides a virtual outlet for experiments in performing gender bending and culture clashes. In the late 1990's, many first person shooter games did not have female heroines as central characters (or avatars). Male programmers began using "patches," or copied and modified code, to insert female players into the games (Schleiner 121). At that time, the majority of players were young, eighteen to twenty-five year-old men. Schleiner questions, "Are these virtual women dangerously idealized porno dolls or substitute girlfriends for geeks?" (121). Perhaps the insertion of "female" figures into predominately male-user games is less about idealization and more about the pleasure of donning an/other's skin, which may be more socially dangerous for the imaginative desires of men (and strong-headed, willful women) in "real" life.

Monster/Goddess/Cyborg: The Plague's Avatar

I place emphasis on Artaud's notion of creating a theater that is based on "known works" that are recognizable to all, in particular his conviction of *the power of archetypes and mythologies* to engage an audience. In the "First Person Shooter" episode, I am interested in unraveling archetypes that incite both awe and terror. I use Nina Lykke's notion of triple representation of powerful archetypes to elucidate this tension: the goddess, the monster, and the cyborg. Maitreya embodies all these forms. I explain how and why this is pertinent to furthering discourses on feminist notions of agency and power in technological performance practices.

Gene Plunka writes that "Artaud understood that the type of theater that would provide such physical stimulation and simultaneously appeal to the audience's basic fears and carnal desires must focus on myth" (23). In the case of this episode, the myth is based around the future cyborg avatar, named after a Buddhist bodhisattva figure, Maitreya. There is a hybridization occurring in this Maitreya avatar as both the

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mythological yearnings for power and prestige from a female programmer who created her and gave her form, and the storyline around the Buddhist figurehead who, though mythologically embodied in male form, is meant to appear when the world is covered in great chaos, turmoil and malevolence.

The female programmer, Phoebe, who wrote the code for the character Maitreya claimed she needed a "Goddess" in the testosterone-driven world of virtual shoot-'em-up gaming.

> Phoebe. I mean, she was all I had to keep me sane. My only way to strike back as a woman. She was my goddess. Everything I can never be.

Using Nina Lykke's metaphors of monster, goddess, and cyborg as symbols of anxiety and power, I unpack how Maitreya's shift from goddess to cyborg, or vice versa, alludes to elements of feminist embodied virtual and real representations.

Why does Phoebe claim this invented body, her simulated, fantasy double, to be everything that she cannot be? Why must Maitreya be a "Goddess," initially an idealization for Phoebe, then transformed into a terrifying monster-Goddess, vengeful and full of apathetic wrath? Why is Maitreya illustrated as a hyper-sexed, taut, killing machine? For Phoebe, a woman-warrior/assassin avatar symbolizes her suppressed anger and articulated revenge in a gaming environment used mostly by men. Maitreya as Phoebe's disembodied avatar represents a highly charged, radical, and extreme type of justice.

The word "avatar" has its roots in the Hindu translation of *avatara,* meaning the incarnation of god onto the earthly plane. According to Jennifer Gonzalez, an avatar in technological terms is "an object constituted by electronic elements serving as a psychic or bodily appendage, an artificial subjectivity that is attached to a supposed original or

unitary being, an online persona understood as somehow appended to a real person who resides elsewhere, in front of a keyboard" (qtd. in Case *Performing Science and the Virtual* 199). In other words, Maitreya is an extension of Phoebe in the virtual realm whose subjectivity is also, at least initially, attached to Phoebe. Maitreya is the persona Phoebe wishes to have to counter to the kinds of male-invented/dominant avatar virtual tropes she sees every day. Yet, the avatar resembles so much of an assumed male adolescent sex object of desire that permeates many video game advertising. How can Phoebe's construction of an avatar similar to all the other representations of women in the gaming industry be at all feminist? Is it because Maitreya crosses the boundary between reality and virtuality and also *kills* those who challenge her in the most radically feminist way? I am exaggerating to make the point that some women, too, enjoy a genre of games targeted and engineered for male consumers.

From another counter perspective to this embodied myth of a future-goddess self, within the world of computer gaming, Sherry Turkle describes MUDs (Multi-User Domains) or text-based virtual worlds, as an attempt to find wholeness and community. She perceives the "self as realm of discourse rather than as a real thing or a permanent structure of the mind. . . Its bottom –up, distributed, parallel and emergent models of mind have replaced top-down, information processing ones" (*Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet; Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* 178). Or, in Phoebe's case, the goddess she created is also her idealized self, the goddess within so to speak, rather than a sacred, untouchable myth plucked down (appropriated) from the ether of cultural memory.

Phoebe carries with her a dramatic tension that hinges on her desire for an impenetrable and immortal avatar: a cyborg-goddess hybrid. Nina Lykke writes about the

semiotic distinctions and similarities between goddesses and the seemingly indestructible, omnipotent power of cyborgs:

> The cyborg of virtual reality tends to absorb the material into the semiotic. The material is constructed as potentially changeable by semiotic, sign-producing acts, by programming and reprogramming. The goddess is different. When she represents a mythical reality to her adherents, we might say that she, in contrast to her cyborg counterpart, tends to absorb the semiotic into the material. For her adherents, the goddess is—not just a name, a semiotic device; she IS. (85)

Once the imagined (from Phoebe) realized Goddess as avatar turns into uncontrollable monster—and thereby transforms into an intelligent, self-preserving, artificial cyborg—the added dimension of her ability to clone herself (a virtual reproduction) accents another dimension to my analysis. I link back into Artaud's concept of the plague and the power of viral-spreading destruction; the virus here is embodied through the virtual as Maitreya: the avatar has infected the First Person Shooter program. Since Maitreya has killed not one, but two players, she thus becomes acutely real. Maitreya's actions cannot be ignored as a rare blip in the technology, but a repeated action that is demonstrated through duplicated results. Those results are violent, unstoppable, and relentless bloodshed.

Furthermore, Maitreya learns how to replicate herself, so she is capable of performing strategic defense in order to defeat Mulder in the Western high-noon, show-down scene. Implicit here is the threat of female reproduction to patriarchy's anxiety of impotency. She needs no "man" to replicate herself; she is both powerful and embodied, with a vengeance to destroy anyone or anything that threatens her ability to reproduce.

The avatar also becomes a virtual monster, like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, running loose without a sense of etiquette, law, or limit. However, because of Maitreya's ability to clone herself as well as her growing intelligence, she is also a cyborg. Between goddess, monster, and cyborg, she is a "cybergoddess" terrorist—the ultimate manifestation of patriarchal disorder and disruption.

Why does Phoebe claim this invented body, her simulated double turned terrible threat, to be everything she cannot be? Phoebe does not identify herself as the kind of woman that Maitreya is because she is beyond Phoebe's notion of what is "real." Yet, there are parts of Phoebe that long to be possessed with the apathy and fighting skills to combat against the injustices she sees and feels around her on a daily basis. The avatar is the plague that Phoebe longs to catch: a sickness that could be excused because there would have been no other choice but to destroy, for that is the nature of the disease, and the nature of the monstrous plague that is Maitreya.

Phoebe's confession to female FBI agent Scully--"She was my goddess. Everything I can never be"— illuminates the episode's construction of gendered fantasies of empowerment through Goddess identification poised against anxieties of cyborg intelligence. The "virtual" avatar inexplicably morphs into "reality" to seek out her desire to annihilate all other players in the game. The woman-warrior takes over with superior fighting skills, deadly seduction, and infinite reproduction of self (cloning).

For a player-programmer, such as Phoebe, games can activate empowerment through self-identifying desires and actions played out by an avatar. Janet Murray writes in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* about how virtual reality games offer a sense of agency and power to a powerless player, beyond the scope of what cathartic outlets other media offer, such as in film or television:

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The more realized the immersive environment, the more active we want to be within it. When the things we do bring tangible results, we experience the second characteristic delight of electronic environments—the sense of agency. Agency is the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices. We expect to feel agency on the computer when we double-click on a file and see it open before us or when we enter numbers in a spreadsheet and see the totals readjust. However, we do not usually expect to experience agency within a narrative environment. (126)

In game space (or virtual reality), fantasies and horrors can be manipulated, charted, programmed, redesigned and experimented with until the precise emotional effect is generated from the play. The more vividness and specificity the game performs, the more invested and involved the player. Here, the programmer for the First Person Shooter game is a woman, frustrated by her lack of agency in a male-dominated business; her radical response (however accidental) was to "write" into this virtual reality an invincible opponent, a monster femme, capable of tripping up the egotistical, hyper-aggressive tactics of the male players.

The woman cyborg as monster is an apt metaphor, as Hélène Cixous has indicated through her use of the terrifying Medusa (of Greek mythology) as metaphor of female power, including her sexual and artistic freedom. Only the brave dare enter Medusa's dark chambers, risking their inevitable death if she should meet their gaze. The warm-bodied soldier, pumped to destroy her, can be easily frozen into stone (a purgatorial death) as the consequence for usurping her dominion and power. Similarly, Maitreya says to the arrogant gamer in the opening scene, "This is my game," and then kills him

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without hesitation. Like Medusa's deadly stare, Maitreya will destroy as instantly as possible.

The metaphor of the monster speaks to modern science's anxiety about hybrids, and the slippery divide between human and non-human. The "borderline existence" (Lykke) of a creature made from science and technology but reacting at her own visceral will threatens an orderly, logical (read: gendered masculine) understanding of humans' relationship to machines, and our ability to assert our control on our own inventions. As with Dr. Frankenstein, the monster's conscious existence debunks an empirical assessment of the living and not-living. The reassertion of her dangerous presence also mirrors hegemonic anxieties about feminist deconstructions of, for example, patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism. The monster built out of woman's desire for a fair share of representation and play refuses to be silent. The monster refuses to die, as do feminisms and radical acts of pleasure and ecstasy.

Similarly, Phoebe's character in the *X-Files* "First Person Shooter" episode may feel too inhibited and restricted to wear the costume and express the cut-throat attitude of the avatar, Maitreya. For "grrrl gamers," a term popularized in the 1990's for radical women rockers, gamers, and other gender misfits, the pleasure in playing violent games is not as uncommon as social stigma suggests (i.e., women like girly, doll games with character-driven plots and narratives). As Aliza Sherman explains in an interview:

> I think that as a society, we have a big taboo against strong women and a greater
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> fear of women as warriors. Instead of making fashions with Barbie, why can't
>
> girls have a shoot 'em up game such as a Western based on Annie Oakley, or a
>
> fantasy rough and tumble game based on *Xena,* or a scary, evil "stab them in the
>
> heart with a stake" game based on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer?* Or how about a

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"Glass Ceiling" game for women, where they can take an array of automatic weapons to oppressive corporate offices? (Cassell and Jenkins)

In the *X-Files* episode, Phoebe's alter-ego avatar may be viewed as her version of fun, however, because of the avatar's extremely gendered identity (big bosoms, thin waist, and full lips), the object of her gaming desire may not be so different from that of her male programmers. Then again, why not? Phoebe's character in the episode is meek, a nerdy-but-pretty girl. Perhaps she too wants the bloodthirsty thrill of killing her enemies without pity through the body of a hyper-realized death "Goddess" (as Phoebe identifies her). Perhaps she too wants a Lara Croft-type to swashbuckle and shoot through the maze of demons and dragons. And perhaps she too derives pleasure from looking at female bodies clad in vinyl thongs and stilettos. Anne-Marie Schleiner describes her experiences playing violent video games whose intended consumer base is not necessarily female. She writes that she enacts "a kind of drag twice removed, or drag squared" (129) when she plays a computer game heroine. This identification is what Rhona Berenstein calls "spectatorship-as-drag" (32). Schleiner further expresses her emotional investment in playing first person shooter games.

> My pleasure in swift and deadly annihilation of the enemy and gory blasts of pixilated blood provides an immediate, gut-level satisfaction that cuts through the layers of drag, collapsing the female drag queen identity of the avatar back onto my own. Thus the double drag can be reversed on itself, allowing women to relish in gratuitous computer game violence while playing female avatars. (129)

In the "First Person Shooter" episode, Maitreya's vengeance is also "swift and deadly." She has not only defeated the most achieved (male) gamer, Daryl Musashi, she has taken

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away his prized tools with which he plays—his hands. She castrates his power and reaffirms her superiority in the environment which she says is hers alone. She has morphed into something more monstrous and frightening.

Phoebe assumes Agent Scully would understand her predicament and frustration because Scully is also a minority female in the male-dominated FBI: "I was creating my own game, in my own computer. . . But somehow [Maitreya] jumped programs and she's feeding off the male aggression. It's making her stronger and stronger." Here, Phoebe explains several disturbing factors about her life and labor in the gaming industry, in particular, her absence of character identification in a game environment that she prefers to play. She is a programmer generating codes for games that do not necessarily encompass her choice of game consumption. She creates her "own game," exclusively to fulfill this "lack" of game product. Kevin Howley attests that "*The X-Files* articulates widespread apprehension associated with feelings of a lack, or loss of, control" (259). Yet, Phoebe's great creation, the "Goddess," gains the intelligence somehow to "jump programs."[82] The avatar—the goddess— now functions more as uncontrollable monster that becomes stronger through "feeding off the male aggression." She then uses men (or the male players) for her foundational strength and power, a perverse reversal of how in patriarchal cultures, men have co-opted women's invisible labors to build their paternal strongholds. Maitreya embodies a guttural, in-your-face Theater of Cruelty: her monstrous behavior completely abandons notions of "feminine" sentimentality or nurturing, and in its substitution, she is the deadly harbinger of a bloody, visceral spectacle. Maitreya is the actualized monster/goddess/cyborg, born from the female programmer, thus becoming for my purposes here, one of "Artaud's Daughters."

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[82] This concept is highly fantastic and improbable, but is stylistically normal in William Gibson-esque fictional universes.

In an essay titled, "Dracula's Daughters," Sue-Ellen Case examines avatars as a branding of an idea of self in virtual spaces, like the birthing of a corporate logo. Maitreya also is akin to Case's notion of a "Dracula's Daughter." Case writes that "Gendered characterizations, particularly those that are sexualized, have been promoted in this logo culture to create the logo, or in our case the avatar, as fetish" ("Dracula's Daughters" 555). If the fetish is the material manifestation of interior desires through a semiotics of representation, then how does Phoebe's avatar as a kind of violent doppelganger demonstrate her desire? Phoebe explains to Scully, in desperate frustration to end Maitreya's killing spree, "I need your help. You're the only one who can understand."[83] Despite Phoebe's attempt to relate, Scully's response remains practical and pragmatic, "You've got to destroy her Phoebe. There's got to be some way. There's got to be some vulnerability or weakness somewhere." Essentially, Scully asks Phoebe to kill her fetish avatar who is incapable of following (programming) orders. Phoebe must stave off her desire for representation or face the consequences. Dr. Frankenstein must kill the monster (s)he created.

The artificial intelligence as goddess/monster/cyborg is a manifestation of Phoebe's "cruel dreams" (Derrida 240). Jacques Derrida writes of Artaud that cruel theater is made from "absolutely necessary and determined dreams, dreams calculated and given direction," as opposed to Freudian analysis of dreams as displacement or imagistic substitution for latent or forbidden desires. The goddess/monster/cyborg is the articulation of Phoebe's cruel dream, to become puppetmaster/director/creator of an animated work of art, a semiotic, actualized, terrifying, and destructive expression of her frustration.

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[83] This assumption that a woman can understand another woman simply by being in the same gender category is a flailing attempt at feminist concepts of unity and consciousness-raising from the show's writers, William Gibson and Tom Maddox.

Maitreya's cloning replication is like a victim of the plague, the cyborg herself becoming viral and infecting the game space; she who is ultimately, at the crux of matters, Phoebe's manifestation of frustration as a woman in the gaming industry. Maitreya perpetuates an endless urge to survive, despite the adversities that confront her. The goddess aspect of Phoebe's creation deflates, like a punished god sent back to Earth to live like humans, except instead of being human, she is monster-cyborg. The grand vision Phoebe illicitly programmed into the machine must be destroyed in favor of real, human lives. But what of Phoebe's source of the problem, or rather, the symptoms of the plague of (non)representation of female-gamer desire? The show, not surprisingly, ends on a cheeky, pandering tone, punishing Phoebe for her destructive (naughty girl) behavior.

In the final sequence of the episode, Maitreya's digital replacement is the FBI Agent Scully in another scantily clad outfit. The Artificial Intelligence gains intelligence again. However, this time, desire shifts to the audience, the adoring fans of *The X-Files*— the X-Philes, like myself—with the heroine-cum-"badass" Scully transformed into a warrior sex-goddess. By using the actress Gillian Anderson as the next avatar generation, the producers of the show clearly knew what would fuel the fan fiction frenzy (also known as slash fiction).[84] For fans of *The X-Files*, the image is thrilling, because the avatar is in Scully's image, scanned and uploaded into the game. The potency of the episode's cultural commentary is diffused through this silly reproduction of Scully's character (or rather, Gillian Anderson the actress) into something she may have never been represented as within the show's normal "plausible possibilities" plot structure.

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[84] Slash fiction is the phenomenon of fans of various television series, usually science fiction, creating and sharing invented scenes with each other online. They place the show's main characters into situations that are highly sexual, if not taboo according to the show's fictionalized world, including lesbian love affairs, homoerotic fantasies between heterosexual characters, and other titillating storylines that would hardly pass television censorship boards.

Despite this quick descent into cheekiness, a feminist interpretation of the episode is still relevant. Phoebe vindicates her isolation and ostracism in the game industry through symbolic mayhem, which then rapidly spreads like a viral plague throughout the game space. Her emotional malaise becomes a materialized tool of incurable destruction: a goddess of wrathful intent. Although Phoebe regrets the loss of actual lives in the game space, in some ways, having this monstrous-cyborg-avatar annihilate a major vein of oppression—economic and social dominance of heterosexual, white, men—is temptingly, cruelly appealing as theatrical spectacle.

THE SHAMAN IN THE MACHINE AND VIRTUAL TRANSFORMATION

In this section, I examine the shamanistic characteristics of the "First Person Shooter" *X-Files* episode. First, I offer *in italics* my reflexive-subjective experience of how I came to be an avid fan of *The X-Files* and how this informs my analysis from a feminist perspective vis à vis *l'écriture féminine*. In short, *The X-Files* provided me a televisual outlet to engage in discussions about my hidden obsessions with paranormal and occult phenomenon, in which I could slowly emerge without shame (due to the show's mainstream popularity.) Additionally, the "First Person Shooter" episode triggered another hidden desire: to create my own video games as I would like them to perform, both in narrative and aesthetics. Essentially, I wanted to write, design, and direct my own virtual reality theatrical experience. In the next subsection, I demonstrate how Maitreya emulates ecstatic expressions of transformation, albeit in virtual form that has the potential to affect social and political spheres in real life circumstances.

My Birth as an "X-Phile" and Gamer-"Grrl"

Here, I offer some reflections on my relationship to the *X-Files* series. Beyond anecdotal information, I relay my viewing experience as an identifactory performance

practice. I "write myself" in order to relay my personal relationship between self-awareness, spiritual transformation and video game technology.

The first time I saw an X-Files *episode, I was frozen in my stance, folding clothes at my mother's house after having returned from living for a couple of starved years in New York City.*

Ever since I was a young girl, I have been fascinated with the occult, ghosts, paranormal phenomena, UFO's and anything related to spiritual metaphysics. When I was eight-years old, I recall having checked out every book in my school library on these subjects, and then re-read the books multiple times. I didn't mention my "hobby" and interests in these occult and strange subjects to many people. In fact, I regarded my fascination like a secret treasure, one that only I could explore and understand as I walked alone in the woods behind my house, or scribbled in my journal about my wild dreams.

In elementary school, I tried to magically force hanging mobiles to move by the power of my mind; I played psychic games with myself, trying to guess which suit from the card deck was underneath my hand. In high school, I tried self-hypnosis to glimpse into past life stories. I naively studied witchcraft, herbalism, spirits of nature, and mysteries hidden in the whistling of the Wild. I cast love spells on boys I liked; I made potions from herbs and tinctures to acquire the affection of those I adored. I was innocently exploring the realms of sorcery and power, without ever going "too far," without ever intentionally wanting to harm anyone in my curious pursuit of esoteric wisdom.

Ever since I was a young child, the image of a grey alien head with large, lidless, abysmal eyes and a thin body, haunted me. I could not look at this image without being terrified and simultaneously lured by curiosity. Only my closest friends understood my

odd propensities of having irrational emotional outbursts when certain subjects related to the occult or the paranormal were mentioned.

I cultivated passionate beliefs, but did not openly share these obsessions, except to a select few. In a sense, for most of my life, I have been in the "occult closet" (some in the neo-pagan community call this "in the broom closet"), feeling ashamed and disheartened that the culture I live in tosses off the mystical, the poetic depth and potency of nature's mysteries, and replaces the "irrational" with systematic processes of "reason." Needless to say, when a television series, such as The X-Files, *that focused on every subject I had secretly perused and explored, became mainstream popular culture, I was both suspicious and absolutely thrilled. I quickly became a "fangirl," also known as an "X-Phile."*

Dana Scully was hired to "discredit and debunk" (Howley 258) Fox Mulder's methods and theories. I identified more with Mulder, more with the male figure (again, like Artaud) for his proclivities towards the fantastically impossible. His belief affirmed, however romantically and impractically, my own marginalized status as someone who considers psychic phenomena and esoteric metaphysics (or as Artaud would put it, "spiritual therapeutics"), all of these things as not only feasibly real, but fundamentally linked to our lives.

I also loved video games, and I was one of the first of my friends to have an Atari console. My single, working-class mother most likely wanted me to occupy my time. And I did, obsessively. My first role-playing strategy game was King's Quest, *and I played it from start to final finish, and then did the same for each game in the series. Other games included* Pong, Donkey Kong, Super Mario Brothers, PacMan, *and* Frogger. *I enjoyed Role Playing Games (RPG) games more than First Person Shooter (FPS) games, though I played those too.* Grand Theft Auto, Duke Nukem, Wolfenstein, *and similar FPS games*

were not my style. I did however purchase and play the X-Files *game when it launched. It made good use of my intellect and strategic mystery-solving skills. Then, there was* The Matrix *game (based on the Warchowski Brothers films), which I had intensely played one long winter. I liked my avatar's virtual powers and abilities to walk on walls and stop time.*

The Computer St/age

The affection I had for my avatars and for gaming filled a yearning to accumulate superhuman and ecstatic powers, beyond my abilities. Janet Murray astutely understands; I highlight her key points as they relate to my thoughts here, including the concept that computer technologies continue to resonate a tenuous relationship between human practitioners of performance as art, and mechanized dramas that can be just as if not more thrilling than live performance, as in video games*:*

> The computer is providing us with a new stage for the creation of **participatory theater**. We are gradually learning to do what actors do, to enact emotionally authentic experiences that we know are not "real." The more persuasive the sensory representation of the digital space, the more we feel that we are present in the virtual world and the wider range of actions we will seek to perform there. The ease with which [role-playing gamers] take on and cast off personas suggests that an audience is growing that has been trained in impersonation. We are all gradually becoming part of a **worldwide repertory company**, available to assume roles in ever more complex participatory stories. Little by little we are discovering the conventions of participation that will constitute the fourth wall of

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this **virtual theater**, the **expressive gestures** that will deepen and preserve the

enchantment of immersion. (125)

Murray suggests that video games are in many ways similar to theatrical performances that inspire profound experiences within spectators/players. The interactivity of the game heightens the experience and creates an "enchantment" that seduces players into a "participatory theater" full of "expressive gestures" (125). I argue that this experience also demonstrates Artaud's theatrical cruelty with the additional element of transformation that can induce paradigmatic change within players' understanding of their world and the limitations therein.

Emerging into Transformation and Power

Maitreya is Phoebe's avatar gone amuck, the unruly wild woman without compassion or guilt for her deeds. Mythologically, wild women and their exploits are pervasive in various cultures' folklore and myths. The reclaiming of these forgotten myths from patriarchal suppression has been the focus for many feminists in multiple disciplines, including psychology and theology. Clarissa Pinkola Estes' adopts and appropriates myths of powerful women undergoing rites of passage or great life lessons as teaching tools for empowering women's self-awareness.[85] The archetype of wild woman provides a Jungian interpretation of storytelling that helps identify women with aspects of their personalities, perhaps hidden or buried underneath a repressive (patriarchal) hegemony. Judith Simmer-Brown writes in *Dakini's Warm Breath* that in Buddhism, it is the dakini (an oftentimes wrathful goddess) who dances in frenzy,

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[85] See Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995)

destroys and transforms; it is her nature, and a necessary part of the cycle of life.[86] Maitreya is similar to a dakini. In Hinduism, Kali is the bloddthirsty goddess, who dances upon severed bodies, her hair in flames, with a skull necklace dangling from her neck.[87]

If naming something is important to understand its power, then using "Maitreya" as the avatar "handle" is somewhat contradictory. Etymologically, the root word (maitr) is Sanskrit for "friendship" and the full meaning is "full of love towards all beings." The word is religiously associated with the Buddha, "The Buddha who will appear in the future; a representation of this Buddha" (from the Oxford English Dictionary). The show's writers have attached a culturally specific, masculinized religious figure to a female avatar, who displays no transparent love to all beings. Ironically, Maitreya as the vengeful avatar is utterly opposite in characteristics compared to the significance of the culturally-ascribed name Maitreya. Indeed, Maitreya is opposite, just as she *opposes* the restrictions and limitations placed on women. What is most curious about Maitreya—the male god idol— is his decidedly modern depiction of sitting on a pedestal, whereas most representations of his predecessor Buddha sit lotus-style on a pillow on the floor (Kieschnick 233). I argue that Maitreya through the lens of Western (postcolonial) interpretation as portrayed in the "First Person Shooter" episode is the Buddha of the future.[88] Her sex is female but the name is the same. She is the post-colonial, post-

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[86] "When [the dakini] Ekajati appears to yogins in hagiographies, she is especially wrathful. She speaks in sharp piercing shrieks, her eye boils, and she gnashes her fang. At times she appears twice human size, brandishing weapons and served by witches drenched in blood." See Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism*, 1st ed. ed. (Boston: Shambhala, 2001) 278

[87] Portrayed holding a sword and a severed head, her protruding tongue dripping with blood, the goddess Kali depicts an aspect of *sakti* [the divine feminine] that cannot be ignored. Kali is perhaps the most fascinating and is certainly the most famous Hindu goddess, despite being the most misunderstood." From Lynn Foulston, *Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practices* (Brighton [England]; Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2009) 34

[88] According to the Tibetan Buddhist sacred text on the life of Yeshe Tsogyal, a treasured female boddhisatva, Maitreya will appear during a time of great turmoil. "The present cycle will have reached its

modern representation of spiritual idolatry in a post-human future, and she also knows how to use weapons.

Maitreya is built for, and learns to perform better through experience at, pure annihilation and destruction. She has no regard for her enemy players. By the end of *The X-Files* episode, the imagined (yet deadly real) avatar is killed through a code—Control-Shift-Bloodbath. This code, or script, as "kill switch" demonstrates in literal terms, particular ideological demands: to control and shift the untamed, unsympathetic, monstrous, "bloodbath." Violence must be controlled and shifted by the fingers and powers above the keyboard. The keyboard is the tool that engages the incantatory banishing spell.

Phoebe must give up the code to the men with the keyboard to kill Maitreya. If the "Goddess" is more than semiotics, then according to Lykke's definition, she is more akin to a cyborg. The merging of Maitreya as "cybergoddess" is perhaps where we can salvage feminist notions of the body in virtual spaces. If contemporary goddess iconography is rooted in healing the broken past of patriarchy's take over from the Bronze Age,[89] then for Phoebe, this virtual goddess is her attempt to heal the isolation and ostracism she endures in a male-centered occupation and fantasy world. The ambiguity and fear of the cyborg, as Haraway argues, is more detrimental than not. There is no going back to the ancient ways, according to some, and so we must embrace the technology as having the potential for a powerful revolution, "a total merger of psychic and electronic activity" (Sjoo and Mor, qtd. in Lykke 84).

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trough,/ And emanations will be only masks and shadows,/ The essence of the earth will fail:/ The black age of Dudjom Nagpo Gyachu will be here./ After this will be the coming of Maitreya, and all will be revived." See Gyalwa and Namkhai Changchub, Nyingpo, *Lady of the Lotus-Born: The Life and Enlightenment of Yeshe-Tsogyal*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala, 1999) 190
[89] This argument has been controversially presented in Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989)

In *Volatile Bodies,* Elizabeth Grosz discusses how embodiment can symbolize a meta-narrative based on myth and storylines pertinent to cultural desires, in addition to being a conduit for another's representation to channel, i.e. an avatar as a digitized representation.

> The body becomes a 'text' and is fictionalized and positioned within myths and belief systems that form a culture's social narratives and self-representations. In some cultural myths, this means that the body can be read as an agent, laboring, exchanging being, a subject of social constraints, and thus of rights and responsibilities; on others, it becomes a body shell capable of being overtaken by the other's messages (for example, in shamanism or epilepsy). (119)

In a sense, Maitreya is Phoebe's fetish, imbued with powers of digital sorcery to destroy any threat to her monstrously digital agency. Phoebe wants equality, her voice heard and desires fulfilled over the clamor of game violence substituting for male hormonal overload. However, if catharsis cannot be fully achieved through the theater of the game-space, or its effects are not powerful enough to extend into her real life, then Maitreya must be destroyed in order for Phoebe to maintain her job position. There is no room for the wicked woman in the game-space of her desired images and actions.

Phoebe's desire for an avatar Goddess (turned monster -cyborg) is less about a subliminal real death urge, such as "kill all male programmers," and more about her need for identification with a character that embodies her pent-up rage. However, one could see "all male programmers" as the symbol of patriarchy. Phoebe speaks of her real oppression under patriarchy and Maitreya allows her to dismantle patriarchy, in both real (the destruction of the video game) and symbolic ways. Maitreya embodies in virtual-

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turned-real form, a cruel, visceral, and cathartic performance. Phoebe could have role-played using Matireya in game space to get her "ya-ya's" out, the phrase Scully used to denounce the ritualistic, wish-fulfillment pleasures of gaming. Daniel Mackay writes in *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game* about how players identify and then use virtual characters as an outlet to replace a capitalist culture's loss of ritualistic moments of liminality and re-integration.

> Existing within a cultural sphere that is all about breaking through people's
>
> emotional and moral resistances to persuade, cajole, and seduce them into buying
>
> the role-playing game performance is characterized by a free play dependent upon
>
> the forms and content of popular-culture images. The role-playing game
>
> performance is a utopic moment on renunciation during which the players expend
>
> an energy that purges and purifies their being. It is a moment of catharsis. (112)

For Phoebe, the avatar she engineered turned into her tragic heroine, trapped within a dramatic storyline with the conflicts being inequality in the workforce and the drive to out-compete technological innovations. "However," continues Mackay, "the afterglow of this catharsis soon fades, and the attendant separation of the players from their culturally-programmed desires to own the images of product art does not remain for long" (112). Artaud's rejection of theatrical catharsis is then perhaps more fitting to describe players' intense sacred attachments to their avatars and game play.

Artaud believed once a literary piece of theater, or a culturally recognized metanarrative, is repeatedly presented to audiences (i.e., Shakespeare or Greek classics) the impact of the narrative as a cathartic purging for spectators diminishes. To solve this dilemma, Artaud suggested our human connection to primal truth is apparent not in the

illusory mimesis of human experience and drama that breeds catharsis, but in social relations happening in the street, in public practices of quotidian experiences. His challenge is how to bring the street or the "mirror image of what [we] are" into the theater (*Antonin Artaud, Selected Writings* 254). In the case of this episode, the theater is the virtual world and demonstrative of the dark and radical urges of Phoebe the programmer. In the end of it all, Maitreya transforms from Phoebe's projected idealization of a superpower goddess to the perfect kind of cyborg— immortal. This immortality captures exciting and frightening potential of how digital technologies, in conjunction with politically radical notions of transformation and change, can linger and worm into a culture's seemingly static zeitgeist.

As an example of how culture and self can be transformed and reclaimed through video games, I recently discovered an online video game designed by a five year-old girl with help from her father to implement the programming code. The game is titled *Sissy's Magical Ponycorn Adventure* and can be played worldwide for free (as of this writing) on the Internet (http://www.ponycorns.com). The objective of the game is to find all the "ponycorns" and collect them in jars. Each rainbow on the first screen image becomes a "door" for the little girl character to enter and explore the magical space, encounter an "evil lemon" and an "orange monster" who speaks gibberish. She has to locate the key to free the purple "ponycorn" from its cage, and hurl a coconut at the evil lemon to win the game. The fantasy world is sublimely beautiful as we glimpse not only a young girl's imagination, but also her stream of game logic. What seems universal to most video games is that the protagonist achieves her goal and concludes as heroine, defeating the characters that harbor malicious intent. With this young girl's game, players have access to the logic and imagination of a young girl. This is significant because video games as a mode of expression created by young girls can illuminate and animate their world views

in an interactive and multi-dimensional way. There is much that can be uncovered in the treasures of young girls' minds if their opinions and imaginations were prized as highly as young boys'.

Furthering the concept of game play as an imaginative, productive, and politically efficacious use of time and labor, McGonigal writes that as a society, we need to spend *more* time playing video games. Her thesis is that 500 million players spend 3 billion hours a week playing video games, but what exactly are these virtuoso gamers getting "good" at during this time? McGonigal suggests that if we want to solve global problems like hunger, peak oil, poverty, etc., then we need to aspire to play games online. These games would present real world scenarios, with avatars linked to the players, who could test and strategize solving problems through the interface of video games. She then categorizes gamers as optimistic and highly engaged, and therefore able to enjoy and in fact make good use of the time spent on solving such insurmountable problems. Gamers are "Super-Empowered Hopeful-Individuals" who tend to think they can individually change virtual worlds and not the real world, which is the problem she is trying to solve. "We're using games to get away from real world suffering," says McGonigal (22).

In *Wired Women*, Karen Coyle writes that video games can inform us about social transformation, how to shift balances of power, and how to build societies free of misogyny and gender inequity with avatars as surrogate activists—or as performers, how to create virtual theatrical environments. Coyle explains that:

> [what] we will need is a conspiracy of sisters that begins with the recognition that there is nothing inherently masculine about computers. We must learn to read the computer culture for the social myth that it is. And we have to teach our younger

generation of women that they are free to explore computers in their own way and to draw their own conclusions about the usefulness of these machines" (54).

By making machines, computers, programming codes, engineering, and other technological instruments more available to women, a future in which women are able to create the kinds of entertainment that is empowering, not belittling and subjugating, becomes more probable. In Katherine Isbister's book *Better Game Characters by Design*, Randy Pagulayan (user research lead of Microsoft Game Studios) explains in an interview:

> Games have always been a social experience, whether it's between two friends battling out a game against one another, or a single player against a swarm of digital bad guys. Investigating methods and techniques that can tap into that social element of gaming is definitely a worthy cause. . . Corner a game designer, ask them what they want to know when designing a game, what information do they need that would persuade them to make a design change? Any methods you come up with to help answer those questions would be a step toward the future as well. (Isbister 279)

What do girls want to know in designing games according to their standards and entertainment desires? In general, girls are less involved in game design (not necessarily game play) platform and programming careers as boys are from an early age. In a *Washington Post* column titled, "Technically, science will be less lonely for women when girls are spurred early", Anna Holmes reports that less than twenty-five percent of women are employed in the STEM industries (sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics) that is, the "hard sciences," Notwithstanding the computer sciences being

the largest growth sector in the labor economy. Although I adore video games and would love to design them someday, my strengths are linked with performance studies and theories (even "softer" than "soft" science), and not with the "hard" sciences (per Nina Lykke's arguments discussed earlier.) I am deeply troubled that with the continuing ascension of video games' commercial successes and entertainment dominance, women developers are outnumbered by men in large margin. I would seriously consider merging the "soft" sciences with the "hard" sciences in a revolutionary attempt to invite innovative approaches towards solving labor inequities in an industry (i.e., video game development and design) that have profound marketing powers to influence generations of gamers and women in particular.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I presented my analysis of the "First Person Shooter" episode of *The X-Files* using performance analysis, reflexive-subjectivity, and performative poetics interpretive techniques. In addition, I explored an episode in the television series *The X-Files* that emulated Artaud's concept of theater as a "plague." Specifically, I demonstrated how this fictionalized video game provided a performative expression for radical notions of gender difference, agency, and equity. Video games can be used as performative stage to express and experiment with "woman's writing," through programming code and game-play. The "plague" became a metaphorical subject in the form of a virtual reality avatar created by a female programmer who was frustrated with lack of fair representation and identification in video game industry and design. In the fantasy narrative of this fictional show, this virtual body came "alive," and attacked or killed other players in an emotionless scourge. Theoretically and radically, an avatar as an ecstatically performing agent of change can motivate both metaphysical and political

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transformation from stasis to dynamism in a repressive social structure. Note: among other things, analysis of this case study revealed three core findings including performance "in the extreme," portrayal of woman as "monster or goddess," and improvisational action as performed in video game play. These core findings, i.e., cross threads, will be discussed further in Chapter Six. In the next chapter, I demonstrate how Theater of Cruelty operates within a live theatrical environment.

Chapter Three : The Sensual "Double": *MetamorphoSex* as Feminist Ritual Performance Practice

In this chapter, I present my theoretical and interpretive analyses of the performance *MetamorphoSex* (1995). I use the theoretical-analytic tool and techniques outlined in Chapter Two, including matching similarities to the aforementioned criteria of Artaud's descriptions of his Theater of Cruelty, specifically in relationship to his metaphor of the theater as a "double." I also use performance analysis, experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetic techniques to interpret this particular live performance. I emphasize Hélène Cixous' "woman's writing" (*l'écriture féminine)* as a theoretical backdrop to the techniques. In addition, I offer an exploration of the show's impact as an experiment in shamanistic transformation (i.e., impacts upon spectators and on performers). This chapter closes with a brief summary of the case study.

The purpose of *MetamorphoSex*, according to its creators (and pre-performance workshop facilitators) Annie Sprinkle, Barbara Carrellas, and Linda Montano, was to demonstrate that women's uninhibited exposure of sensual and erotic pleasure through ritualized and sacred action could serve as a catalyst for individually oriented sexual acceptance, transcendence, and liberation. My aim here is to explore the explicit transgressions, dominant hegemony boundary-shattering risks, enacted in the production. I do this through the perspective lenses of Artaud's Cruel Theater, Cixous' feminist poetics of feminine difference, and live enactment of shamanistic/ecstatic performance practice. All elements are examined in relation to Artaud's Theater of Cruelty criteria stated in chapters one and two, specifically Artaud's metaphor of theater as "double." My analysis is extended by juxtaposing ritual theories of women's ceremonial rites as distinct

from ritual theories discussed by several scholars in performance and ritual theories. In other words, I demonstrate that ritual displayed via theatrical expression is and continues to develop as a potential site of transcendent feminine difference as performed in *MetamorphoSex*.

BACKGROUND TO THE PERFORMANCE

In addition to the aforementioned, I apply a useful analytical strategy to the show, one that Clifford Geertz (renowned anthropologist and ritual theorist) defined as "thick description," albeit from a "feminist spectator" critical perspective.[90] I include brief biographical information about the show's creators/producers. In addition, I offer an overview of the workshop and the women participants who took the pre-performance workshop that provided the dramatic material for the staged, public performance. I ask the reader to suspend critical judgment of my performance description in order to better visually absorb the details and emotional "force" of the actions performed in *MetamorphoSex*.

MetamorphoSex : Background Information

In December 1995 at the VORTEX Theater in Austin, Texas, Annie Sprinkle with Barbara Carrellas (co-facilitator and sexual health educator), Linda Montano ("spiritual consultant" and "life-as-art" performance artist), and twenty-seven women (who the creators labeled as "erotic pioneers") created and performed *MetamorphoSex*: *A Sacred Sex Workshop and Three Ritual Performances*.[91] The show was the culmination of a

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[90] See Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Theater and Dramatic Studies; No.52 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1988)

[91] Interesting to note, this same year the Pompidou presented Artaud's works on paper, as indicated in the Introduction, which included the drawing of the "daughters" in "*Le Théâter de Cruaté*."

week of workshop exercises that focused on Tantric sensuality,[92] private journaling, and explorations of hidden sexual desires, and emotions related to, among others, joy, trauma, grief and rage.[93]

Facilitators also taught physical exercises such as "kegals, pelvis undulations, ecstasy breathing, the microcosmic orbit, the Chakra Chant, Kundalini meditations, [and] Tantra yoga techniques" (Sprinkle "Lunch at the Art/Life Institute: A Conversation with Linda M. Montano, Barbara Carrellas, and Gabrielle Cody" 101). As indicated, the performers had learned specific physical techniques, beyond performance training and rehearsal for the live performance. Such exercises are foundational practices in Barbara Carrellas' sexual health and healing workshops that she has taught for decades.[94] Participants were encouraged to journal their thoughts and feelings throughout their week-long workshop and they were also asked to practice effective communication skills, which required them to cultivate a sense of self-trust by taking responsibility for personal boundaries.[95] The performance of *MetamorphoSex* included participants voicing fantasies, erotic massages, sensual dance, and collective deep and focused breathing, all of which culminated in a large orgasmic burst, but closed with a tender denouement.

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[92] Tantric sexuality is a transcendental meditation practice involving ecstatic and sensory body-mind-breath awareness.

[93] Tantra, as a spiritual practice, is often confused and misinterpreted in the West where it has become a catch-all phrase for sexual spirituality. I am not able to present in the scope of this document all of the complexities of the study of Tantra, which is more than the study of sexuality. In fact, Tantra is rooted in both Hinduism and Buddhism as a practice of understanding the phenomenal world and our ability to transcend dualist thinking through acute observations of our sense perceptions and ego-projections.
[94] Many of these exercises can be located in Carrellas' book. See Barbara Carrellas, *Urban Tantra: Sacred Sex for the Twenty-First Century* (Celestial Arts)

[95] The workshop did include a fee, which ranged from $250-300. This most certainly would have been prohibitive to lower-income class women, which raises questions around privilege. Is sexual education as pleasure activism more available to those who can afford it? What if sex workshops were conducted with a focus on lower income groups? What sorts of dominant culture paradigms might be stirred? I discuss this further in the discussions section, in the final chapter of this dissertation.

The performance incorporated "super sex technologies,"—as Sprinkle called them—onstage before a public audience for only three nights. The performers in the show chose their preference of recently learned sex technique and/or integrated wisdom as part of their "role" and actions. This resulted in a ritualized, somewhat improvisational performance before a public audience in a live theatrical context. Said differently, the show integrated "super sex technologies" and other ritualized ornaments, objects, and performative actions. Glowing candles, incense, low lighting, soft humming, and invocations to a higher, divine selfhood were some elements of the "sacred sexuality" performed through this publicly witnessed fantasy play. Of the three performances, one night was strictly for "women," which included those who identified themselves as "trans," or in gender transition, or those in drag. The other nights' audiences were comprised of mixed audiences of gender orientations, including a higher attendance of GLBTQ audiences. The audience was visibly predominately white.[96]

The actions performed during each show changed nightly and spontaneously because there was no script but only a thematic sectional outline to arc the flow of the performance. The through-line remained the same which was to provoke transformational ecstasy in a gradual, soothing and orgasmic process encircled by the parameters of a less fixed and more porous ritual structure. In *Hardcore from the Heart*, Sprinkle discusses the show's theme of "unconditional love for our temple-bodies and tolerance and compassion for all beings" (Sprinkle and Cody 31). To put it bluntly, the premise behind *MetamorphoSex* was to transport orgasmic energy as authentic, loving intentional prayer for peace and healing.

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[96] Data that supports extensive demographics on the attendance is not available for this study.

"Theater of Sensual Delights": The Performance Ritual[97]

Audience members were saturated with wafting plumes of sage incense smoke as they entered through the door to the performance space.[98] The playing space was centrally located, with the audience seated on two sides, similar to a one-half arena stage. The performers warmly greeted individual spectators and gently guided them through gesture and words to their seats. Some performers moved about the central playing space, ringing hand bells, lathering their bodies with lotions of floral or musky scents; while others sat in a meditative pose with eyes softly closed. Members of the audience could choose to be anointed with scented oil on their foreheads by a performer as they entered. This action was designed to create a transition from the outside world into a sacred space, crossing over into a ritualized liminal space, between quotidian life and the play of performance.[99]

Once all members of the audience were seated, the players configured into a crescent-shaped line, center stage. They gazed at the audience or at a microphone on a stand which was situated in the center of the crescent line. The performers softly started humming, "Vummm, vummmm, vummm, vummm," the vocalization the creators called the "chakra chant." Incense burned, leaving traces of smoke snaking in the air under warm colored lights. Upstage center stage, candles glowed on an altar, an enormous vase full of vibrant and odiferous, exotic flowers formed the centerpiece. A large silver bowl

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[97] The performance was also videotaped during one performance, which I had also referred to while transcribing specific detail in dialogue.

[98] This process is also known as "smudging," a Native American indigenous tradition that uses smoke to dispel negative or stuck energies. Many cultures use incense and smoke as means to purify a space before sacred ceremonies.

[99] The performance clearly marks a separation from the outside world to the theatrical. This process has been repeatedly emphasized as important to entering a state of "play," a necessary component to the environmental circumstances of a theatrical production. See Victor Witter Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982)

of flame flickered wildly. The performers were shoulder to shoulder. The audience was on two sides of the stage with the first row seated in chairs on the edge of the playing space, leaving only about a couple feet of distance between the players and the spectators. The seats for the audience were in stacked rows of movie-theater type chairs, up to four rows on one side, and up to ten on the other. As the chant continued, a performer moves to microphone placed downstage and center.

"My name is Barbara. And in a rare public appearance, I'd like you to meet . . . my pussy." She raised a puppet in the shape of a woman's genitalia from behind her back. The puppet "gazed" at the audience. Barbara was clothed in black and donned a black floppy, hat. The audience chuckled, some seemed shocked, or embarrassed while others clapped intermittently with uproarious excitement upon seeing the puppet.

Figure 12:   Examples of the Vulva Puppets

The humming continued in a drone underneath the action, as one by one, each woman introduced herself, and her sexuality— symbolically represented in the so-called

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"pussy puppets."[100] Aptly, this segment of the performance was titled "Voices from the Vulva." Performers manipulated the puppets by hand, operating the opening and closing of the vaginal lips to mimic human mouths speaking.[101] Each puppet was unique in color, shape, and texture.

"Hi, I'm Kerthy. And this is my cunt: Miss Elizabeth. She doesn't like me to talk for her. 'That's right, I don't!'" The performer's hair was fashioned in braided pigtails and she wore a white dress reminiscent of a Transylvanian virgin.

"I'm Kimberley Silver. This is my big dyke pooch. We've been through a lot of pain together. We've been misdiagnosed with endometriosis for seven years. After my hysterectomy I was pissed. I was angry for so many women who have been misdiagnosed and genitally abused. And I dedicate my ritual tonight for those women." Kimberley was costumed in a doctor's smock and cap. A mask hung from her neck.

"I'm Bonnie. And this is Bonnie. And we'd like to welcome you all to our theater. We are very glad you came." She wore a black and silver bra with a scarf that flowed over her back, and a red skirt. Her round belly was exposed and strong.

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[100] The puppets were made by a San Francisco artist, Dorrie Lane, although the artist calls them Vulva Puppets.

[101] Elizabeth Grosz mentions other feminist discourses (Luce Irigaray, in particular) that examine notions of the female vaginal lips as not only representing "mouths" to speak her embodied language, but also as a physically realized rebuttal against Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "flesh," which he suggested as being an externalized, sensual experience. For women, the "lips of the vagina" are always touching and therefore are already in a sensual experience of the "flesh." See Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Theories of Representation and Difference (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994)

"Hi. I'm Carolyn's pussy. I have a few things to tell y'all. I am a squirting pussy. And I love to ejaculate. Deal with it."[102] She wore a snug rock-and-roll themed t-shirt that accentuated large breasts and a tight black skirt that hugs her ample hips.

After all the performers had their turn introducing themselves and their "puppets," Linda Montano moved to the microphone and announced firmly, but gently, "I am Mother Superior." Starting softly, the performers chanted again, in a rising crescendo background chorus.

Montano continued, "Become a superior mother to yourselves. Repeat after me: I am the real Superior Mother to myself. I am the real Superior Mother to myself! I AM THE REAL SUPERIOR MOTHER TO MYSELF." The audience was invited to repeat and join the performers in voice: "I am the real superior mother to myself!" Voices rose into a powerful rant for several minutes, filling the theater with intense emotions, ranging from benediction to rage, or as affirming incantations.

Next, Montano spoke an invocation focusing on healing and love. This action set the tone for the evening. The women transitioned into the subsequent action. The lights shifted color to underwater blues and volcanic reds. From backstage, performers carried various props and placed them on the set, including a twin-sized mattress, blankets, oils, powders, sex toys, feathers, body paints, and perfumes. Music played on overhead speakers: a simple rhythmic guitar melody with soft tambourine and bells. Sprinkle placed herself upstage, standing regal-like by the altar, holding a microphone, sweetly instructing the audience to breathe in and out with the group onstage as the performers prepared.

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[102] See Chris Straayer's examination of the female ejaculate as a phenomenon least discussed in feminist discourses on sexuality and pornographic expression. Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientations in Film and Video* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996)

The performers moved into variously chosen positions on stage to commence the process of their orgasmic climax to pleasure.[103] One performer/practitioner induced Tantric "fire breath" partner exercises with another participant. They sat or lay down while breathing in rapid successions with their bellies protruding out and in like balloons quickly inflating and deflating. Another was completely naked, lying prone on a standalone massage table. Another woman dusted her with scented powder with a large puffed cotton swab. She then massaged oil all over the woman's naked body while wearing protective latex gloves. She lubricated the genitalia of the woman on the massage table until she appeared visibly and vocally to climax in a shivering wake of cries and moans. During that same moment, another woman had her legs spread wide, down center stage, applying an electric Hitachi wand vibrator to her clitoris. She was busty-shaped, with a full belly that rolled over hips. She was shaking and pulsing with the same speed as the temporary appendage.

Upstage, Annie Sprinkle, dressed in elegant queenly garb, held a large feather as wide as her torso. She was swaying and breathing, as if anchoring the energetic flow in the space. Below her, downstage, was another woman who covered herself in what appeared to be mud. Another woman joined her and they used each other's bodies as canvases, painting rudimentary and colorful spirals and lines on their thighs, buttocks, bellies, and cheeks. One woman was having her pubic hair shaved by another. The woman being shaved moaned in pleasure. This Dionysian sequence continued for about forty minutes, which I felt to be an uncomfortable yet evocative amount of time from my perspective as an audience member. I was not sure where to focus my attention during all

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[103] How the performers achieve orgasm might change throughout the course of the three nights of performance.

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the sexual and erotic activity on stage. This became somewhat frustrating for me as a spectator as if I was undergoing a sensory overload.

Barbara Carrellas then guided these women into a synchronized "Big Draw" which consisted of twenty fast breaths, holding the breath while clenching the body, then total relaxation. They repeated this several times, with Carrellas urging them like a fitness instructor to, "Hold it…big draw, bring it in, a little more…and release!" Each time the women released their clenched bodies, they sighed loudly. This climax process was titled, "An ejection of consciousness."

Afterwards, the women rested with backs on the floor, holding hands, head to head, as they "basked in the afterglow." Some women cried tenderly with the release. Some looked back at the audience with motherly strength, eyes glowing with self-satisfaction and peace. Some meditated quietly, still covered in paint and color. Some continued to hold hands and sob as the lights went dim. Sprinkle touched her finger to a space on her forehead between closed eyes, as if working a mystical power. In yoga practice, this is the "third eye" energetic chakra location. The lights faded to blackout, and the women exited the stage. I do not recall a final bow from the performers, although the audience, apparently stunned and overwhelmed (I certainly was), clapped awkwardly as if pushing through the residual murkiness of a dream.

About the Performers

> "I personally never applied for a government grant. I didn't need to. I made enough money giving blowjobs to produce my work myself! But once I shared my life stories on stage, I put myself in a position to be judged. People either love me or hate me, it seems." --Annie Sprinkle, from *Carnal Comics: Legends of Porn*, issue #1

In this section, I briefly describe the knowledge and experience of the creators of the show; this helps to explain the origins of *MetamorphoSex* as a feminist ritual

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performance. Common to these performers is their identification as women who are seeking to expand and explore their knowledge about their own sexualities.

Annie Sprinkle

Annie Sprinkle proudly claims to be the first porn star to earn a PhD in human sexuality. Her performance work, ranging from her pornography films and the avant-garde art scene, garners attention from a wide spectrum of audiences and fans including critical theorists and academics to sex workers. She is also a lightning rod for controversy for her willingness to perform on stage, her sexual representation, and her objectification of the female body.[104]

Annie Sprinkle's emergence as a performance artist in the late 1980s and early 1990s ignited a life-long dream. In an interview, she states she had "discovered that through performance art I could create my own future. If I performed who I wanted to become, I would become it" (Sprinkle "Some of My Performances in Retrospect" 70). That dream was to become an artist. In addition to her performances, she has created visual art pieces like her "tit prints," which are painted stamps of her breasts on paper with swirling strokes of color or stenciled imprints of objects such as the state of Texas with a nipple dot marking the capital city.[105]

In her 1989 one-woman show, *Post-Porn Modernist*, Sprinkle disclosed not only her history as a sex industry worker, from prostitute to pornography movie star, she also inserted a speculum into her cervix for the audience to view one by one with a flashlight.

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[104] See Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Dutton, 1989)

[105] For more on Sprinkle's illustrious tit printing career, see her interview with Elizabeth Stephens in *Women and Performance*'s Twentieth Anniversary Issue (the cover of which is Sprinkle's "Feminist Tit Print" in the shape of the circle dipping the cross-- a symbol for "woman." Elizabeth Stephens, "Breast Strokes: Performing Annie Sprinkle's Tit Prints," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 14.2 (2005).

The title of this piece was "A Public Cervix Announcement;" here Sprinkle adapted her body as the medium of the message about sex-positive awareness as healthy lifestyle choice.

In 1999, Sprinkle brought *Herstory of Porn* to Austin, Texas. Throughout the performance, she used a large projection screen onto which she displayed images and videos of her work in the porn industry.[106] We see how a young, naïve, but keen Sprinkle traveled the tunnels of desire and sexuality and was transformed into a seasoned porn star who discovered her own subversions, perversions, identity, and empowerment along the way. In her autobiographical exploration in *Herstory of Porn*, Sprinkle cleverly unravels the complexities of expressing sexuality in a puritanical culture. Her political purpose was to awake and nourish abundant desire and sexual freedom through education, play, and pushing boundaries of heteronormative paradigms by embracing radical diversity in sexuality and desires. For example, she produced and directed a documentary titled *Linda/Les and Annie* (1992) about her relationship with a surgically-shifted female to male transsexual partner. In another video titled *Sluts and Goddesses,* she offers a wide range of imaginative solutions for women or women-identified individuals, to express themselves through sexual role-playing and fantasy. Sprinkle has also been a staunch advocate of gay marriage, sex workers' rights, and safe sex education.

In *Spectacular Sex* (2005)—her first published self-help book—Sprinkle acknowledges that she has tried almost every kind of sex with a plethora of bodies, genders, inanimate objects, and queer identities. Her wealth of sexual experience, along with her academic credentials, indelibly characterizes her as, what sex educator/writer

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[106] The film version of *Herstory of Porn* won the Erotic Oscar Movie of the Year award in 2005.

Susie Bright labels, a "(s)expert."[107] Sprinkle's recent opus is her seven-year wedding project with partner, Elizabeth Stephens: this was inspired by Linda Montano's own seven-year "life as art" multiple forms art project initiated over twenty years ago. Over the past seven years, Sprinkle and Stephens have staged highly elaborate wedding ritual ceremonies, inviting artists, LGBTQ communities, activists, and academics to these performance events. Each wedding is themed around a particular energetic chakra, using the Tantric understanding of subtle body channels. In 2006, I was involved as a stage assistant in their second chakra-themed wedding, the Orange wedding.[108] In tantric philosophies, the orange chakra resides just under the belly button and represents fertility and creative energy. This performance included autobiographical, episodic, sketch-comedy-inspired, and storytelling elements. Also recounted were Sprinkle's recovery from breast cancer, and off-the-wall comedic reenactments about the couple's attempts to get pregnant through various inventive and scientific methods. In 2011 and on the day I write this, March 27, 2011, Sprinkle and Stephens have completed their seven-year cycle. Sprinkle and Stephens are beginning their new project, called "Ecosexuality," in which they are creating an environmental movement that views the earth as a sentient, sensual being who enjoys pleasure, love, and care as much as humans.

Barbara Carrellas

Barbara Carrellas is a sex positive teacher who has worked with Annie Sprinkle for about ten years in both theater and in sexual education and exploration workshops. She toured with Sprinkle in *Post-Porn Modernist*. Together they have taught sacred sex

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[107] Susie Bright is a sex-positive writer, teacher, and performer who coined the term "Sexpert." She currently hosts a call-in radio show on topics of sexuality and sexual exploration. She continues to promote sex-positivism through yearly editorial contributions for an erotica book series.

[108] The show was performed at VORTEX Theater in Austin, Texas. I was one of the stage hands who assisted Sprinkle and Stephens with props and audience participation sections of the performance.

philosophies and techniques around the world. Carrellas recently published a book on sacred sexuality entitled *Urban Tantra* (2007) for which Sprinkle wrote the foreword. Carrellas notes that her exploration of sexuality, spirituality, and physical pleasure began after watching many friends suffer and die from the onslaught of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. She writes about the New York community of New Age and metaphysical explorers with a sobering realization:

> Years of AIDS had taken their toll on all of us. We were gay, lesbian, queer, heterosexual, bisexual, two-spirit. (We weren't yet transgendered—that wouldn't come along for another five or ten years.) We were sex workers, artists, teachers, massage therapists, nurses, writers, accountants, marketing directors, corporate vice presidents, astronomers, and herpetologists. Some of us had been sexually abused; some of us hadn't. Many of us were recovering or practicing Catholics. Most of us should have been dead by now. Some of us would be soon. What we shared was a longing to reclaim our spiritual and sexual selves from the Judeo-Christian scrap heap they had landed on when "sex equals death" became the new urban motto. Most of us had lost dozens, if not hundreds, of friends and coworkers to the AIDS epidemic. And they were still dying. (*Urban Tantra* 5)

Carrellas, primarily motivated by the painful reality she encountered during the onslaught of the AIDS epidemic, became a sex-positive educator. Her work since is linked with political advocacy, personal healing, and recovery from various traumas associated with sexuality and well-being.

Linda Montano

Linda Montano is a performance artist famously known for her lengthy "life as art" (or "life/art") performances, in which she endured specific self-imposed performance criteria for a given period of time. For example, her most famous piece was a collaboration with artist Tehching Hsieh in which they were bound together by an eight-foot rope for a full year. Montano's past as a Catholic nun and her current spiritual inclinations towards more Eastern, specifically Hindu, religious practices has influenced her devout dedication to art as a spiritual path. At the time of *MetamorphoSex*, Montano was teaching performance art at the University of Texas at Austin.

Other participants

Bonnie Cullum is the Producing Artistic Director of VORTEX Theater; she is a MFA-educated, visionary theater director who is also openly pagan, a feminist, and sex-positive. I have been a close collaborator and friend of Cullum for twenty years. Her theater has hosted many internationally-known performance artists, including Tim Miller, Karen Finley, Quentin Crisp, Penny Arcade, Kiki and Herb, and several of Sprinkle's shows, including *Herstory of Porn* and *Post-Porn Modernist*. Cullum's commitment to new, experimental, devised, original and transgressive work has been steadfast throughout the theater's twenty-year history.

The participating women who joined the workshop may have seen the "casting call" posted at various locations around town, places that catered to the eclectic, hippie, New Age, queer/gay/lesbian/transgendered, artistic and adventurous individuals who live in Austin, Texas. Austin could be considered a cultural oasis within a mostly conservative "red" state. Its landscape is both lush and rugged with rolling, sensuous hills, limestone cliffs, tremendous live oaks, leaning pecan trees, and several universities. A large subaltern group of spiritual seekers, peppered with California New Age rhetoric,

radical feminists, and mystics, many of whom at the time of the production might have been curious about sacred sex practices, also reside in Austin.

The promotional flyer posted around town calling for participants could lure a curious seeker through its language of mystery and power. Such phrases as: "If you . . . want to transform some personal life-issues/ Want to learn and practice various healing 'Sexercises' and 'Super Sex Technologies' . . . then come along with us on our sexual magical mystery tour." There is a hint of playfulness mixed with New Age/feminist sex-education/empowerment in this document that is both explicit and mysterious. The flyer was ambiguous; this may have been due to the fact that the organizers themselves were not sure how they were going to orchestrate the event. Although Carrellas had been leading sex workshops for years and performing shows around sexual themes in an explicit, ritualistic, spiritually invested manner, this show was an experiment for performers and spectators and clearly posed certain untested emotional and physical risks for all involved. In an interview with me, Carrellas said:

> We sat down one afternoon and made a kind of outline which was the ritual. I just remember being scared. I was not scared about the workshop. I had been teaching long, long, week-long workshops, three day workshops, evening workshops, six days a week, all day, all night, for a couple years at that point. So I was not scared about the workshop. I was scared about whether or not it would ever be a performance in a week!

Her fright had everything to do with her stage management history in helping to create "serious, repertory theater [with] rehearsals, lines." *MetamorphoSex* was almost entirely improvised live, with just the ritual structure pushing the action along: "Imagine coming

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in on a Sunday knowing you are going to be performing the *following* Friday! And you have no script. You know it's going to be sexual! Oh, that's comforting,"[109] she explained with a touch of sarcasm. "But Linda had her performance students, who were used to taking those kinds of emotional risks."

About the Workshop

The women in *MetamorphoSex* had also been participants in a week-long workshop that covered some of the "super-sex technologies" mentioned earlier in this chapter. The workshops were relevant for the creators of the show, as they derived most of the substance of the performance from the information they had gathered by teaching and playing with ideas with the students and performer-participants.

Barbara Carrellas had taken extensive notes while teaching the workshop on *MetamorphoSex.* Her notes and my interview with her were invaluable in understanding some of the generative aspects of the pre-show training: "We started by dancing, waltzing." She explained to me:

> Then there was a kundalini meditation. We did a burning ritual, which to my
> memory, was we would write down things we would like to create and let go of
> and then we would burn them. Linda led a 'new mother' process. She frequently
> does pieces about becoming your own best mother. Linda also led us in her
> chakra chant. . . Annie led them in how to build erotic energy, what she calls
> 'sexercises.' . . . Linda talked to us about attention, voyeuring, channeling,
> healing and the audience as co-creators of the piece.

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[109] At the time I conducted this interview, I had neither taken nor studied much of Rachel Rosenthal's DbD workshop structure. In retrospect, I think it would be interesting to conduct a workshop with the expertise of Carrellas, while incorporating some of the improvisation techniques created by Rosenthal.

Carrellas further described other exercises from her book *Urban Tantra*, including various physical positions, breathing techniques (e.g. "fire breath" or "Big Draw") and meditations on desires and fantasies.

After the workshop and during the night, Carrellas, Sprinkle, and Montano would return to their hotel room and jot down notes and ideas that became the structure of the *MetamorphoSex* performance. She told me, "We had a talking circle asking people where in their sexual evolution they were and what they wanted to create. In *Hardcore from the Heart*, Sprinkle writes that in the workshop, the women "shared stories of our past sexual abuse and pain. [They] talked about how [they] have different needs and desires at various times in [their] lives, and [they] can honor and include them all. [They] talked about how the sexiest thing in the world is simply being in your own truth in the moment" (Sprinkle and Cody 34). For the workshop, in general, there was a preference for process over product creation (i.e., the actual show)—a risky experiment for anyone who has had the experience of producing theatrical shows. Carrellas mentioned that she "was a producer and a general manager. Talk about a control freak job. I was just scared we weren't going to come up with anything worth putting on the stage at all." However, the show opened and succeeded, as far as audience attendance is concerned, to sold-out houses every night.

ARTAUD'S THEATER AS A "DOUBLE" IN *METAMORPHOSEX*: ANALYSIS

In this section, I analyze *MetamorphoSex* through the lens of Artaud's theater as "double." Specifically, I question what it means to "gaze" as a spectator when I am in a state of emotional, physical, and psychological confusion and how this confusion rouses me from complacent observation to deeply engaged, sensually alert participation.

Upon examination of Annie Sprinkle's performance history, one could recognize her ability to possibly inspire others to look beyond her or his feelings of squeamishness and fright with regard to sexuality, eroticism, and desire. Such people may watch her performances with timid introspection. She invites viewers to play with their most intimate sexual selves. As an example, for performance theorist Rebecca Schnieder, looking into another woman's cervix (as she had done in Sprinkle's *Post Porn Modernist* show in the segment "A public cervix announcement") triggered obsessions with scopophilia (an affinity for visual information) that touched upon the much-debated power of the spectator's gaze.[110] Schneider asserts that, "Then in the midst of theories about third eyes and cervical gazes, there was the troubling reverberation of personal memory" (56). In other words, Sprinkle demonstrates an uncanny talent for reversing the gaze of objectification and inquisitive thoughts towards one's own life stories and experiences. Through her performances, Sprinkle encourages others to release habits of fear and self-hatred dumped on (especially female) bodies. Ideologically, Sprinkle raises concerns about institutionalized misogyny that inculcates toxic patterns of oppressive and self-destructive behavior.

Sprinkle suggests, "An honest, focused, sexually knowledgeable and supportive group of women is a divine and extremely powerful force that can only inspire each woman in that group, but has the potential to contribute to the well-being of all life on earth" (Sprinkle and Cody 32). From an Artaudian perspective, this intensity of emotion, generated by witnessing the performance, ripens possibilities for a kind of transcendental shift towards self-awareness and healing, by playing with the doubling of desire and spectatorship.

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[110] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (1975).

From a personal and subjective perspective, regardless of my efforts to translate the experience, the epistemology of *MetamorphoSex* has been difficult to decipher. Peggy Phelan warns us that "[I]n performance spectatorship…the gazing spectator must try to take everything in" (*Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* 146). What happens when this does not work? What happens when trying to take everything in is usurped by seeing what we do not want to see, cannot allow ourselves to see, and are repulsed or terrified by what we see? Here is where the doubling of Artaud ignites processes of looking inward and serves as a last resort to withdraw from the intensity of the performance. *I could not relax, not at all, during the performance, and yet I was intently invested in watching as much as possible and simultaneously asking internalized questions.*

Geraldine Harris describes her frustration as spectator while watching Sprinkle's *Post Porn Modernist*, which was (like *MetamorphoSex*) explicit and involved Sprinkle opening her cervix with a speculum and inviting audiences to look inside:

> Indeed, I *did* go to this show thinking, arrogantly, that I could be an invisible
> spectator at this event, in a position to decide 'objectively' on the politics of this
> contested piece. Despite my protests above, I discovered that my subjectivity was
> engaged by this piece, even uncomfortably so, sending my intentions awry and
> creating a hiatus in which I was aware that any position I might take was haunted
> by its own internal contradiction. (162)

Harris describes her experience as if she were afflicted with cognitive dissonance that disturbed grounded, objective interpretation. A similar feeling arose in my own experience while watching *MetamorphoSex,* which I describe further in this chapter. I prioritized control of my visceral reaction over attempts at critical analysis in the

moment. This process is exactly what exceptional cruel theater must do, as compared to a Brechtian "distancing" or Augusto Boal's anti-cathartic, politicized strategy. Rather, this process engages the spectator towards a viewing presence that emulates a "theater that wakes us up: nerves and heart" (Artaud *The Theater and Its Double* 84).

Pornography: A Double of Desire?

For the purposes of this dissertation, I define pornography as the display of sexually explicit activity with the intention to cite arousal in the viewer. In the preface to Artaud's *Selected Writings,* Susan Sontag writes, "In the ecstatic fantasies of this [asylum] period, the world is a maelstrom of magical substances and forces; [Artaud's] consciousness becomes a theater of screaming struggle between angels and demons, virgins and whores"(*Selected Writings* lii). Indeed, Artaud was terribly confused about his visions of religious iconography, women, magic, and consciousness. Upon analysis, I associate Artaud's confusion with the oversaturated proliferation of pornography as a metonymic and literal double to postmodern, industrial U.S. desires and fantasies. Vapid consumerism and commodity fetishism are like various emanations of Artaud's "screaming struggle" in which the literal interpretation of these actions in capitalist culture can manifest as pornographic excess. This relates to *MetamorphoSex* because the women are performing actions some might consider pornographic.

Gertrud Koch, in an essay from *Dirty Looks,* writes about a vision of pornography that produces something it can never contain or a "shadow realm" (4) that lies beyond symbolic systems; pornography thus is also deeply utopian. I suggest that pornography can be viewed as a kind of double that evokes the polarizing emotions of both terror and ecstasy, a paradox that is characteristic of many esoteric and shamanistic practices. The expression of sexuality is a double mirror of identification.

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Pornography as performance, in its blatant display of a veiled subject (genitals, penetration, bodily fluids exposed, etc.), can be a curative or damaging force, as Sprinkle has often articulated in her work. This blatant exposure of a subject that makes us uncomfortable as spectators is exactly what Artaud demands of theater. Emphasizing the visceral and disturbing projection of secrets and forces "that must not be divulged," (*T and D* 79) can provoke spectatorship from safe complacency. A doubling affect, that is, an insistence on viewers who may be unfamiliar with certain "arresting images,"[111] must decide where to look, and how to negotiate their subjective identification and intertexual reflexivity in the process. Merleu-Ponty describes this process further in the *The Phenomenlogy of Perception* wherein he notes that perception takes precedence over Cartesian notions of dualist objective/subjective dialectics.[112] However Elizabeth Grosz argues in *Volatile Bodies*, that Merleau-Ponty's theories on perception are not adequate for "understanding the difference between the sexes," and his theories are "incapable of accounting for or adequately conceiving voluptuous passion." (109). The "double" as an act of perception and identification is a challenge and a revolutionary action in *MetamorphoSex*. In this way, the show answers Grosz's call for alternative methods of understanding the phenomenology of subjective interpretation and perception:

> Feminists need to seriously question whether phenomenological descriptions are
>
> appropriate for women's experience and, if they are not, whether it is desirable

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[111] Film critic Barbara Klinger suggests that avant-garde filmmaking's most predominant trait is the effective use of "arresting images." She uses the example of Jane Campion's *The Piano* to illustrate this point. See Barbara Klinger, "The Art Film, Affect and the Female Viewer: The Piano Revisited," *Screen* 47.1 (2006).

[112] Merleau-Ponty's philosophies are used quite frequently in feminist theoretical discourses, especially those interested in embodiment, spectatorship and interpretation. For an example of this, see Ann Daly, *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2002)

that they should be or whether, instead, altogether new and different theoretical terms are necessary—and how such terms may be developed. (Grosz 101)

Thus, I continue to explore various understandings of the phenomenology of spectator interpretation and intertextual subjectivity through an unraveling of my experience with *MetamorphoSex*. For example, in *Herstory of Porn*, Sprinkle stands before a projected image of her own, explicitly visible vagina (from her film *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle*) that is being stimulated (in the film) by a vibrator. Simultaneously, Sprinkle is live onstage, stimulating her image on screen with the same brand of vibrator. She doubles herself and gives pleasure to her doubled, projected image. There is no escape from any of the images if discomfort arises. She demands and urges the viewer to watch in an exponentially doubling sequence, as if proclaiming and promoting pleasure and sexuality with a symbolic megaphone. She is pleasing herself by watching herself please herself and reiterating her intention with ironic effect.

Artaud's Theater of Cruelty: Criteria

In this section, I describe in specific detail how *MetamorphoSex* characterizes Artaud's Theater of Cruelty practice. The criteria as discussed in Chapter One (which may have malleable traits) include: (1) non- reliance on the text, "to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (*T and D* 90), (2) sounds and movements prioritized over spoken words—if words are spoken, they are incantations or make word's meaning into mythic purpose, (3) use of symbolism and signs to inscribe meaning, (4) "direct communication . . . between the spectator and the spectacle" (*T and D* 96), (5) "attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works" (*T and D* 98), (6) embodiment of theater in the flesh: "In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds"

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(*T and D* 99), (7) use of trance induction techniques to lure an audience into their own psychological or psychic state for the purposes of personal, direct, transformational, curative change

Application of Criteria

Here I use Artaud's assertion of <u>non-reliance on text</u>, aiming "to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (*T and D* 90). Indeed, *MetamorphoSex* had minimal dialogue and relied almost entirely upon improvisational spoken words. There was no textual script the performers memorized, but rather a loose outline that had the structure of a ritual format. The action on stage was the primary means to understand the subject being performed. As stated above, sounds and movements were prioritized over spoken words—if words were spoken, they were incantations or expanded a word's meaning into mythic purpose. This format included a number of typical ritual elements, (e.g., Schecher, Geertz, Turner) such as transitioning from ordinary quotidian experience into a liminal environment, and activating an intention as an expression of desires and will to transform from one's knowledge of self into another. Within this non-textually driven format, the use of dialogue or spoken language was sparse.[113] Artaud's preferential treatment of voice and sound, or the distortion of spoken text, rather than speaking words without ornamentation, suggests that words become an "incantational beauty of voices" (*T and D* 93) brimming with a kind of psychosomatic magic with the power to penetrate latent recesses of pain and memory to coax healing processes.

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[113] Jacques Derrida referred to Artaud's dismissive use of spoken language as *la parole soufflé,* or as the "spiriting away of speech." For Artaud, speech should be used as a powerful tool of incantatory force Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 194.

Artaud also called for ample <u>use of sounds and movement</u>, with "concrete appearances" of "new and surprising objects" (*T and D* 93). He called for "objects of strange proportions [that] will appear with the same sanction as verbal images, [and which] will enforce the concrete aspect of every image and every expression" (*T and D* 97). The "pussy puppet" distinctly represented what Artaud imagined as an eye-opening use of props and objects on the stage. These puppets visually confronted the spectator to "wake up" by noticing the unusual. At the microphone, the puppet (as female genitalia) was able to "speak" and be seen. These "new and surprising objects" became enhanced and enlarged, visible and tangible symbolic projections of the women's sexuality and history.[114] The puppets also acted as "double" expressions of their sexuality and, as such, further illustrate Artaud's metaphor as it relates to this particular production.

Artaud preferred that the material of theatrical production emphasize themes and stories familiar to large groups of people (i.e., symbolism and signs to inscribe meaning) including those found in myths, archetypes, and fairytales.[115] These are seen as "attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works" (*T and D* 98). An example of this was present in the workshop preceding the production of *MetamorphoSex.* The women were asked to explore, through guided meditation, as Barbara Carellas noted, "the female archetypes most feared by the patriarchy: the witch, the bitch, the dyke, the whore."[116] In the show, Sprinkle's character presence as a goddess-esque, "Anya," fulfilled notions of a mythical, otherworldly story at play. Recall too the myth of Dionysus and his maenads venturing into the woods to worship him through orgiastic

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[114] Eve Ensler's monologue-driven play, *The Vagina Monologues* (1996) is another instance of women performing with the "voice" of their genitalia.

[115] He suggests works from the Bible ("The Fall of Jerusalem"), the fairytale/folktale of Bluebeard, a tale by Marquis de Sade, and Buchner's Wozzek as possible examples to be staged. See Artaud, *T and D* .

[116] Carellas continues, in my interview with her: "I heard Susun Weed at the Wise Woman Center say that and I had made a suggestion that this would be thematic thread to work in the workshop."

sexual ecstasy. Clearly, *MetamorphoSex* could be viewed thematically as another example of this ancient rite.

Artaud's vision for theater to provide "<u>direct communication . . . between the spectator and the spectacl*e*</u>" (*T and D* 96) suggests that he does not want audiences numb in their seats, letting stories dominate subjective experience in an ineffectual, briefly cathartic matter, one in which, once the curtain rose, it simply became a conversation topic, if discussed at all. Threatening the status quo was Artaud's primary agenda in all of his manifestos and writings, wishing for "no more masterpieces" (*T and D* 74). He classified the theater of his day—still relevant today—as having audiences in "straight-backed or over-stuffed chairs placed in a row and tell each other stories, however marvelous, is, if not the absolute negation of theater—which does not absolutely require movement in order to be what it should—certainly its perversion"(*T and D* 106). He continues:

> 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. (*T and D* 125)

In *MetamorphoSex*, "capturing the sensibility" of the spectators focused on agitating their comfort zones as a method to shift their passive viewing to active introspective narrative and simultaneously sensationally overwhelming them with the spectacle onstage. Oftentimes, even though it has now become cliché, especially in experimental theater, a "shock" might include naked bodies at play as in *MetamorphoSex*. Eric Toepfer discusses maps of various types of performance nudity and its effects:

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[T]herapeutic nudity entails nudity which works to deconstruct 'idealized'

(overdetermined) perceptions of the body that inhibit the 'healthy' formation of

erotic desires. With this strategy the spectator invariably reads the body as a

source, rather than object, of desire. (Toepfer)

Clearly, Toepfer's statement is consistent with Artaud's concept of embodiment of

theater in the flesh: "In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that

metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds" (*T and D* 99). Again, Artaud's Theater

of Cruelty by all possible means must, induce "spiritual therapeutics" for spectators; this

may, out of cultural necessity, require a bolt or surprise to provoke them beyond

complacent, ineffective spectatorship.

 MetamorphoSex also used <u>trance induction techniques</u> to lure the audience

members into their own psychological or psychic state for the purposes of personal,

direct, transformational, curative change. Some examples include: "sudden changes of

light, the physical action of light which arouses sensations of heat and cold;" (*T and D*

93) the drumming sounds and enchanting melodies that played on speakers overhead; the

rhythmic pumping sounds of the "fire breath" exercise that repeated for an extended

duration; or the images of the women doing the action onstage, usually in slow,

intentional, methodical, precision, was extraordinarily trance inducing. Accordingly,

what follows is a summary of Artaudian trance induction, using a poignantly descriptive

quote from Artaud. My comments in the quote from Artaud below briefly touch upon my

analysis above. These comments are presented in *italics* and bracketed:

 "Every spectacle will contain a physical and objective element [*ritual with*

 specific intentional effect], perceptible to all [*in a live theater space with audience*

 present]. Cries, groans, [*orgasmic sounds*] apparitions [*active visualization of*

positive sexual identity with a meditation on this image as if to make the "apparition" come alive], surprises, theatricalities of all kinds…the incantational beauty of voices [*the chant led by Montano with the trance sounds of "vummmm vummmm"*]…physical rhythm of movements whose crescendo and decrescendo will accord exactly with the pulsation of movements familiar to everyone [*fire breath rapid breathing exercise*]…appearances of new and surprising objects [*genital hand puppets*]" (T and D 93).

In sum, *MetamorphoSex* demonstrates specific elements of Artaudian Cruelty through performative intentions, effects, and presentation.

L'ÉCRITURE FÉMININE: REFLEXIVE PERFORMATIVE POETICS: FEMINIST ANALYSIS

In this section, I present my personal interpretations as feminist spectator of *MetamorphoSex* and as someone who experienced what I consider to be a profound sacred teaching through the witnessing process. *From my experience, the performers are not the only people moved into a temporary state of vulnerability. I too experienced a kind of rite of passage by simply witnessing the event. As an audience member, I melted into a physically passive (seated in a chair) but metaphysically-engaged participation (e.g., which includes libidinous sensations, a heightened sense of presence and energetic density) through watching and interpreting, at times, the uncomfortably explicit actions*.

Along these lines, Hélène Cixous' *l'écriture féminine* was represented in *MetamorphoSex* as live bodies evoking "women's writing" through the embodied physicality of performance. In discussing Cixous, Ann Rosalind Jones writes, "if women are to discover and express who they are, to bring to the surface what masculine history

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has repressed in them, they must begin with their sexuality. And their sexuality begins with their bodies, with their genital and libidinal difference from men" ("Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of "L'ecriture Feminine"" 252). Embodied, lived experiences and poetic style, as encouraged by Cixous, are vital analytical tools for understanding how women performing their desires act as mirror, or Artaudian "double," to the audience and to the self. Specifically, my use of reflexive-subjectivity allows me to analyze a performance's intense effect upon me such as that of *MetamorphoSex. As audience witness, my presence at that particular time catalyzed my personal growth as a sexually realized, healthy woman. Indeed, the title of the show, which is a neologic pun on metamorphosis, indicates change through a process of rising above ("meta") previous notions of identity; whether intellectually or metaphysically, a change of form ("morph") was the intention, and, for me, the result as a spectator. To be sure, the definition of the word "metamorphosis" has a particular element related to "transformation by supernatural means" (from the* Oxford English Dictionary*). In this case, the supernatural is theater performance, an "above natural" circumstance and situation that is a "double" to the "natural" or normalized behavior in quotidian aspects of life.*

As spectator, this mirroring of life through an exaggeration of sensuality on stage is cruelty because it "wakes" me up to the parts of my own dormant and suppressed psyche and desires. Inherently, a metaphysical transformation was subtly taking place inside of me. I was assessing a multitude of sensations and thoughts that lifted me above my preconceived notions of sexuality and performance. Artaud, too, yearned for a transformation above his present state of mind. "I speak of a metamorphosis of the interior conditions of the soul," (*Selected Writings* 139) he writes. Sometimes a metaphysical experience is best captured on the page by the vivid lucidity and mystery of symbolism and metaphor found in poetic expression. Cixous writes that woman must

"put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (875). *This movement, in view of the perspective I take for this dissertation, is to cautiously travel along the edge of artistic discovery and scholastic inquiry through text, but to not forget the experience of the body, as I do in the next section.*

Reflexive Observational Narrative of *MetamorphoSex*

A presentation of my reflexive-subjective experiences of MetamorphoSex *is frightening. Here I delve into territory filled with sexual intimidation, fear, repressed memories of abuse, and the mysteries of desire and fantasy. I was twenty years old when I saw the production of MetamorphoSex, but what I saw and the nature of the activities on stage still titillate me with a kind of nervous curiosity. I may talk a good game about being sexually liberated, but in action, I still hide in the false comfort of conformity to what is "normal." Discovering my own kink and queerness, as well as recognizing my ignorance and judgment, are by-products of the process of writing this dissertation. I write about this show having lived through self-experimentation and queries fueled by the show's latent and in-your-face messages.*

I sit in between two large men, my arms folded into my chest, covering my breasts, one leg crossed tightly over the other. My space is suffocated by the presence of these large men seated next to me, restricting my personal space on both sides of my body. I am uncomfortable as witness, both within and beyond my personal space. My best solution is to turn my gaze inward, to ask myself questions about my own sexual health. How are the performers doing that? What does that feel like? Is she really being turned on or is she "faking" it? Why would anyone want to do that? What's it like to have another woman fondling you? Are these women bisexual or lesbians or none of the above or all of the above? Does that matter? And, if I am getting turned on, does this make me

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bisexual or lesbian or none of the above or all of the above? (Remember: I am twenty years old at the time I saw the show, which may indicate my naivety.) What am I seeing here? Is this a sex show? Yes, but there is something else happening here, isn't there? I don't like sitting between these men. I have to ignore them.

As I observe, participating through my breath and stimulated presence, watching other women experiment, play, love, and breathe into their bodies, desires, passions, and sexuality, I see more than images. The signifier of naked woman as submissive woman translates to women using their bodies as agents of self-pleasure.

I go beyond passive spectatorship, simultaneously noticing my sexual desires, and begin to feel. I feel my own pulsating sex warming—it is a charge of empowerment generated by the orgiastic force of spirit and free will oozing within the traditional catharsis of theatrical experience. I am not sympathizing anymore, because something in me says that to gaze upon these women as a voyeur is inappropriate. I am with them.

I muse that the performers have collaborated like a networked, amoebic fetish; they have used their individual bodies as conduits for some higher purpose than to simply have orgasms onstage. The bodies were stuffed with desire and want, like a fetish doll, and through their release of paroxysm, the vibrations of intention, whether it is healing, peace, or transcendence beyond trauma, are released into the world. Their experience is clearly sacred, reaching towards the divine, beckoning for transformation.

Embodied Difference and Desire in *MetamorphoSex*

In this section, I interpret aspects of *MetamorphoSex* through the analytical lens of *l'écriture féminine.* The women in the production of *MetamorphoSex* are not expressing virtuosity in "acting," nor are they pedestrians simply walking down the street, going home, performing their quotidian daily lives. They embrace taboos in a

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symbolic, activist and ritualized context by touching each other in openly sensual ways, whether or not they identify themselves as lesbian, queer, straight, or transgendered, using sex toys, exposing their genitals to strangers, and having orgasms.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous addresses the many variations of fantasies that women might be reluctant to express, which they keep secret, lest they fall into the trap of becoming cultural Medusas, socially constructed monsters, ostracized and feared for their lush libidos and desires. It is my assessment of *MetamorphoSex* that the majority of the participants and perhaps the audience were poignantly affected as a result of the intensity of the eroticism and emotional force of the production, in part, because of the shockingly explicit nature of the performance and because they were a part of that rare theatrical experience. I note that in a brief off-hand conversation, a local GLBTQ female journalist reacted with excitement when I mentioned the topic of this chapter. "I saw it!" She exclaimed. "What did you think?" I nonchalantly inquired. "The smell of vagina was everywhere!" She answered with an enthusiastic grin. Another woman, a lesbian and owner of a local bed and breakfast, also said she was there in a casual conversation. "What do you remember?" I asked. "Seeing Annie in the middle of a big sexual thing happening. It was intense."

As with most shows, memories can flood to the surface when audience members are asked to tap into them, especially if the images are particularly arresting. In this case, audience members had the potential to leave the performance not only with powerful images and heightened sensorial stimulation, but somehow *affected* from the experience of witnessing women empowering themselves to induce their own pleasures. In this way, the performance characterizes Jill Dolan's "utopian performative," in which, Dolan explains, performers and spectators unite temporarily in a shared, yet individually distinct vision of ideals, hopes, and desires. This shared vision extended outward to the

spectators, such as myself during *MetamorphoSex* who sat mesmerized and inspired, who saw in these women courage, bravery, and empowerment (with paradoxical hints of audacity and narcissism). This self-centered, egocentric fantasy play is purposeful. Hélène Cixous calls for applying strategic narcissism as feminist tool in "The Laugh of the Medusa":

> I have been amazed more than once by a description a woman gave me of a world all her own which she had been secretly haunting since early childhood. A world of searching, the elaboration of knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity. This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful. Beauty will no longer be forbidden. (876)

The opportunity for personal empowerment through ritualistic initiation into a world of sensual sex education is a radical act and one that encourages us to figure out who we are through understanding desire, including our sexual identification. *As spectator, I contemplate my own secret, private desires by witnessing the performers' public pleasure. Through this exchange, I stalk my own "erotogeneity," daring to laugh with Medusa, perhaps emulate her symbolically by acknowledging my own monstrous rage in unearthing the source of my own repression. It is in the process of discovering my identity, my unique self and core passions, that I am transformed.*[117]

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[117] The word "erotogeneity" seems to be a neologism, combing "erotic" with "erogenous." The first word references a more romantic, mental sexual stimulation, and the second relating more with biological sexual arousal, excitement and stimulation.

In post-industrial capitalist America, hell bent on commodifying women's bodies, falsifying their pleasure for profit, the radical notion of women experiencing their sexual pleasure publicly, devoid of shame or veils, for their own power, is a transgressive act. If power is the capacity to do something effectively, what is effective about having real (supposedly not faked) orgasms before a live audience? Audre Lorde writes that use of the erotic has "often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite: the pornographic." (54) Lorde defines the use of erotics as empowering because once exposed to a world beyond patriarchal constraints, erotic expression is an "assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (55) To expose female pleasure, or at the very least, the attempt to honor and reveal her search for authentic, unique sexual gratification and healing, cracks open patriarchal hegemonies of desire, and reveals that women are the absolute masters and manipulators of their own flesh.[118]

Annie Sprinkle's performance persona as the goddess-esque "Anya" is her imaging of feminine empowerment through beauty and desire originating from the self,

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[118] However, this may arguably be a tenuous grasp for power. *MetamorphoSex* can be seen as another "production of productions," as a product of "sensual pleasures, of anxieties and pain." Gilles and Guattari Deleuze, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) For certain, profit was made in this performance, having sold-out houses every night, and generating more money for the theater in a week than in a typical month. At the time of the performance, Sprinkle and performance art in general was gaining success and respect. So was the practice of New Age Tantra. According to Hugh Urban, the practice of Tantra in the West "would seem in many ways the ideal religion of and for consumer capitalist society at the start of the millennium" Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy Politics, and Power in the Study of Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 254.

rather than from the hungry eyes of the consumer. Sprinkle "has eyes and mouth, and they are often actively engaged in seeing and speaking" (Schneider 64). In *MetamorphoSex*, the women are not posing for lifeless film cameras, seducing an audience of voyeurs as in Laura Mulvey's now contested theories of the "male gaze." Charlotte Canning, on the history of feminist theater productions, reflects this feminist notion to overturn traditional concepts of spectatorship:

> The artificiality of fourth wall voyeurism was seen as a male device that would
>
> divide women from one another. Emphasis was on responsibility to an audience
>
> composed not of passive spectators but of participants joined with the performers
>
> in a common movement. (33)

Consciousness-raising via feminist activism is taken in a different direction with *MetamorphoSex*. The women are consciousness-inducing, yearning for transcendental, along with political or social, revolutionary healing. To "trans" is to go beyond, and "scandere" is to climb over or surmount. To transcend is to move beyond or climb over a reality of being and into another state—in other words, a transformation of self occurs with the aid of transcendental experiences. This is the ontology of shamanistic expression. The women are the wounded healers, the (loosely defined) "shamans," curing their own symptoms through the actions and directions of their "gurus," Sprinkle, Carrellas, and Montano. One represents the reclamation of pure carnality and kink, another represents shameless sexuality and how to harness that power with precision, and the other represents the living legacies of feminist performance art in the guise of a performance "nun." The performance queers a previous generation of feminist theater makers in its radicalism.

It is important to consider Alexander Doty's notion of "'queerness' as a mass culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people in varying degrees of consistency and intensity" (2). Boundaries twist and turn between gender, privacy, pleasure and scopophilic titillation. Spectators have entered into new terrain. Interpretation while watching is constantly sloshing in a milieu of bodies performing and embodying desire for the desiring public spectators. Implicit within the intention of the performance is a genuine need to transcend hegemonies of inhibited desire and power. Body art performance scholar Amelia Jones explores transcendence as an ideology meant to usurp patriarchal constraints: "[F]eminist body artists … strategically perform in order to become singly rather than, as is typical for women subjects in our culture, doubly alienated from their illusory, coherent selfhood." (*Body Art: Performing the Subject* 153-57). In *MetamorphoSex*, the performers are cogent in their intentionality. "Double alienations" are reiterated and debunked. The show is all about self-hood honoring self. Poses are doubly heightened: they see me watching them, in my privileged gaze as spectator, but the gaze circulates back to the performers in a way that is both encouraging and revolutionary. Somehow lines have been crossed. Transcendence couples with transgression. In this case, the women onstage could be considered as activists whose cause is pleasure.[119]

The bulk of pornography production is created by and for men. For the purposes of this dissertation, I define pornography as a display of sexually explicit activity with the purpose of spectator arousal. Also, the industry generally works this tactic of stimulation and arousal of spectators which can then supply commercial profit. What makes *MetamorphoSex* unique, if I were, for the moment, to consider this as pornographic, (I

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[119] Indeed, Sprinkle considers herself to be a "pleasure activist" and regularly hands out buttons with that slogan on it when she lectures.

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do not) is that it was created with and by women, not necessarily only for women, except for the one-night, women only performance, but performed for all gender identifications in the audience. Perhaps the show is pornography in liminality? In an interview with me, Barbara Carrellas emphasized her joy in not delineating the distinction between "live sex show" as pornography or "sacred ritual" as transcendental expression:

> My whole point was you're never supposed to know. You're always
> supposed to think you know it, but you're probably never right. And I
> remember thinking, saying to Annie at the time, you know what,
> somebody years from now is going to sit down and try to figure out if this
> is a live sex show or a sacred ritual. And here we are.

Carrellas' recognition of the liminal space *MetamorphoSex* imbues through its non-distinct classification is part of the performance's lingering effect. To return to Audre Lorde, "pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling" (54). As spectators, feeling the erotics occurring in the space is an attribute related more to the show's performative ritualization of explicit sexuality rather than a display of pornographic activity. By performing in a ritualistic format, temporary bonds of trust and erotic titillation form between spectator and participants that are elegantly knit. As Charlotte Canning writes, regarding the history of ritual in women's performances:

> Feminist theater practitioners turned to ritual as a way to create feminist theater
> because ritual emphasized the bonds of community, sought to deny differences
> and barriers between audience and performer, and served the feminist community

by encouraging the celebration of women and their potential and actual power. (127)

In *MetamorphoSex*, the placement of desire, agency, and witnessing becomes unstable, and this allows spectators to assess what they will derive from the performance, with no clear sense of whether or not they witnessed pornography, an avant-garde radical art show, or an unfamiliar and strange sacred rite. Returning to Artaud's double, and Cixous' "writing the body," the performance is a radical notion of drama in the extreme expression of women-identified performers, which can then be reflected back onto the spectators. Undoubtedly, the experience was unforgettable and it left residual imprints on my memory that still elicits potent emotion.

TOWARDS SHAMANISTIC PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Performance "as" ritual is one of many ways to understand symbolic action. The academic discipline of performance studies incorporates a view of ritual theory "born out of the fecund collaborations between" (Phelan and Lane 58) ritual theorist and anthropologist Victor Turner, and theater director Richard Schechner. From the feminist perspective(s) I employ in this dissertation, *MetamorphoSex* specifically challenges well-recognized theories on rites of passage as a means of purification. Here, I explain how *MetamorphoSex* is a feminist ritual of transformation and purification by (1) understanding the prevailing concepts of ritual theory in performance studies, and (2) analyzing the performance using the lens of "woman's writing." In the end, the shamanistic, "spiritual therapeutics" (vis-à-vis Artaud), and gender equity political stance characteristics of the show assume that ecstasy and spiritual transformation are highly valued and also provide a night of entertaining theater.

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Ritual and Social Drama Schema: A Description

The distinguishing characteristics and processes of ritual, when interpreted as performance, include Victor Turner's "social drama" schema and its liminal phases from the ritual rites of passage (influenced by Arnold van Gennep), and the establishment of communitas; that is, a body of people who see themselves linked together in a cause, culture, or tradition. Turner's configuration of social drama displayed via ritual action includes (1) a *breach* (of an "established order," oftentimes includes breaking taboos), (2) *a state of crisis* (which disrupts the order), (3) *redressive action* (usually ritualized to repair the social breach and assuage crisis), and (4) *reconciliation* (also known as reintegration, the final solution of the crisis).[120] Liminality occurs in between each stage, however; "the breach exists for a long time," and "the critical corrective action is sudden" (Schechner *Performance Theory* 188). Liminality is a state of lost identity, ambiguity, or the oft-quoted "betwixt and between" metaphorical state. When enduring a ritual and/or rite of passage, the participant is utterly vulnerable but is also able to behave outside normal custom. Typical is the inversion of roles, rules, and social positioning in liminality; anything goes before the transformation.

Within the context of *MetamorphoSex*, live representation of the Turner/Schechner model of performance ritual is re-appropriated by the performance's overall shamanistic intent; indeed the very action of women gathering in public for the purposes of engaging in pleasure is radical. Their pleasure becomes performative action, a performance of "women's writing" their own inner desires and needs with their "text" embodied in flesh.

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[120] See Turner's *From Ritual to Theater*, pages 92-93.

Ritual and Performance Theory: A Feminist Polemic

MetamorphoSex lingers long in the "breach phase" with regard to socially constructed conformities of sexuality and pleasure. Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep observes that rites of passage that aim at purification "may simply lift a taboo and therefore remove the contaminating quality, or may be clearly active rites, imparting the quality of purity" (12). For Sprinkle's *MetamorphoSex*, the "contaminating quality" is initiated by exposing their bodies, naked, in private actions made temporarily public in the contained space of a theater. The female body itself disrupts and complicates the purification process in VanGennep's schema of the processes of rites of passage because female bodies—socially suspect as impure, leaky, and shameful things—are blatantly exposed and enjoyed. Mary Douglas advances this argument in *Purity and Danger* when she refers to "vulnerable" orifices that expose the public to possible dangerous contamination. The "[m]atter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, feces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body" (150). In the Biblical narrative of "woman's" rite of passage, her body is repeatedly blamed as the harbinger of evil through her first performative action of desire: to bite an apple from the "father's" (patriarchy's) forbidden tree of knowledge. This "forbidden" knowledge pertains to her self-awareness of her body and desires.

Vulnerability, as a performative act and as a literal flowing of the performer's sensual fluids, complicates the redressive action in rites of passage (i.e., the actions made to repair the damage from the taboo break or transgression) and liminal status of ritual. In other words, according to the Turner/Schechner model, the breach in *MetamorphoSex* can be viewed as the breaking of a taboo that is epistemologically based in the patriarchal ideology that woman's bodies are for his pleasure and use. From a feminist perspective, the actual breach in *MetamorphoSex* is the disavowal of submission of the status quo

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repression of women to own, experience, and explore their bodies. There can be no redressive action, no repair that would "reintegrate" her back to the "established order" of this sexual repression. Women's bodies, ritualistically purified in an act of submission to themselves suffices to be the true redressive action to mend the "crisis" of their socially kidnapped sexual identities.

Within performance studies, "masculinist history," is typically applied to ritual theory. In the Turner/Schechner ("masculine") model of ritual as performance and performance as ritual, universality is a common denominator for "twice-behaved behavior" or "performed actions that people train to do, that they practice and rehearse" (Schechner *Performance Studies: An Introduction* 22) in lived experience and symbolic action. Schechner writes that "when efficacy dominates, performances are universalistic, allegorical, ritualized, tied to a stable established order; this kind of theater persists for a relatively long time" (*Performance Theory* 123). In this model, performance ritual is a compulsive, necessary urge to perform for a specific, universally understood allegorical effect, whether it is considered cathartic, entertaining, or a spectacle or worship. The "stable established order" in Schechner's "universalistic" performance ritual reiterates and extends Turner's "social drama(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*)(*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of*

Play)" (*From Ritual to Theater*) schema. However, the primary difference between performance as entertainment and performance as ritual, according to Schechner, is that spectators become participants in some fashion.

In *MetamorphoSex,* the women's ritualistic experience of complete voluntary suspension and transformation away from the abusive perception of socially inscribed sexual modesty seems to have the most potential to empower and rehabilitate the women involved. Archetypes of feminine or woman's empowerment can assist the performers in ritual action. Visualizing "the Goddess," whether as deity, archetype or symbol, accelerates the emotional and psychological connection to a "feminine" lens. From this perspective, female bodies are plural, multi-dimensional, and multivalent as valued, precious, precocious, respectable, sometimes wrathful, and warrior-like, and sometimes maternal and nurturing. In interviews conducted by Barbara Walker on women's rites, one woman revealed, "I was raised to devalue my body. I had some sexual wounding. I was taught that the body is evil, wrong: sex is evil. The Goddess has helped me reclaim those denied aspects of myself"(Walker 233). The "Goddess" for her is a symbolic image of self-empowerment and healing. In an interview I conducted, one of the participants of the *MetamorphoSex* workshop said she felt that by doing this sex-positive healing work, a power greater than herself emerged, "a power that would move mountains, or reverse the direction of rivers," she emoted. As it turned out, the world outside her did not dramatically shift, it was her "own world within" that was fundamentally transformed.

With Sprinkle at the helm in her Goddess-Diva personae "Anya," the women presented their embodied knowledge in a temporary, utopian community, as pleasure-activists before a public audience in a live pseudo-ritual performance context. In an essay titled "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols," Barbara Walker argues, "When women recount their own lives, the themes are less climax . . . or elevation than continuity"

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Walker alludes to a more circular shape for women's ritual processes.[121] Lesley Northup elaborates, "Women's rituals tend to emphasize the cyclical rather than the linear: the recurrence of menstrual periods, seasons, moon phases, harvests—the endless cycles of life" (30). The form's structure is also more spontaneous and intuitive, "making allowance for the unanticipated" (Northup 45). The emphasis in women's "ritualization," as named by Northup, is on the processes of creation rather than strictly rigid and dogmatic in form.[122] This process "becomes an act of liberation, by which women name their experiences, choose their own symbols and tell their own stories, so defining their own identity in and over against a patriarchal worldview" (Berry 279). *MetamorphoSex* overtly twists the "social drama" schema of performance ritual by breaching an irreparable taboo in the "patriarchal worldview." This is important for contemporary Western women who find that their life experiences are often neglected by religious and secular rituals. Catherine Bell concludes, the "tension between the natural and cultural that is sometimes recognized and sometimes disguised in life-cycle rituals appears to be integral to the values and ideas that shape personal identity, social organization, and cultural tradition" (Bell *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* 94). Their point is that women's rituals are different. Barbara Tedlock writes in *The Woman in the Shaman's Body*:

> As a general rule, women shamans, and men trained within a feminine tradition,
> have an interpersonal orientation; they coax their clients to become active
> participants in their own healing. Male shamans, and women trained in a

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[121] Although using the term "women" about a female-only ritual is problematic because I risk biological essentialism, I choose to contain the arguments presented in a gender-specific container for structural cohesiveness or "strategic essentialism," as coined by Gayatri Spivak. In many cases, I employ the term "feminist" to escape the inevitable traps of essentialism.

[122] I recognize this also describes other ritual practices identified by Schechner, Turner and Drewal.

masculine tradition, take on a heroic role; they encourage their clients to take the

role of passive spectators at their dramatic performances. (282)

In general, per Tedlock's research shows that for women shamans, the focus tends to be

more on "inner emotional and physical imbalances" through a process that focuses on

"self-awareness, purification, acceptance and surrender"(166).

The spectator experience, as well as the participants' experience, is an essential

element in *MetamorphoSex*'s ritual effect. Victor Turner's definition of liminal refers to

the "undergoing of ritual to a state of vulnerability so that they [the ritual participants] are

open to change […Then] persons are also inscribed with their new identities and initiated

into their new powers" (qtd. in Schechner *Performance Studies: An Introduction* 67).

The aforementioned theatrical format is a ritual performance spectacle for the

purpose of healing traumatic wounds for the performers, and possibly the spectators,

buried deep within women's sexuality. *MetamorphoSex* is on the edge of being a live sex

show, an instance of avant-garde performance art, and sacred theater; this is

fundamentally feminist in nature because it explores and challenges conventional

boundaries. As Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris have pointed out, "Feminism has

always operated self-reflexively: as an evolving 'body' of political ideas and impulses"

(Aston and Harris). Arguably, *MetamorphoSex* joins feminist conversations already at

play to imagine and shape a more positive, healthy, and just world for women, especially

with regard to issues of sex, performance, and spirituality, and the experimental

convergence among them.

Indeed, ritual as feminist, shamanistic performance practice, as a demonstration of

Artaud's cruel theater, is an activist strategy of sexual politics, spirituality, and poetics.

Performances like *MetamorphoSex* should be devised and remounted again after

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integrating learned valuable lessons from the inaugural run. Barbara Carrellas reflected this sentiment when I spoke with her; however, she also noted that she would like to move the show into a narrative structure, based concretely on thematic archetypical journeys such as those in fairy tales. *MetamorphoSex* used a ritual structure as its narrative force with the performer/participants as archetypical "goddess" characters, based on their own life stories, whose journeys on stage dare to inspire or incite radical change for themselves and possibly for the spectators. This ritual structure is a critical aspect of my central argument, i.e. *MetamorphoSex* is an example of cruel, feminist, and shamanistic theater.

MetamorphoSex re-appropriates ritual practice, a common component of shamanic healing techniques, for both personal and political feminist performance agendas. This demonstrates that women's spirituality is evident in feminist performance practices and can be viewed as a feminist performance ritualistic practice. In *Ritualizing Women*, Lesley Northup argues that:

> Ritual both reacts to social change—usually in a protective and conservative
>
> mode—and engenders innovative symbolization and models of social reality. The
>
> dynamic of ritual and social change works in both directions: although ritual can
>
> dampen social alterations, it can also spark them. (92)

In this way, ritual can "reveal the possibilities for resistance and subversion that lie within ritual" (92). Therefore, rituals "can misrecord, revise and edit history—a primary claim of feminist scholars" (93). *MetamorphoSex* acknowledges the repression of women's sexuality in a patriarchal culture by offering the women participants an opportunity to revise and edit their life traumas (in relation to their identities and

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sexualities) and to transform such traumas into wisdom, rather than remaining emotionally and psychically stuck in a constant state of victimhood.

In *Theater & Sexuality*, Jill Dolan warns us that "Political history demonstrates how easy it is for dominant culture to backslide into normativity as its default mode" (*Theatre & Sexuality* 83). Are there performances that carry some of the elements of *MetamorphoSex* that can continue the process of dismantling hegemonies of normative oppression? In Chapter Six, I discuss what cruel theater as a mass spectacle that is an immersive experience devised to uplift and transform spectators into full-participation with a common purpose or theme.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I used performance analysis, reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics to examine the qualities and characteristics of *MetamorphoSex* as a performance that reflects Artaud's Theater of Cruelty criteria, with an emphasis on his concept of the "double." I described a radical feminist ritual performance, *MetamorophoSex* as an emulation of Artaud's notion of theater as "double." I showed that theater as "double" has multiple meanings, including how a spectator emotionally and intellectually positions herself/himself while watching this production. I suggested that, if viewed as pornography, *MetamorphoSex* "doubles" as an outward projection of social excess within the "shadow realm" of desires. I also described that this extreme excess of women displaying their sexuality in live performance can produce curative emotional effects on the performers and the audience. I also demonstrated that women's rituals in a theatrical setting are unique manifestations of ritualized performance practices because of the porous, improvisational structure of the ritual and the intention of the ritual focused on transformative healing for the women involved.

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As with the previous chapter, my analysis of this case study also revealed three core findings, including performance "in the extreme," further portrayals of woman as "monster or goddess," and improvisational action as performed in a live theater context. Chapter Six includes further discussion of these findings. In the next chapter, I discuss another live performance event in which I was an active participant in a theater workshop called the DbD Experience. I analyze how this performance experience integrates Artaud's notion of "cruel" theater through various exercises and techniques.

Chapter Four: "Cruel" Theater as the Doing by Doing Experience

I must be cruel only to be kind.—*Hamlet*, Shakespeare

Generally speaking, in this chapter, I analyze the DbD Experience: a weekend theatrical training workshop, in which I participated, developed by performance artist and teacher, Rachel Rosenthal. I begin by applying Artaud's concept of Theater of Cruelty as an analytical tool, specifically his explanation of "cruelty" as an element of theatrical expression. I accomplish this by describing Rachel Rosenthal's DbD Experience while using performance analysis, reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics techniques. I interpose an Artaudian analysis along with thick descriptions, introspective reflections, observations and performative poetics. I demonstrate how the DbD Experience is a robust, although certainly not pitch-perfect, example of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty.

I also investigate the DbD workshop and training sessions as an expression of Hélène Cixous' concept of *l'écriture féminine* (or "woman's writing") which included performing daring, intimate and personal stage events and expressions. By applying a personal and unique language of gestures and feelings, I discover and express, abstractly and technically, pieces of my life, dreams, hopes, and fears that embodied emotional and metaphorical concepts in a theatrical form.

Finally, I examine the DbD workshop's "shamanistic" performance practices that emulate Artaud's proposed Theater of Cruelty as "spiritual therapeutics." Along these lines, I demonstrate that certain performance tools have the potential to uncover and transform participants' perspectives, including my psychological and metaphysical self. During the workshop, Rosenthal taught participants how—despite doubts and fears— through the medium of improvisational, non-scripted, and non-rehearsed performance, to

engage with and activate self-awareness, a process that encouraged tenderness, resiliency, and courage. She accomplishes this, from my perspective, through workshop exercises that are also challenging in a "cruel" way. Given this, I have come to recognize latent yet powerfully poignant, precious, and vulnerable aspects of myself and others as a participant and theater-maker as director, performer and writer.

Through the use of the aforementioned theoretical-analytic tools (i.e., Artaudian, *l'écriture féminine,* and "shamanistic") I challenge distanced and objective analyses and I write self-reflexively and performatively; in essence I apply these approaches to understand the DbD workshop experience and to show how this experience demonstrates Artaudian performance practices. *For emphasis and/or poetic contemplation, I include my introspective commentary in italics*.

Following a brief methodological note, this chapter is organized as follows: (1) a description of the DbD Workshop; (2) background information about Rachel Rosenthal; (3) an experiential description of the DbD workshop experience from my subjective-reflexive position (at times, I write performatively); (4) an analysis of the DbD Experience using Artaud's criteria of cruel theater practices. Finally, because feminist and shamanistic characteristics were wholly *integrated* into the workshop's exercises and resulted in a *densely interconnected* experience; thus, presentation of my analysis of this experience, in contrast to the presentation format used in Chapters Three and Four has been integrated into a section of this dissertation. Thusly, the "feminine" or "woman's" writing is fused organically with concepts of "shamanistic" acts. This final section includes (e) observations of how the DbD workshop demonstrates an embodied mode of "woman's writing" (*l'écriture féminine)* while providing "shamanistic" characteristics that I associate with the workshop and which are consistent with Artaud's Theater of Cruelty. In the final analysis, I convey how these workshops helped to shift my

perspective on performance through a cutting-to-the-core theatrical, transformational process, consisting of cruel, feminist, and shamanistic performance practice. In order to convey these integrated ideas, I often use performative poetics and self-reflexive commentary to accent the holistic, all-encompassing qualities of the workshop. Upon analysis, I conclude that the DbD Experience closely resembles Artaud's Theater of Cruelty. This chapter ends with a brief summary of the case study.

A Methodological Note

Returning to Hélène Cixous' declaration that "Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (875), I suggest the "movement" that I put "into the text" is ideological and requires approaching this chapter on the DbD workshop rhizomatically; that is having multiple viewpoints, multiple origins and endings, without a starkly discernable central fixed point, consisting of the same ecosystem, i.e., the landscapes of Artaud's "cruel theater" and a structure that is intentionally fragmented and eclectic, like a healthy field of dandelions. This rhizomatic metaphor is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, French philosophers who base their book *Anti-Oedipus* in part on Artaud's concept of the "body without organs" as well as their concept of the "rhizome" in *A Thousand Plateaus*—connecting theories they apply to late post-consumer capitalism and the inherent schizophrenic psychological split commodity culture induces within individuals. Poetically speaking, *rhizomes extend through the undergrowth underground, creeping up through the topsoil like indestructible weeds. Rhizomes, like dandelions, are often mistaken as pesky weeds and can grow through cracks in cement, which I view as a reminder that concretized ideas and forms are never as impenetrable as they might seem.*

To wit, my analytical approach in this chapter aligns with the manifesto spirit as written in the works of both Artaud and Cixous. Artaud wrote, "As for the drawing up of this Manifesto, I realize that it is abrupt and in large measure inadequate. . . The dialectic of this Manifesto is admittedly weak. I leap without transition from one idea to another. No internal necessity justifies the arrangement" (*T and D* 114). *I write myself into the world. I have studied; indeed, I dive into performative poetics with my voice as text, as "flesh."* In *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography*, Lynn Miller and Jacqueline Taylor write*:*

> Creating an autobiographical narrative reconstitutes the self, the audience, and surrounding cultural contexts. It makes sense of the self, gives each part a voice and a body. We can safely say that until a life is shared through writing or performance, it does not exist at all, or at least does not resonate in the broader realm of public consequence. . . The story of women's autobiography is the story of resistance to the disembodied, traditionally masculine 'universal subject,' whose implicit denial of skin color, gender, sexual orientation (other than heterosexual) and economic disparity constrained many women as 'others' with no voices or physicality. (3-4)

From this fertile ground of ideological dreams and inquiries inspired by Artaudian and other exuberant manifestos that, once combined together, conjure manifestations of a fearless, feminist theater of transformative cruelty, I discover flowers that have pushed through the cement of my rigid theatrical dogmas and assumptions. I share these experiences to "reconstitute myself" and to remember my existence first and foremost as a practitioner of the performing arts.

To reiterate, this chapter is a demonstration, in textual and written form, of how all three elements of my three-pronged analytical tool integrate together. No fixed distinction can be made between Artaudian, feminist, and "shamanistic" practice because these attributes were working in simultenaity from my reflexive-subjective position as observer and participant in the DbD Experience.

A Description of the Doing by Doing Experience Workshop

In September 2009 and 2010, during a thirty-four-hour period—a Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday days—paid participants, including myself, joined performance artist Rachel Rosenthal at her studio/theater/home space in Culver City, a neighborhood in West Los Angeles. Since 1980, Rosenthal has conducted the Doing by Doing (DbD) workshop wherein participants practice specific performance techniques she developed in her expansive career as both a performance artist and director. During the workshop, participants learn to use Rosenthal's performance techniques and exercises that are foundational for her unique, all-encompassing improvisational theater format. Additionally, participant-performers receive training on how to use lighting instruments, sounds, props, set pieces, and costumes to enhance performance aesthetics.

From her study of Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* in 1946, Rosenthal realized performance could encompass more than what traditional theater typically offers in form. Rosenthal realized that dance, music, bodies in moving images, spectacle, live instruments, lights, and voice could coalesce into an entire, totalizing theatrical experience. She explains that performance could be a "space within which all kinds of physical, visual, and audio events could take place and communicate ideas without the use of text" (qtd. in Roth 45).

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Over the years, Rosenthal noticed that the DbD workshops provided her with a core group of company members to practice a uniquely improvisational theater that had long lasting effects on the participants, including myself:

People were changing radically as their proficiency in the form progressed, and in ways that altered not only their stage work but also, quite dramatically, their personalities and individual lives. Workshop members reported increased self-awareness and awareness of their environment, altered consciousness, and they began to make radical changes in their personal lives. (Rosenthal *The Dbd Experience* xvi)

Rosenthal believes that her improvisational performance training is extraordinarily difficult and wrought with countless opportunities for failure. However, she has learned that performances can and do blossom organically with awe-inspiring wonder, and seemingly magical, yet precise exertion of effort. Kate Noonan, the Managing Director of Rosenthal's company, describes in metamorphic terms the learning process inherent in the DbD Experience:[123]

What is played out in the workshop is the eternal dance between the "I" and the "Other", the negotiations of power, the intermingling of passive and active, the

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[123] From the website in further detail: "The DbD Experience is a 34-hour intensive weekend created and taught by interdisciplinary artist Rachel Rosenthal. Ms. Rosenthal developed the method applied to the DbDX during the 12 years of training people for her Instant Theater Company active between the 50's and 70's in Los Angeles. "Doing by Doing" is the underlying philosophy of the workshop, providing participants with a thorough hands-on experience covering all aspects of theatrical performance (body, voice, sound, music, movement, lights, sets and costumes), approached through exercises, processes and improvisations of solos, duets and group work. The nuts and bolts aspect of the work is technical and professional."

focusing and diffusion of attention, the dialogue between "who I am" and, as

Rachel puts it, the "givens" of existence. (qtd. in *The Dbd Experience* xiii)

Since my DbD experiences with Rosenthal and its workshop participants, my techniques and habits related to performance and theatrical presentation have changed. Such "givens" of existence as Noonan describes above are now inconsistent with my professional concretized and habitual assumptions about theatrical presentation and training. I challenged every technique I had once learned as an actor, director and performance artist; my preconceived knowledge of my artistic crafts became undone. My artistic, personal, physical, and metaphysical awareness of myself collided with a kind of explosive aftermath, like a supernova, radiating magnificence after its painful eruption. All this transformation had been initiated after one weekend (that I attended twice). Interestingly, Rosenthal also describes the workshop experience in similarly grandiose, poetic terms:

So what exactly is Doing by Doing? It is precisely what it says it is. You learn, you accomplish, you evolve, not by theorizing but by concretizing. Ideas and concepts are the backbone of the work. But they must be transmuted into matter, into something sensorily perceptual. It must be felt, seen, touched, heard, not just thought. Physically, ideas alone don't promote growth. They can drag you into standing water, and give you a false image of yourself, a narcissistic view of a self-portrait that is in reality a still life. (*The Dbd Experience* 24)

Rosenthal explains that in a DbD workshop, participants first work and improvise upon given concepts and ideas. Then, through her guidance, techniques, and performance practices, they learn to use their physical bodies to "transmute into matter" to produce a physical expression of concepts and ideas.

So the mystery, the secret of DbD's success is that, for two and half full days, you are doing, doing, doing, bringing to light your innermost impulses and fantasies, your feelings, your uniqueness and total being. . . . You also get a sense of [the DbD Experience's] effect on others. It is an "In and Out" process that sets a whole gamut of dynamics in motion. Hence change in one's life, in one's thinking, in one's doing. (*The Dbd Experience* 24)

Rosenthal describes DbD experiences in ways that seem intimidating and even frightening, as they were for me at times, igniting "a whole gamut of dynamics in motion." By using theatrical expression as abstract and artistic filters of personal stories, the DbD experience facilitates self-expression in ways not dependent upon texts, language, or spoken dialogue and thus tends to instigate profound changes in how the participants handle life situations. Indeed, after each of the two DbD Experience workshops I attended, I noticed a significant shift in how I performed on stage, in addition to how I performed in private and public life, and in all areas of responsibility and desire. *My thinking and doing has changed into an aspect of maturity and respect for the craft of performance art alongside an awareness of my dynamic negotiations of life's inevitable see-saw moments between suffering and ecstasy.*

RACHEL ROSENTHAL: BACKGROUND

In this section, I briefly describe Rosenthal's artistic background and career. Rosenthal, now in her eighties, is an interdisciplinary performance artist whose teaching and previous solo-performance work span four decades. She incorporated multimedia, props, costumes, and even animals in her past performances. In her adolescence, Rosenthal migrated from Paris to New York and continued moving back and forth between the cities for about a decade. During that time, she met and worked with

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numerous well-recognized theater directors, actors, musicians, and artists.[124] In Paris as a young woman, she trained with Jean-Louis Barrault and Roger Blin, both of whom personally knew and admired Antonin Artaud. In New York, Rosenthal participated in the 1950's avant-garde art scene, collaborating with John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg. She currently resides in Los Angeles and is Artistic Director of The Rachel Rosenthal Company; she also engages in theater through workshops and performance meditation exercises that she calls "Doing by Doing" (DbD).

Rachel Rosenthal was born in Paris on November 9, 1926. Although she was Jewish, Rosenthal recalls her family was "completely assimilated" (*The DbD Experience* 3). She explains, "I didn't know I was a Jew or what Jews were until much later in life. My father was an atheist, my mother a closet mystic, and I was an atheist like my father" (3). Rosenthal describes her upbringing as lush, upper-class, and sheltered from the outside world; nevertheless, she believed art to naturally be her career path. In Paris, she lived with her parents, servants, and nannies. In an interview with biographer and scholar Moira Roth, Rosenthal explained that she was raised by governesses in an opulent neighborhood in France. When her parents were present she was on show and on her best behavior; however, simultaneously her caretakers witnessed the raw and untamed parts of her personality: "My parents adored me and my governesses were mean to me. I grew up with this dichotomy—that I was totally wonderful and totally horrible at the same time" (Roth 62). In her book about the DbD Experience she writes:

> I am laying out this background to establish that I grew up half spoiled rotten,
>
> snobbish, self-centered, willful and male-identified, half neurotically nervous,

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[124] Rosenthal harbors a uniquely American history in performance art and theater. Her background as a French immigrant raised an upper-class neighborhood during childhood, whose family fled from the Nazi occupation in 1940, indelibly marked her self-awareness as "Other."

over-sensitive, lonely, confused, and with no skills whatsoever involving human relations, be they over or under our social caste. (*The DbD Experience* 3)

Despite the opulence and privilege she experienced as a child, she wrote, the "Nazis were building their power at that time," (*The Dbd Experience* 4) and thus her family immigrated to New York City, where she spent most of her teenage years.

As previously stated, Rosenthal discovered Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* while living in Paris in the late 1940's. Rosenthal writes about her discovery:

Artaud's book totally amazed and enchanted me. He was presenting me with the solution to my problem [of not knowing which art form to practice]. He posited an art form that was neither all literary, nor all visual art, a way of integrating all the arts under one banner, thus allowing me to indulge in all the art forms that I loved and that I feared had turned me into a dilettante, because I couldn't decide on just one to be my life's work. (8)

Like Artaud, Rosenthal sought to create art as an interventionist strategy against bourgeois culture: "Like Artaud, she wants to jolt the public. Like Artaud, she defines the theater as an all-embracing spectacle. Like Artaud, hers is a fanatical and visionary commitment to theater" (Roth 7). Perhaps Rosenthal's feelings of "otherness" coupled with her self-admittance of loneliness and longing for attention predisposed her to Artaud's work.

Between 1945 and 1955, Rosenthal lived in both Paris and New York, where she quickly became the darling lady of the mostly-male and homosexual circle of now recognized artists including John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Jasper Johns. Later she referred to "her total sense of male identification with its resulting alienating effect on her

as a woman artist; there were few women among her circle" (Roth 8). In 1956, she moved to Los Angeles and began her career as Artistic Director of the Instant Theater (1956-1966), where she experimented with Artaudian-influenced techniques as well as Zen and the martial arts, which she learned from her work with Cage and Cunningham. These techniques have been incorporated into her DbD Experience. From the 1970s through the 1990s, Rosenthal created solo performance art pieces, garnering recognition as a voice for both feminist and environmentally themed performance art. Her pieces involved pseudo-narratives based on her life experiences, including family and her relationship with the earth, and animals in particular.

In 1981, Rosenthal shaved her head, cutting off her curly, red locks in a performance as a rite of passage and to rebirth herself as an artist. Photographer Annie Liebovitz captured a stunning photograph of Rosenthal buried neck deep in a desert landscape with her head utterly bald. Rosenthal's head is cocked towards the camera, bearing an expression of both fierceness and emptiness. The message implicit in the image is that Rosenthal is of the earth, inseparable from the landscape and her own body. Although she looks like an androgynous wise crone, also apparent is an underlying blanket of sadness and destitution. Moira Roth muses that this particular photograph seemed to visually suggest her "increasingly shamanistic role for us, the audience" (Roth 22). Others have commented on Rosenthal's ritualistic performance style as characteristic of potent spiritual intentions. In a review of Rosenthal's *Pangaean Dreams*,[125] Ross Wetzsteon suggests that Rosenthal is a "stand-up shaman. . . and performs her vigorously meditative one hundred-minute monologue as if the Earth itself were using her as a Delphic voice to express a solipsistic reverie" (140). From my experience as a participant

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[125] Rosenthal performed *Pangaen Dreams* in 1990 in which she personifies the supercontinent of the Earth from 250 million years ago. She interchanges her life history along the trajectory timeline of Earth (Pangaea's) eventual separation into other continents and forms.

in two of her workshops, it appears that Rosenthal functions along a similar track to what Mircea Eliade, anthropologist of shamanic cultures, describes as a "great specialist in the human soul" (8): or what I deem as a "shaman of performance." Below is a reflexive interpretation of an embodied example of a "shamanistic" practice as well as Artaudian display of "emotional athleticism". The performance piece I describe is replete with "ecological-feminist ideas shaping the work" (Munk 135).

I learned to trust Rosenthal's teachings, knowledge, and experience through an intuitive and gradual accumulation of conversations that began at a conference on ecology and theater practice[126]. *I watched her give a keynote speech about her performance career, offering glimpses of these shows through video replays. She read from one of her past solo shows entitled* Rachel's Brain. *Although she stood behind a podium, I noticed a discernable energetic shift in her stage presence. Her voice deepened to a bellowing, powerful resonance which she would then radically alternate into tones of high and low resonances, speaking words as if each phrase carried an incantation or a warning that magnetized the audience's attention. Through her vocal control and performance style, I acquired an immediate adoration for her, although my adoration was rooted in wanting to understand how Rosenthal's work as an artist and teacher clearly exemplified Artaud's Theater of Cruelty concepts. "Artaud saved my life," she said at this keynote, directly addressing me and nodding in my direction in the audience. (Earlier, we had a conversation in which I had asked her about her connection with Artaud and how she digested his concepts in her performance work.)*

Off the stage, Rosenthal is neither welcoming nor is she intentionally over-powering and cruel. She exudes an energy that is indescribably warm as well as bone-

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[126] The conference was titled Eco Matters on Stage at University of Oregon in Eugene, 2008. I presented a paper on activist groups that incorporate performance tactics in their protests, including Bread and Puppet Theater, ACT-UP, and the Dead Man Walking school theater play project.

tingling frightening. She is a "monument and a marvel. She is a force of nature."
(Bernheimer 138). As DbD students, we feel she is somewhat open to debate about our
choices and sometimes she is won over with our logic. In fact, Rosenthal's unobstructed
bluntness and penetrating insight about students' efforts in the workshop are astute and
eye-opening. Through her experience performing dozens of solo pieces and her
teachings, Rosenthal's artistic work has been generated by her self-aware, internal
storylines, and reflexive growth as an artist, her connection to the earth, and her desire to
teach others how to create "spontaneous and collective ordering of chaos (multiplicity)
through a very disciplined art form" (Roth 31). This work, she states, is "much more
spiritual and abstract and artlike, often on a mythical level" (31)

I feel proud to consider Rosenthal one of my primary mentors in my career as a
performance artist. I also acknowledge the problematic power dynamics that can occur
when students wholeheartedly supplicate themselves to a teacher-trainer. And yet, if I did
not allow myself to fully invest in Rosenthal's training, I would not have exposed wounds
that desperately needed healing.

It is true that Rosenthal tends to generate an overwhelming sense of devotion and
"guru"-like adoration from those with whom she has worked. Testimonials I have
personally collected and those contained in Rosenthal's collection indicate that
participants frequently develop feelings of appreciation for Rosenthal's workshop
experience. One of the participants in my first DbD experience was a female visual artist
who traveled from Costa Rica to take the workshop. She wrote the following.[127]

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[127] The writer has granted me permission to use her testimony in this document.

One of the long time dreams I had since 1988 was to meet Rachel Rosenthal. The first time I knew about her was in San Francisco, CA when I saw her face on a monumental poster in a building.

As a visual and performing artist from Costa Rica, I was very honored to be accepted to her DbD experience workshop in September of last year. Although I knew, that it was going to be a big challenge for me to take the workshop taught by a Master of so high standards and to be in a group where most artists knew a lot about theatre and performance, I decided to take the chance.

After the 36 hours of the workshop, and after sharing stage experiences with very talented peers and listen to Rachel's views of our presentations, the world and humankind. I realized how important was for me to be there to reinforce not only my knowledge about scenic actions and building up a character; but also to reaffirm my place as an artist in Costa Rica, Central America and the world. The DbD workshop led me to research more about myself in relationship to my own mission as an artist. I was able to understand better Rachel as a person, as an artist and as a pioneer of performance and theatrical improvisation. That time helped me to understand part of art history and the great work Rachel Rosenthal has done for women in the arts, all around the world.

Personally, it was a "precious and intense time" I will never forget! And it definitely changed my way of looking and understanding contemporary improvisation and performance. (Barfield)

For some people, this type of trust in a teacher is considered suspicious and lacks critical inquiry. However, this is not necessarily true for artists who view her training methods as integral and necessary components of refining their craft throughout their career. My primary artistic passion as an actor and performance artist is to use actor training as a fundamental base from which to generate new material. In many modern schools of actor training, devotees to a teacher with unique teaching methods, even trademarked techniques, are not uncommon. Examples include students of various acting schools, such as Stanisklavsky's "The Method", Dell'Arte, Meisner, Stella Adler[128], Suzuki, and Anne Bogart's "Viewpoints", and even schools in improvisational comedy that view teacher-trainers like Del Close[129] with an almost unnerving reverence.

Experiential Description of the DbD Experience: Analysis

In her book, *The DbD Experience: Chance Knows What Its Doing* (2009), Rosenthal provides a detailed description of the DbD Experience, including lists of specific performance technologies, exercises, training, pedagogical intentions, and related metaphysical and transformational effects on practitioners. In the following pages, I describe a select number of these to demonstrate how they impacted me as experiential Theater of Cruelty in performance practice. In addition, I discuss how, for me, the experience opened the possibility to physically embody a resolute respect for the

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[128] Local Austin theater company, The Rude Mechanicals, produced a show called *The Method Gun* that revolved entirely around a fictional "guru" based loosely on a company trained in Stella Adler's acting techniques. The show revealed both the utter naïve devotion of the artist to the teachers as well as an underlying skepticism that these methods could be psychologically and physically dangerous for the students. The suggestion presented is that one may not fully understand or know how to judge the difference until personally experiencing and applying the training unconditionally.

[129] Del Close was a primary creator in the long-form improvisation comedy routine called "The Harold." My former employer, Latifah Taormina had worked with Del Close in the San Francisco politically radical comedy troupe, The Committee. Close also worked at Second City, Chicago's premiere improvisational comedy training and performance venue. He taught a significant number of *Saturday Night Live* actors over his almost four decades-long career.

feminine, vis-à-vis Hélène Cixous' radical manifesto musings about *l'écriture féminine* in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." Cixous writes, "Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst—burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 876). Similarly, through DbD, I learned to appreciate how the body on stage can "speak," evoke, and harness tremendous pent-up and repressed emotion, both as a performer and as a spectator, leaving no product or trace other than an internal shift in perspective. I purport that this is fragile and dangerous work; however, it can catapult participants out of their fears of expressing "luminous torrents." Also, I examine how this work inspired me to adapt a shamanistic approach to performance training and presentation that resulted in the kind of personal "radical changes" that Rosenthal describes above. By recounting the journey I took to learn from Rosenthal which I describe in performative poetics below, I employ *l'écriture féminine* as a method to illuminate my yearning for a technique of performance that could influence and ripple out into techniques of understanding and living authentically as a public intellectual and artist in my intentions and actions. In essence, I wanted to learn a theater technique that, through the performative motions of the exercise, could lead to transformation. I also understood that Artaud's influence on Rosenthal would naturally seep into these techniques of transformation and ecstatic activities within theatrical practice.

In September 2009, I traveled from Texas to participate in Rosenthal's DbD Experience. My motivation was spurred by a lust to acquire more performance training tools and to further my academic research. I arrived in Los Angeles on a Friday afternoon, hours before the workshop's start time. I took a cab from the airport and requested the driver to take me to the ocean. I didn't know where to go exactly. I mentioned that my destination was ultimately Culver City and asked him to recommend a

place. The cab driver dropped me into the heart of Venice Beach. Upon arrival in this eclectic, prototypically lazy surfer community, I dragged my bags to the sandy beach. The Pacific Ocean's blue expansiveness cut the horizon with a sharp demarcation line. Large, fluffy white clouds spattered across the sky. The sound of waves repetitively crashing against the shore eased my tense body. I sat cross-legged on the sand, facing the ocean, and breathed. Closing my eyes, I tried to think of nothing, expecting nothing. For the first time in several years, I felt an ascension of my spirit, as if joy had started to creep into my depressed malaise. After my restorative communion with the Pacific Ocean in Venice Beach, I ventured towards Rosenthal's space. I took a thirty minute bus ride to the workshop location.

Rosenthal's white box performance space, Espace DbD is located in a moderately small two story building in Los Angeles' Culver City (Sony Pictures Studios is close by). When I entered the space, I instantly felt immersed within a hearty legacy of community. Kate Noonan, Managing Director of the Rachel Rosenthal Company, answered the locked glass door. I entered with my small suitcase and back pack. She invited me to sit on the couch in the office area, which also served as a meeting area apart from the theatre space. A ten-foot tall black and white sketch portrait of Rosenthal hung on one wall. On another wall, behind Noonan's desk, were large binder folders of archival materials from Rosenthal's company and artistic history. A long table served as an eating area and an empty bookshelf served as a spot for participants to put their bags and other items. The theater space was kept clean and clutter-free.

Throughout the first weekend workshop I attended in Los Angeles, I took detailed notes. In brief, I recall jumbled images of women and a couple of men, moving about in various costumes underneath an assortment of dim and bright shifting colors, a plethora of props, prolonged eye contact, contact improvisation, tears and laughter, and two dogs

huddling close to Rosenthal, who sat regal and powerful in the center chair against the wall, facing the performance space. She appeared as a shaman, a medicine woman of performance, with large silver and turquoise rings on her fingers, and multiple ear loops in both ears. Her presence demanded immediate respect. Nothing seemed to elude her.

On the first day, we gathered on the floor in a circle. Rosenthal sat in a chair within the circle of us all. "I love to see all your scared faces," she cooed with a slightly devious smile. *I laughed, relieved that she noticed what I felt was the unspoken energetic vibe in the space. Her "toying" with us did not seem malicious, but thrilling like a three-card monty dealer.* She introduced us to Kate Noonan. Rosenthal mentioned two other participants as her "slaves of love," which she explained is her term of sincere endearment.[130] These "slaves of love" direct the workshop occasionally and assist Rosenthal with the flow and trivial details of the workshop in ways that a newcomer, without experience, could handle:

> They [the Slaves of Love] are there to help, support, make things safe and smooth, listen to gripes and deal with other problems, pass the box of paper tissues, and anything else needed, clean and make neat before and after, prepare coffee. . . They create an atmosphere that is anxious or easy. They can have a lot of influence on the way a DbD goes. (*The Dbd Experience* 36)

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[130] Rosenthal using the term "slave" to describe a volunteer who essentially assists her with the stuff of the workshop that might be cumbersome to her is problematic and insinuates a lack of understanding of privilege and whiteness. Rosenthal's upbringing, as stated earlier, was opulent, with her having many advantages that she may not be able to recognize outside her personal experience. I believe Rosenthal is making an attempt to reassociate what "slave" means in her own lexicon of theatrical devotion—to be a slave to DbD is, for Rosenthal, a willingness to submit to the mysterious, overbearing force of art-making itself through the power of a love for the process.

Indeed, with Rosenthal's aging health, the necessity of assistants helping her throughout the workshop was crucial. They also did tasks that were physically difficult for Rosenthal, and they buffered any emotional overflow that was in danger of unnecessarily interrupting the workshop curriculum.

Each morning of the three-day DbD Experience, participants sat on cushioned chairs with wired cushioned backs in a circle on the floor. Rosenthal began by introducing the day's thematic focus. She discussed her concepts and shared her stories and hopes of that particular day's overarching theme. The circular seating pattern and the different daily themes were the basic structure for the DbD workshop. Day one (Friday evening) was titled "Origins," day two (Saturday day and evening) was titled "Connections" and day three (Sunday day and evening) was titled "Power."

Rosenthal explained that the DbD Experience worked "the way evolution works, and the way life is expressed in our being." For Rosenthal, evolution and respect for the earth's intricate ecological systems were fundamental to her art and spiritual pursuits, and advanced her urgent call for transformational healing. In the DbD workshop, through exercises, trance meditations led by Rosenthal, and improvisational performances that will never—can never—be reproduced again, like the impossibility of recapturing moments in our everyday lived experiences, we worked a miniature version of the human story on this planet. She explains:

> We respond to actions, events, the unexpected, by a process that is akin to
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> improvisational performance, the only difference is that, in our lives, the process
>
> is continuous, whereas in the making of art, it is discontinuous and 'in brackets,'
>
> so to speak. In other words, we make art at times, but live our lives all the time.
>
> (*The Dbd Experience* 27)

Rosenthal stated that day one was titled "Origins" because it was the first day and also an opportunity to remind us of our human fragility, beauty, and circumstances of the grand scheme of human existence. She told us that we needed to accept the givens of living as human beings on earth, in the solar system, and in the galaxy; that despite our sense of entitlements we were a tiny piece belonging to the greater cosmos:

There are infinite mysteries still to be fathomed. The miracle of our reality, our life, our formation, our history and histories, and finally our present time with its complications, its beauties, its horrors, are all material that we draw from in our theatrical compositions. There is no end to the possibilities at our disposal. Our origins feed our creativity and us. We are made of these origins. . . . All we require is to listen, to allow our minds to reach into those deep folds and our bodies to respond with motion and sound, in order to attain these far-away, alien and long forgotten states. (*The Dbd Experience* 42)

Rosenthal further explained that artists are particularly sensitive to the world around them and thus, carry answers to some of our problems today by experimenting with our troubles through performance and other modes of artistic expression. Next, Rosenthal described how we are connected, from Pangaea, the theorized supercontinent that connected all of the earth's separate continents millions of years ago before the tectonic plates cracked open the landmass into disparate parts. Although still speculative, the concept of Pangaea (meaning "all the Earth" in Greek) was first articulated by Alfred Wegener in his book *The Origin of Continents and Oceans,* published in 1915 with much scrutiny from the scientific community. His theory was based on continental drift and that all continents were at one point one great land mass.[131]

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[131] See Leslie Alan Horvitz, *Eureka! Scientific Breakthroughs That Changed the World* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002) 156 . Horovitz writes, "To understand the context of the debate, it's necessary to go back to the beginning—at least metaphorically speaking—to the Book of Genesis. Throughout much of

The totality of a performance's components becomes the stage reality in the same way that the unfolding of our being is the result of myriad forces, events, fields, and actions of which are aware only to a limited degree. Life is a hugely complex dance that boasts not one but an infinite number of choreographers. Each present moment is a constellation of things conscious and unconscious, and is determined by individuals, groups, social forces, environment, ecology, weather, the past, the future, and by 'accidents' that are the unexpected interference of events.

(Rosenthal *The Dbd Experience: Chance Knows What It's Doing!* 26)

An element of romanticism and utopic idealism was evident when Rosenthal spoke about our "connections," as if we were all one giant human community, in (dis)harmony with ourselves, our relationships, our languages, and our way of living. She suggested that during the Pangaean time there was little change, then suddenly the Cambrian Explosion, which evolved seemingly spontaneously and exponentially, produced more extravagant creations and animals. She noted, "Time is a big mystery. It's one thing for us on earth, another thing for those in another world."

Richard Schechner describes time in terms of various degrees of meaning in performance practices. The DbD Experience resembles his concept of "event time." Schechner defines this type of time in the context of a series or sequence of events that reach conclusion only after all the precursor moments of play or ritual have taken place. His examples include rituals in which a "'response,' or a 'state' is sought, such as [those performed in] rain dances [and] shamanic cures." (Schechner *Performance Theory* 7). In

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, geology was still dominated by the concept of the biblical Flood as a major force in the formation of the Earth's surface. Long-ago catastrophes, it was widely held, had brought about sudden and radical changes that persisted to the present day."

the DbD Experience, time does seem to shift into a state of open-ended finales, depending on the circumstances and parameters of the exercise Rosenthal assigns to the participants. In this way, Rosenthal performs the role of director who becomes, vis-à-vis Artaud, "a kind of magical conductor, a master of sacred ceremonies" (Artaud *Selected Writings* 220).

The DbD Participants

Every person who wants to participate in the DbD workshop is required to write Rosenthal a letter. Most people indicate that they wish to participate in the workshop because, as Rosenthal states, "I want to know who I am, and I want to know how I am able to express it."

Rosenthal explained that artists are heroes of our species (as well as anti-heroes), dedicated to the truth as they see it and committed to presenting such truths to balance out a "sick and suffering world." We are on the "brink of extinction," she cautioned. There is fear in the air and we can sense this due to the relentless path of destruction brought onto the earth for generations by humans.

Rosenthal pointed out that artists make things where once there was nothing and this makes them creators in collaboration with the creative processes of the cosmos and of the earth. She told us that she viewed people who create with fond affection. "I have a great deal of love for them."

Rosenthal also stated that in their letters to attend DbD, participants frequently identified fears and hesitations about getting to know ourselves as artists and human beings, "as if we might find a monster lurking there. But this was a lie." She said that we were all worth getting to know ourselves better. Throughout the workshop, she said, she would teach us how to become better human beings by simply becoming awake and

aware of our potential as artists and as human beings who are stuck in the same situation of life's cruelty, in all sorts of ways.

In my letter to Rosenthal, I state that I seek out her workshop and teaching methods specifically because of their Artaudian and "shamanistic" appeal. My first letter to her is below:

My name is Heather Barfield. We met in Eugene, Oregon for the EcoDrama conference. I approached you with the oft-asked question: "Did you know Artaud?" However, that was a trick because I already read that you never worked with Artaud. I just wanted an opportunity to engage in conversation that is close to my heart, mind and spirit, and to hear the truth from you...

I am currently working on a dissertation about Artaud and feminist performance artists who emulate his Theatre of Cruelty. Recently, I have discovered some interesting links between Artaud and shamanism, if you recall his trips to Mexico. I bring this up because I feel that your DbD workshop might be the kind of theater/shamanism that I am curious about in various ways.

My personal life is in need of some love. I don't mean relationships, although that's a part of it, but rather to fully be present in love. I have been involved in performance/theater for 20 years, mostly here in Austin, Texas. But I am also . . . a performance artist, poet, director, scholar and magic worker. I am also a new mom.

Your workshop would certainly help me to understand my

roles/masks/hats/modalities that I maneuver through on a daily basis. Being that I

am a graduate student (in ABD status) [and] mother of a 2 and half year old, I

don't have quite the amount of funds that your workshop requires. I have made a

deposit to hold my spot, but it would be difficult for me to be able to afford the

plane fare plus the total workshop fees, though no doubt worth every penny.

So, in so many words: I would love to attend your workshop and learn,

participate, and contribute. And I would be interested in any scholarship funds

you may have available. I can send along my dissertation proposal if you are

curious.

All best, with love,
Heather Barfield

(dated: September 9, 2009)

Other Participants: a spectrum of personalities

I include here a brief description of other individuals who participated in the DbD workshop with me.

Rosa[132] was a visual artist from Costa Rica whose mother had just passed away. She said that she had always wanted to work with Rosenthal and that she was excited to have made the trip to the workshop. Her first language was Spanish and during the

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[132] All names of participants have been changed. These participants were in the September 2010 DbD Workshop.

workshop, she occasionally requested further explanation on certain words to understand their context and meaning.

Samantha lived in L.A. and studied fine art and performance art. Recently, she began focusing on textile arts. She was also a participant in Rosenthal's eight-week version of the DbD workshop, which culminated in a live performance presentation for a public audience.

Hensen was a puppeteer, performance artist, and a recent MFA graduate from CalArts. His artistic work tended to be queer-focused and transgressive. His hair was dual toned pink and blonde; his eyes were penetrating yet inviting and warm. I connected most with him during the weekend's activities and we remain friends today.

Chad was an instructor of philosophy at a nearby community college. He had never performed on stage for an audience. As an artistic hobby, he enjoyed photography and making videos.

Caroline was an interdisciplinary visual artist.

Taylor (whom I had worked with in my first DbD experience) explained, "I am an extreme artist." She was an active member in Rachel Rosenthal's current company, Tohubohu![133] in which the artists perform the improvisational theatre format Rosenthal had taught them for a paying public.[134]

Regina was a writer who said, "Yes to life," and had brought "no expectations" to the workshop. She wanted to learn how to put her ideas onto the stage.

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[133] Tohubohu is a French term, rooted in Hebrew that means chaos or hubbub, or a confused messing about.

[134] Rosenthal's company members are somewhat like her living lineage of knowledge, the ones who will carry her vision and concepts of live performance, her notions of instant theater and its value into the world. Rosenthal had once mentioned in the workshop that she hopes to remount some of her performances, but with a different person playing herself. Rosenthal does not perform any full-length work anymore.

Jorge was another member of Tohubohu! He jokingly commented, with pleasant enthusiasm, that he "had to be here." He grew up in Los Angeles with his Spanish-speaking Chicano family.

Serina was currently an undergraduate studying theater art. She was also a member of Tohubohu!, but this was her first weekend DbD workshop. She was Asian-American who, like Jorge, grew up with English as a second language.

As I listened to the introductions, I was immediately struck by Taylor's introduction. *Extreme artist? I wondered what she meant. Am I an extreme artist? I certainly know how to work under pressure to produce a show and how to perform on stage as an actor.* Many actors must learn methods of relaxation and confidence building techniques in order to face an audience, while simultaneously subduing stage fright. But I later discovered this kind of "extreme" is not what she meant. In Rosenthal's view, this level of improvisational live art was without rehearsal but rich with props, costume, lights, sound, and performers, in which participants had to instantly collaborate in a theatrical context: it is highly extreme and can be terribly frightening to those performing. It is extreme because there is no plan other than to improvise with whatever concept is brought to the stage. I surmise that similar to living life, the DbD Experience requires a performer to think on one's feet, make instant decisions, and execute those decisions second-by-second. The performer has to learn, in the moment, how to create and trust that performed choices will be relevant, understood, honest, and harmonious with all other elements working together in the space. These elements seem to be an important component of both Theater of Cruelty and shamanistic practices. Artaud states that a "poetry of space" (Artaud *Selected Writings* 232) is comprised of a "language of signs, gestures and attitudes (Artaud *Selected Writings* 232). As an example, he describes that this space is comprised of "all the means of expression that can be utilized on stage, such

as music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesture, intonation, architecture, lighting and sets" (232). Thus, for Artaud, a Theater of Cruelty has an intense natural (or spiritual) poetry. (233).

After a round of introductions, Rosenthal told us that we were an interesting and diverse group from various and unique backgrounds. She said that we would bring much material to the upcoming hours we would be spending together. She told us that during our time together we would not compete or do things right or wrong; she explained that there was no grading system and there were no rewards other than our fellow participants' clapping after a performance. And, clapping simply let the performer physically understand--through the action of clapping--not only a performed piece's quality but more importantly, that it had been seen.

In the circle talk before the Power day, Rosenthal told us that artists are "people with a sense of responsibility, simply by the fact of having dedicated their lives to creation" (*The Dbd Experience* 102). She said that when we, as artists, hear "the Call" to make our art, to follow our vision, and our sense of obligation to create, that we must follow, else we suffer from "neuroses, accidents, and defeats" (Rosenthal *The Dbd Experience* 103). *I thought of my many paths in life, and how I was suddenly struck with a sense of purpose sitting in the workshop, doing this work. I describe these experiences in the next section.*

DBD AND THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY: AN INTEGRATED REFLEXIVE-SUBJECTIVE AND PERFORMATIVE POETIC ANALYSIS

The Artaudian Theater of Cruelty criteria include: (1) Non-reliance on the text, "to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (*T and D* 90). (2) Sounds and movements are prioritized over spoken words—if words are spoken, they are incantations or make word's meaning into mythic purpose. (3)

Use of symbolism and signs to inscribe meaning. (4) "Direct communication . . . between the spectator and the spectacle" (*T and D* 96). (5) "[A]ttempts at direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works" (*T and D* 98). (6) The embodiment of theater in the flesh: "In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds" (*T and D* 99). (7) Use of trance induction techniques to lure an audience into their own psychological or psychic state for the purposes of personal, direct, transformational, curative change.

In addition, I present an integrated analysis that includes Artaudian, feminist, and "shamanistic" interpretations simultaneously; this departs from the separate analyses used in the other case studies discussed in chapters three and four. I use this presentation format because many of the examples of exercises are amalgamations of the qualities and affects I have outlined and demonstrated, but in less separate distinct categories than in previous chapters. In other words, I offer performance examples that evoked theatrical "cruelty," demonstrated characteristics of *l'écriture féminine*, and also profoundly or subtly transformed me through various "shamanistic" practices, decision-making, and intentions. Thus, to describe the DbD Experience, I have re-characterized my three-pronged theoretical-analytic structure into a rhizomatic and dynamic form.

To this end, my approach reflects a self-conscious weaving of what Artaud considers a process of "Becoming." Consistent with Rosenthal's sense of art-creating as a catalyst for knowing ourselves more dynamically, Artaud writes:

It seems, in brief, that the highest possible idea of the theater is one that reconciles

us philosophically with Becoming [sic], suggesting to us through all sorts of

objective situations the furtive idea of the passage and transmutation of ideas into

things, much more than the transformation and stumbling of feelings into words.

(*T and D* 109)

Artaud insisted that theater's most prominent characteristic emphasizes live action in physical space, performed by actors, whether those actors are human, animal, puppet, or object. As long as the space is occupied with *something* that can be observed by an audience, then there is an opening for interpretation of that object's action. Theater occurs "between gesture and thought," which is to say, between action and objective, force and will, or focus and direction. Neither text nor speaking aloud are dire necessities to Artaud's Theater of Cruelty since he believes a gesture or an action can evoke powerful dramatic "exorcisms" that eradicate stoic and lifeless abstract conceptualizations and criticisms.

Here I discuss the first criterion I set forth above: non-reliance on the text, and "to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (*T and D* 90) in terms of the DbD Experience. Discursive thinking in the Theater of Cruelty dampens the force of intent and expression for Artaud. An actor must learn how to be, as Artaud claims, an "athlete of the emotions (heart)" who is able to effortlessly glide from one evocative gesture to the next without second-guessing or over-analyzing the (improvised) action. In point of fact, Rosenthal taught us how to quiet our inner chatter to perform from a place of brave spontaneity, trusting in our own artistic choices in the moment, live, and usually without speaking. It was Rosenthal's hope that with these techniques we might be able to slowly integrate into our quotidian lives, learning how to be both present and impeccable. *Personally, I learned that the techniques I practiced in the workshop revealed intuitive wisdom that I had not tapped or that I had*

rejected because of social customs and paradigms that prohibited my ability to trust in knowledge gathered from my life experiences.

"Language is not a part of the DbD method," explained Rosenthal, "except for a few words allowed on Sunday. To deprive people of language is to unlock the floods of body-centered knowledge and action that often defers to words. Words can be crutches, and using none forces imagination, energy and invention that lie dormant when language is allowed to take over" (*The Dbd Experience* 30). Thus, in the workshop we learned to communicate by staying present and being aware of one another, by noticing subtle body, breath, and sight cues, and by listening to something other than our rolling internal dialogue that dominated our thoughts and cauterized our ability to maneuver between the edges of spontaneity and intention.

Similarly, Artaud emphasizes the importance of overthrowing the oppressive power of word and text in his Theater of Cruelty:

> That is to say: instead of continuing to reply 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." (*T and D* 89)

With regard to a "language half-way between gesture and thought," I describe exercises that emulated Artaud's thinking.

After a circle talk on the first day, "Origins," Rosenthal instructed us to perform "The Blob" exercise. We slowly moved from our "blob" of bodies in the center of the space (a physical metaphor of "Pangaea" and the dawn of life on Earth from single celled to multi-celled creatures) into legged creatures. We began the Blob exercise lying on the

floor, with dozens of pieces of long gossamer cloths (Rosenthal referred to as *schmatas*) that were thrown arbitrarily upon us. Noonan played a song from the sound board that involved simple, trance-inducing wind instruments and a single drum that beat faster and faster in rhythm. Members of the group subtly rustled. The urge to move apart and separate from the "blob" beckoned us. Bit by bit, we shifted our positions; we inched our way to other locations in the space. We might have felt somebody's hand next to ours or the brush of another's leg. We moved intentionally, cautiously, and gently into a rising strength beyond the physically connective "blob." We did not speak, nor did we look at one another. However, we recognized our uniqueness and our instinctual responses in reaction to others' movements. In short, we imaginatively performed our human, evolutionary process over the past millions of years in about ten minutes. These motions were a means to impel us to overcome our shyness with a strange group of people and to facilitate our nascent abilities to take an amorphous concept and translate it into concrete and visible performative form. Eventually, we metaphorically became lions, deer, frogs, rabbits, and other creatures. We sniffed one another, examined each other's traits, and connected with each other as if we were living in an imaginary wilderness ecosystem.

On another day of the workshop, participants learned various tools for the voice as an instrument for performance. In order to work with voice, Rosenthal taught, in stages, how to sit properly positioned for vocal work with our spine vertical, moving our "asses" back from underneath, and then relaxing our shoulders, slightly pulled back and down. We breathed slowly and deeply while opening our rib cage, "like a fish's gills," stated Rosenthal. This process expanded our capacity to breathe inside of our lungs. Next, Rosenthal counted to three as we inhaled, paused, and counted to three again as we exhaled. She then increased the count to six. We repeated this pattern until she raised the

count to twelve. *I am not unfamiliar with breathing techniques but appreciated her specific focus on the technique as it applied to her style of performance presentation.*

In addition, Rosenthal taught us how to do what she called "purring." This sound is made when air is pushed through vocal chords while consciously controlling the air flow. One can create a staccato type of sound with this "purring." She claimed that producing this vocalization could help a person to relax if she/he were nervous before an important appointment or public speaking. We made this sound as a group and created a frog-like chorus of sound which shifted spontaneously into a harmonious low note. After the vocal warm-up, we did another individually-focused exercise.

In the following exercise, we emulated Artaud's criterion of <u>sounds and movements prioritized over spoken words</u>—if words are spoken, they are incantations or make word's meaning into mythic purpose. According to Rosenthal, the voice as a tool for expression holds a proverbial key to opening up blocked or frozen emotions.

In this exercise, the group sat in a circle. Rosenthal approached us individually. She hobbled on her damaged knees to sit open-legged while facing the participants. The goal in this exercise was to generate a controlled and powerful tone that shifts from a "mmmm" sound into an "ahhhhh" and back to "mmmm." It was a deceptively simple exercise. Most of the participants were not able to accomplish the "correct" sound on their first try. Resistance and shakiness in the voice shook a person's vocal steadiness. Rosenthal peered through us with her piercing but loving gaze. She did not allow our nervousness or timidity to undermine the exercise. She enthusiastically encouraged a participant until she/he was able to get as close as possible to perfection in the vocal exercise. That perfection sounded differently for each individual; however, it was easily detected: it appeared to be that moment when the participant seemed on an edge between absolute confidence and absolute fear, holding a paradox of expression between these

emotional places that challenged or frightened her/him. It was a perceptible shift in the person's stature, confidence, and vulnerability as a strength with which we all identified.

When it was my turn, I let my ego take over. "I know about voice. I'm an actor!" I thought. However, when Rosenthal sat before me, I felt my heart flutter in nervous excitement. I inhaled, opened my mouth to breathe out and make a sound, but I could barely hold the sound longer than a couple seconds. "You're a tricky one!" she exclaimed after seemingly unsure how to instruct me. She encouraged me further, giving me some confidence and patted me on the knees. She suggested that I relax. She instructed me to make the sound balance in pitch, tone, and length, In other words, I was to make the "ahhhh" and "mmmm" sounds evenly spaced in time. By my fourth try, she said, "Good. Now send that sound to group. Look at each person in the circle. They will clap in a rhythmic pattern to keep a beat." I smiled nervously, inhaled and pushed the resonating sound out from my diaphragm and into the air. I gazed at each person for only a brief second as I was trying to control the strength of my sound. I did this without wavering and without fizzing out due to lack of breath support. I finished, closing the sound with a soft "mmmm."

Rosenthal grinned and said to me, "You have so many treasures to share. Don't hold back your treasures." *I softly gasped, feeling as if suddenly a huge burden had been lifted. For many years, I have resisted the bounty of my passions for performance, while believing that to control my river of passions I must dam them behind firm walls. Typically, I would intentionally subdue and belittle my performance expressions because I did not want to overpower others who may not have had the training and experience which had shaped me into a well-seasoned performance artist. However, in this particular vocal exercise, my perspectives transformed. I understood that emotions, passion, love of expression, and prior experience can be more accurate, evocative, and*

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effective for me as a performer and for an audience, if I harness these active attributes with confidence, grace, and impeccable technique.

In the following exercise, called the "Object Exercise," each performer spent time in front of the group with an object that Rosenthal intuitively chose from her fecund prop area. This exercise was a clear example of Artaud's criterion: *use of symbolism and signs to inscribe meaning*. Rosenthal selected the object by pondering the person and her instincts about who the person might be and which object might resonate meaning within her or him. Rosenthal described her process of picking the object for the particular person as something "totally instinctive" in which she gets a feeling of that person's personality. She then moved into the prop room and let an object "offer itself." Rosenthal placed the object on the stage with the participant facing the back wall with closed eyes and unaware of the object chosen.

The other participants watched stage events as they occurred while lined-up against the opposite wall. "This is not to be a performance," Rachel instructed. The (non)performer simply observed the object while assessing what the object *is* beyond what we *see* it to be. We were not to over-intellectualize the exercise, but rather to continue to be aware of our breathing, to observe, and feel inside ourselves any fluttering of emotions that might rise.

The person onstage knew when to face the others after hearing Rosenthal's intentional stomping towards her chair. *The "Object Exercise" was a particularly significant experience for me. During my turn, I was surprised with Rosenthal's uncanny object selection. Placed underneath a single spotlight was a silk and cream-tinted corset with delicate metal buckles and straps. I thought, "How did she know?" Experiencing my emotional state without judgment, I felt a welling of elation, sadness, loss, ecstasy, and pain. A host of conflicting emotions rose and fell. I let them go, without moving,*

performing or making an attempt to "do" something. The students were instructed to let these feelings and thoughts "pressure cook" and to not "entertain, or even make art" (Rosenthal *The Dbd Experience* 98).

After some time passed, maybe a couple minutes, I felt laughter bubble to the surface. Where did it come from? The laughter I vocalized became louder. I felt as if I was maintaining control while still allowing the laughter to release. I steadied a sense of my stage presence and acceptance of my authentic emotions rather than trying to "perform." I slowly approached the corset with sporadic giggles rising louder. I would laugh and then remain silent. I continued to gaze at the corset. Quite surprisingly, the laughter would initiate again. I thought in lightning flash bursts about Annie Sprinkle, this dissertation, my love life, my sexuality, my father, whores, and seduction. I thought about a man I have had crush on who dresses in drag for his performances and how much I would love to prance around for him in this corset or him for me. I thought about kundalini chakras, subtle energies and accessing bliss. I abstractly thought about repression. My giggles turned into guffaws. Tears formed in my eyes and my face turned red and wet. Laughter coalesced with an unfamiliar cry. Am I laughing or crying? I gently settled down and felt as if I was walking a thin line towards performance; I did not want to disobey Rosenthal's rules. I silenced myself. I waited again. I took the corset into my hands and noticed that it was inside-out. I turned it around, naturally, as if I handled these costumes everyday, which I do not. I loosened a buckle or two. I placed the corset on my lap while kneeling on the floor. In a flash moment, I looked up to the audience. Rosenthal, who sat dead center in front of me, seemed in total sync with my presence on stage. She raised and lowered her hand in a swift gesture to Kate Noonan to signal black out.

As the lights went up, the air in the room felt thick. It was as if we had all dived underwater, descending into a cavern together, and slowly swam back to surface. I was emotionally conflicted between embarrassment and relief. I tried to prevent paranoia (such as whether or not I did a "good job") from consuming me. Rachel left her chair and did not return again until after our dinner break. This saddened me since I had so desperately wanted to have a moment of discussion afterward, like we had done with the others. That discussion never came for me, and I think I still long for it. The empty space left after my turn of the "Object Exercise" was related not to Rosenthal's lack of interest, but to an unforeseen circumstance that interrupted our workshop for most of the remaining weekend. This need I felt for feedback on this one particular exercise shall remain a void, for the story was more about my own search for personal connection to desire and identity than gaining performance merit from Rosenthal or my peers.

Rosenthal taught the performer-participants another fundamental technique consistent with Artaud's criterion: "a direct communication*"* with our fellow participants as the audience, or "between the spectator and the spectacle.*"* This technique was her triangulation concept of "No-Focus Focus." Rosenthal's practice of teaching us "No-Focus Focus" in the beginning of the workshop helped us understand how to spread our sight not only with our eyes, seemingly focused on some distant place, but also as a way of extending our peripheral awareness of the overall space within which our bodies were floating. The effect was a slightly detached perspective from the performed moments (for the ones performing). But, unlike any sort of frigid sensorial detachment, the "No-Focus Focus" was an expansive observational technique. It inherently dissolved aggressive performer agendas. For example, hypothetically, I might have had pre-conceived actions about my improvisations but this would dampen and forcibly perturb the fluid and organic process of improvisational performance art making. Essentially, the performers

were in a direct "communication between spectators" through this focus technique. The participants were the audiences and the performers, and therefore an instant exchange blossomed like an amorphous group consciousness.
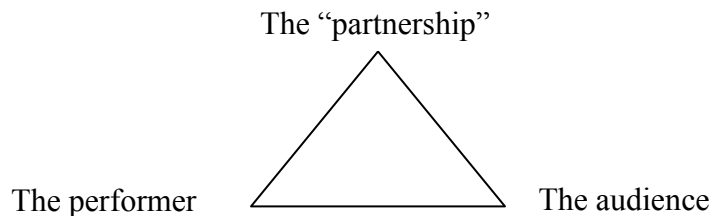
The "partnership"

The performer   The audience

Figure 13:   The "No-Focus Focus" technique

According to Rosenthal, "No-Focus Focus" induced a triangular "partnership" between the audience, performer, and all the other stage elements at play during a staged event. She has written about this triangulation as a fundamental idea to furnishing performances: "I am very aware and respectful of the Audience [sic], and believe that no piece is quite done until an audience has experienced it" (*The Dbd Experience* 42). Indeed, during the workshop I realized that this "direct communication" between participants cultivated a bond in which we learned about each other without habitual masks or pretensions dividing our connection. Rosenthal continued, "Playing to an audience is like the final action performed by the old sword smiths, to 'baptize' their finished swords, by making them taste fresh blood" (43). Quite dramatically, Rosenthal pointed out that in order for us to learn how to understand ourselves through performance, an audience's reaction is necessary and valuable.

I realized that I eventually had to let go of my insecurities, especially about body size and lack of a dancer's grace or a comedian's levity. For example, due to a lifetime of self-hatred about my belly size, I would rarely move the lower half of my body, using arms, hands, upper torso, head, and facial expressions as my primary instruments.

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Rosenthal glared at me once and suggested, "You need to move your legs more." *This comment triggered a reaction that induced me to accept the "givens" of my body's ability to move in particular patterns and to let go of these attachments and limiting notions of my abilities. I was empowered to blast through self-perpetuating patterns of self-degradation and relish in the extreme sensuousness of my body. To move my hips felt as if I was moving rivers of desire and beauty. I allowed myself to love my body as if I were a child, innocently loving the pleasures of corporeal existence.*

In another exercise that illustrates Artaud's criterion about spectator/performer communication, we learned how to "see" each other unwaveringly while intently observing the other. This exercise inspired thoughts about what happens when we uncompromisingly "look" at one another, in silence and in pairs, relaxing our bodies, shoulders, and breath.

I noticed tiny wrinkles forming in the corners of my partner's eyes; I noticed a small dimple here or a birthmark there. I noticed the tense way she held her head on her neck and the angle of her stare. I noticed how uncomfortable she seemed to be with me fully looking at her. We became rapt audiences for each other, giving and receiving our gazes without becoming attached to the image and the person. We continued staring without projecting "cuteness," as Rosenthal instructed.

Rosenthal described the aforementioned exercise as not covering up our discomfort with awkward soft giggles or smiles to lessen the silent intensity of staring. We were emotionally exposed and raw before one other. This is cruelty in a subtle, inside-out way. We allowed ourselves exposure so that we could connect to another in a gradual realization that, as Artaud once wrote, "life is always someone's death" (*T and D* 102). In other words, by closely *looking* at another participant and recognizing her uniqueness and sameness, I was overwhelmed by and appreciative of being alive and

present in that instant. We acted as mirrors of our deaths through examining the exquisite details of our lives and peculiarities of our bodies.

Here, I examine another Artaudian criterion: *"direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works"* illustrated by the exercise titled "The Mayan Temple." In this exercise, we performed a slow-speed improvisation of the rise and fall of a mythic Mayan civilization that eventually became crowded out and destroyed by the force of an ever-encroaching jungle. On the whole, the performance *themes* we set out to do each day focused on creating ephemeral glimpses of human *myths* in live performance contexts. The participants were the protagonists within our own life stories, with the goal of transforming our traumas, personal and cultural shadows, and innermost desires into beneficial lessons, including an appreciation and awareness of our diasporic and complex histories.

Rosenthal selected one half of the group to perform as the "jungle" and the other half to perform as the "temple." I was part of the temple group. We built the temple and used our bodies as bricks, stones, and statues. The music from Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" played overhead in a rising crescendo; the song offered immediate dramatic tension.

I was a stone, repositioning myself parallel to Jorge. We formed the hieroglyphs and statues that may have been chiseled by laborers, slaves and underlings. We emulated faces of victory and the faces of mythic gods one might find on a Mayan artifact. We jutted our tongues out, pushed chests forward and stood in powerful warrior stances. My focus remained in "No-Focus Focus" as I sensed the creeping movement of other players moving closer to us as the "jungle." I felt a pressure to "do" more, but Jorge and I remained stubborn and committed to our obstinate physicalizations. We formed the temple's foundation and were not easy to crumble. But slowly, I felt a hand grasp at me

and pulling me down, forcing me in a controlled but firm way to bend my knees and crumble. I glided with this flow of dramatic intention, and I saw Jorge in the corner of my eye following suit.

Eventually, my body was split between the platform and the floor, dangling lopsided, tongue pointing down and out, mouth wide, eyes, emanating a fearful gaze. I had fallen and the temple's structure gave way to the unstoppable durability of vegetative life. It was my destiny as the temple to submit to the decay of time and erode my face, body and form. I recalled that concretized ideas and forms are never as impenetrable as they might seem. Like rhizomes that push through cemented ideas, I crumbled in symbolic action as our imagined and staged civilization crumbled. Like modern cities that expanded ever-increasingly into the wildest parts of the forests and jungles, eventually, these structures and mythologies built by human labors, fell to the immortal and uncontrollable reproduction of nature's will.

Paradigms fade, revolutions are made. The growth of the jungle is less like a tree with branches extending outward with a central trunk and root system and more like an interlaced network of complexities, identities, and meanings depending on condition and circumstance. This interdependent, sometimes spontaneous and persevering growth harvested through life experience is mirrored in Rachel Rosenthal's perspective on the DbD Experience.

Much of what has been said about Artaud's revolutionary proposals for theater can also be said of Rosenthal's improvisational performance practices. Like Artaud, Rosenthal and her company produce "mythic spectacles" that include "verbal incantations, groans and screams, pulsating lighting effects, and oversized stage puppets and props" (Artaud *T and D* 97). Again, this reflects Artaud's criterion for a "direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works." Like Artaud, Rosenthal's

improvisational group endeavors to use these "themes" and "known works" as a method to connect with spectators on a personal level. This mirrors Artaud's intentions, as described by a reviewer for art magazine, *White Hot*:

> Rosenthal's TOHUBOHU! [her public performance company] may be the
>
> actualization of the best of Artaud's intentions. Surely anyone who witnesses the
>
> improvised creation of this unique ephemeral art will indeed be connected with
>
> something deep and true within themselves. (Brown "Soldiers of the Zeitgeist:
>
> Rachel Rosenthal's Improvisational Performance Art Troupe ")

Visceral metaphysics is the process whereby concepts are concretized through our bodies on stage. They are absorbed through all our senses and require presence and attentiveness to all the forces at play on the instant stage. With reference to thought manifesting on stage into visceral form, I approach Artaud's next criterion: "In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds." This refers to a way to embody theater in the flesh as a catalyst towards transformational performance affect.

In another exercise, we sit against a wall and watch others perform previously assigned solo pieces. Again, Rachel insisted that this instant type of theater must include all theatrical elements such as props, lighting, and set. We had no more than a few minutes to raid the costume rack and prop shelves to prepare for our piece. If inclined, we could suggest a musical selection for the board operator to play. Usually, those who helped with setting up the props, set pieces, lights, and sound were also workshop participants. The lighting instrument grid was simple and the sound rack was user-friendly after we all learned it (as taught by Kate Noonan.) The technician also

improvised with the live performance, fading in and out, switching lighting channels to follow the scene, lowering or raising sounds when most appropriate.

Rosenthal peered at me after a particular solo exercise and asked why I hide and guard my softness and tenderness so tightly when it is precisely in those moments I shine. "Are you going to shut the door as soon as the performance is over?" She asked. "Probably," I replied. As I listened to other comments about my short, three minutes of improvised performance, I couldn't stop thinking about Rosenthal's question. I returned to my cushion on the floor against the wall and tried to concentrate on the performance after mine. Because of this one question, I have slowly, every day, been doing in life what Rosenthal clearly saw me avoiding in performance, that is, opening to the world through love and tenderness, rather than through defensiveness and aggression. I often wonder how I might keep that door open in life without constantly feeling vulnerable and afraid.

Of all the lessons learned in this workshop, this is the core teaching that led to my radical growth after the DbD Experience. This is the path to personal healing as a shamanistic performance practice and as a method of remaining vulnerable, yet resilient and capable, despite my fearful urge to shut down behind an armory of protection. In the film *Sex is Comedy* by French feminist filmmaker Catherine Breillat, a character explains: "Emotion is never dirty or obscene. It's grace." *Indeed, grace in the form of appreciating our emotions as tools for information and healing is ever-present in the DbD Experience.*

The process of expressing emotions through stage events may be intimidating but it also makes us warriors who are willing to dare to create using our bodies as primary tools and who are willing to step forward and, as Rosenthal said regarding artists, "make something where once there was nothing." We each have our lessons and life experiences that teach us where we must go, and how we must live, in order to transform the world

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and ourselves into sane, healthy human beings: "The exaltation of feeling capable of bringing the impossible to light is intoxicating," (*The Dbd Experience* 25) writes Rosenthal.

Rosenthal informed us in the beginning of the workshop that she believes to make the world a better place we must start by becoming better human beings. We do this by working on ourselves, alone, as a starting point, and then extend outward, in our relationships with other people and with the earth. Rosenthal teaches us how to begin this process through her treasure chest of techniques. This included making a "theater in the flesh," as Artaud had desired. We learn how to search, or stalk, all those parts of ourselves that strong emotions prevent us from exploring. Rosenthal wrote, "The process of art is like archeology with ourselves as the digging sites" (*The Dbd Experience* 25).

It should be mentioned that critics of Rachel Rosenthal's work as a performer find it difficult to accept her agenda of using performance to better ourselves as human beings. Jill Dolan writes:

I think there's a kind of self-righteousness in Rosenthal's work that puts me off. There's a way in which her politics become much less complicated because of how obvious she makes them, because she tries so hard to make them part of her experience. ("Pain, Passion, and Parody: A Dialogue" 87)

In contrast, Hélène Cixous once wrote that "to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is to eat the core of self" ("La" 59). In other words, Cixous, like Rosenthal, finds the most fascinating subject our own lives, not in a self-absorbed way as Dolan critiques above, but rather in a respectful, curious, wondrous way. This effort to know oneself, especially identifying oneself as a woman, is a pursuit that encourages a

transformation out of the cocoon of fearing our lives, stories, and histories. In essence, I as woman can use DbD performance training as a performative and active catalyst for personal empowerment.

Trance induction techniques were also widely used to inspire empowering changes amongst participants throughout the DbD Experience. However, beyond the individual technical exercises that we practiced, I found Artaud's criterion, acute display of trance-induction techniques to lure an audience into their own psychological or psychic state for transformational or curative change best demonstrated in the "Blow It Out Your Ass" performances and exercises. In this section about trance in performance, I write differently than in previous sections on Artaudian analysis in this chapter. I include my subjective-reflexive position while applying expository storytelling that encompasses the transformational affect this type of performance training and presentation impressed upon me.

Admittedly, I have great hesitation to write about my experiences with this exercise. So much was revealed about my personality and my perceived weaknesses that to allude to them in this dissertation exposes my vulnerabilities. This is the point. What Rosenthal showed me is how to soften myself while managing to put on an intelligent and elegant piece of live performance, instantly. She showed me that I have to take criticism with an open mind and open heart, and not to beat myself up for not being perfect and not impressing her with my preconceived brilliant art-making and intelligence.

By performing instantly, I confront the challenges of my ego, my pretentious actor self and all of the various crystalline compositions of the self. I learned that I must surrender into the moment, into the now. *I have no time to second-guess my actions; in fact, the more I might belabor an impulsive thought, the worse the choice. But, conversely, if I act too impulsively, I lose the grace and appreciation of the surrounding*

environment and plot. Prima donnas and stage bullies (i.e., upstaging) are a waste of time and effort at the DbD experience. I have been both in my life as a performer. I was keenly made aware of this habit when I attempted to enter a scene taking place on stage during a BIOYA exercise.

The marionette bit should have been a solo piece. This I learned after performing in a "Blow It Out Your Ass" exercise. Rosenthal described BIOYAs as, "There is nothing more delicious than a good BIOYA! It gives you permission and opportunity to put what you've learned into practice but not in a mechanical or didactic way" (*The Dbd Experience* 63).

I located a sad looking marionette from the prop shop. I thought, "Ah, I know a little something about puppets! I'll show her what a clever idea this is!"[135] Without minding patience or surveying the action already happening in the playing space, I slowly emerged with the marionette stage-right. I focused entirely on the marionette, moving its little legs and arms and cocking its cute head to and fro. In the moment, I was thinking, "This is so brilliant of me! With the tiny puppet entering this slow dance sequence happening before me, there is a story here, for sure!" I was indeed inventing a story, placing all the other performers including myself into my solipsistic plot and structure. Meanwhile, the other performers appeared thoroughly engaged in their contact improv movement, rolling on the floor together and throwing bits of schmatas *in the air. "Maybe they just don't notice me." In a desperate response for attention, I raised the marionette to another level, on the edge of a suitcase. There he and I rested, looking forlorn, until the lights dimmed.*

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[135] My haughtiness no doubt induced by my past experiences as director for a theatrical production about Artaud in which I used large puppets, marionettes, and shadow puppetry.

When the lights came back up, I was happy about our performance together. I was eager to hear Rosenthal's input. She mentioned her enthusiasm for much of the piece and the characters created within the silent narrative. But then, she said pointing to me, "Now what were YOU doing over there?"

"What?" I ask.

She proceeded to tell me that I interrupted an entire moment unfolding beautifully, that I seemed to have not paid any attention to the other players in the space. And that—this comment is what really got me—this wasn't a solo performance, but I acted as if it were. Not to say the puppet wasn't interesting, but that the puppet didn't have any interaction with the other characters, and thus was extraneous and show-off. She explained further that I do not have to pull out all my tricks for a piece; I could do them one at a time!

I was floored and utterly despondent. "How dare she! I knew what I was doing! I fit in quite well, thank you very much!" I thought at the time. But she had a valid point and an impactful, visceral one that was a big stab in my solo performer egotism. It was in this moment and teaching that I realized what a stage dominator I could be, when pushed to the extremes, such as in this kind of high adrenaline instant theater technique.

For Artaud, Theater of Cruelty must induce a "more or less hallucinatory state" that impels "the sensibility and mind alike to a kind of organic alteration" (*T and D* 121) upon both spectators and performers. This is characteristic of shamanic states of ectasy. Similar to creating theatrical trance-conditions, the performers must be totally involved in the action without letting drives or motives to "perform" dominate the playing area. When in a trance-like state, the mind is in a static and open expansiveness that does not judge or dismiss, but rather spontaneously commits to action.

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What does it mean to have our bodies fully committed to a moment? Do we do this in our daily lives? I understand meditation is a constant pull back to the present, back to the gravity and reality of this exact moment. While we typically let our minds run asunder, creating storylines and inventing patterns to make sense of a confusing world, meditation allows us the space to breathe through the mad rush of thoughts and to gently remind ourselves that we are "thinking," and then to exhale into relaxation. It'll all be ok, it's no big deal.

Similarly, while moving and creating on the spot during the DbD experience, one has a distinct feeling of gentle groundlessness and insecurity that is fragile, delicate, and yet resilient. A good "scene" in DbD is when all the elements at play are harmonized, almost while in a trance, into an unspoken, organic, and generous dance of thought, body, and wide-angled vision. Artaud wrote, "Effort is cruelty, existence through effort is a cruelty." (*T and D* 103) Here, he refers to his budding interest in Gnostic theology whereby nefariousness is the inherent mode of human behavior and that "evil is the permanent law" (103). For Artaud, life is cruel because of the inevitable result of death and the inherent cruelty of life is rooted in death's imminence. But, while being fully in the present, and "on the spot" for any given situation, the monotone fear of living life for fear of death diminishes. This is due to one's attention and focus in DbD which is acutely centered on making choices in the stark reality of "now," rather than in the frantic hope or fear related to future successes or failures.

Through the eyes during DbD exercises, we soften into vulnerability and openness, even if only for a brief few seconds. Those moments might be terribly frightening to somebody who has been hurt in the past by somebody she has opened herself up to, which pretty much sums up everyone I know. We must continually break down our walls of protection in order to show that side of ourselves that we hold dear:

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the parts of ourselves that are soft and innocent, afraid of being taken advantage of or abused if offered to the wrong person. The more open one becomes, the more protected the heart. It is an odd paradox, but it has been proven time and again through the DbD performances, especially in the BYOIA exercises.

We must attempt to lose our inhibitions around body image, erase years of performance "habits," and ignore critical thinking in order to induce the Genie; the magical affect. This becomes a lesson in trust, vulnerability, integration, open attention and keen observation. The "Blow It Out Your Ass" exercise, was meant to be an exercise in walking in between the worlds of artistic originality, innovation, control, and ritualized action. Everyone must perform in a BIOYA exercise, as these were the larger pieces that inform Rosenthal how much information we have absorbed and applied from our previous hours' labor and experiments. This was the "magic," the naked, raw exposure of performing instantly and on the spot, while maintaining an awareness of the physical space and the energy of my fellow participants. In fact, there is much indescribable "magic," (*T and D* 111) as Artaud might have surmised about Theater of Cruelty in the experience and training offered by the DbD Experience. Artaud wrote:

> [T]heater, 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 language. (*T and D* 89)

Anthropologist Mircea Eliade also writes about the near impossibility of language to capture such magical experiences, except through poetry.

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Poetic creation still remains an act of perfect spiritual freedom. Poetry remakes

and prolongs language; every poetic language begins by being a secret language,

that is, the creation of a personal universe, of a completely closed world. The

purest poetic act seems to re-create language from an inner experience that, like

the ecstasy or the religious inspiration of 'primitives,' reveals the essence of

things. It is from such linguistic creations, made possible by pre-ecstatic

'inspiration,' that the 'secret languages' of the mystics and the traditional

allegorical languages crystallize. (511)

The "inner experiences" I encountered and created within the DbD workshop
connected me to a world that was and still remains elusive; this was the world of my
fantasies, dreams, fears, hopes, anguish and the inexplicable need to understand who and
what I am to offer this world. In a sense, I learned how to create my own "secret
language" in the vein of Artaud and Cixous, with a poetic syntax and a physically
connected expression. Hélène Cixous urges women to write their secret worlds as a
means to understand all the complexities of woman's experiences:

Besides, you've written a little, but in secret. And it wasn't good, because it was in

secret, and because you punished yourself for writing, because you didn't go all

the way; or because you wrote, irresistibly . . . . But secretly, silently, deep down

inside, she grows and multiplies. (877-888)

In the DbD Experience, our individually distinct personalities as participants
shine like rainbows through a crystal prism, each color melting into the other, tiny hints

of our quirky characteristics and neuroses, radiating like precious jewels uncovered and discovered through the vivid expression of performance.

The BIOYA was our opportunity as participants to play with one another, either in costume with props and music or only wearing our work clothes. It was our chance to experiment with information we have hopefully assimilated through the day's exercises. We did not usually perform a theme but rather the piece unfolded gradually with some of us waiting offstage to feel for the most appropriate place to enter the event. One by one we entered to join the players already "doing" something. We each found our moment of inspiration, partially instigated by courage, anticipation and a *trance-like connection* to the action on stage. These BIOYA pieces appeared to be the most rewarding for everyone when the Genie happened to be present. This is where art, trust, and fluid cooperation intersect with an effortless grace. For this improvisational performance or any performance, we followed certain basic rules. (1) No physical force. (2) Damaged props must be repaired or replaced with a similar looking prop. (3) Don't "take the hat," which means, do not intentionally take anything off or away from a fellow performer because you panic and do not know what to do; this violates the other player's space and body and is viewed as an entirely aggressive, unnecessary decision.

If I insisted on performing with an air of ego and pretention in these improvisational performances, to satisfy some craving for accolade or acceptance, then I had already failed. There was a place in between severe risk taking and confidence that was at play in a "genie" like performance. When choices were made spontaneously, with a kind of nervous but steady grace and ease, this was when the magic happened and the performers were not be entirely sure of themselves, but they sensed there was something marvelous happening in the process.

In a 1932 letter, Artaud wrote about his Theater of Cruelty that, "this Cruelty is a matter neither of sadism or bloodshed. . . . 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" (*T and D* 101). As I have suggested, the improvisational theatrical performance techniques that Rosenthal teaches in the DbD workshop encompasses these concepts of Cruel Theater, with the additional element of working towards a healing process initiated through "shamanistic" techniques and practices.

My insecurities were laid bare before everyone, especially Rosenthal, who, despite her eighty-three years, watched and saw all like a hunched-over hawk, gazing intently at the instant theater pieces unfolding before her. I often felt like prey and her words of soft, but firm, criticism felt like talons digging into my pride and self-worth. I do not suggest she was any way intentionally cruel or hurtful but rather, she was extraordinarily precise. She knew the difference between discernment and blind choice. This was perhaps one of the most significant lessons I have learned about myself and my path as a performance studies scholar and artist.

The BIOYA exercise was not about a finished product; it was about the *process* of producing a marvelously magical performance, with the hope that the "Genie" is present. The "Genie" was the light-hearted term used by Rosenthal that referred to a performance which is immaculate, harmonious, and beautiful but not overtly pompous or showy. It was evident when everyone seemed to be in synchronicity with the action and images happening on stage, including the audience as an active witness. The Genie often seemed to be present both during and after a piece. Performers felt as if guided by an instinct that was more pronounced than their everyday logic and reason; their "thinking on their feet"

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through improvisational performance is a thought process driven from an esoteric place, a heart-centered place within each of them that is filled with dread, anxiety, fear of making a mistake or interrupting the harmony of the larger group image and flow. Performers were moved to perform instinctively, driven by techniques learned in the workshop into the most perfectly suitable event.

Rosenthal writes, "When magical things happen in the performance space, we say, 'The Genie is here!' And it is palpable. Amazing things happen: coincidences, synchronicities, realizations, esthetic heights, spontaneous finds. It's the Genie of the place being honored, manifesting through the art work, and it's like nothing else. It is sheer ecstasy" (*The Dbd Experience* 40). *It is as if our soulful body, beckoning for beauty and ecstasy, an etheric "double," is directing the action and we are simply puppets in physical form intuitively listening to it, being guided by it and using the techniques Rosenthal offers. This makes me ponder the "double" immortal spirit body ancient Egyptians termed the* ka. Note that, ultimately for Artaud, his concept of theater of cruelty encompasses theater as a plague and theater as a double. Elizabeth Grosz further describes the metaphysical concept of the double known as *ka*:

> The concept of the body image has a long and illustrious history in Western
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> medicine. Perhaps its earliest anticipations date back to ancient Egypt, where the
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> word *ka* was used to indicate a copy of the human body, a copy that is more
>
> ethereal and less dense than the physical body, and invisible but still material
>
> analogue of the living being, the soul. This soul-like double inhabitated and
>
> animated the material body but was logically distinct from it. It left the body at

the point of death. Unlike the Cartesian notion of soul or mind, the double bears

the image of the body, being a ghostlike icon of the subject. (63)

The concept of *ka* is not unfamiliar to Artaud, who always sought out occult answers to his suffering and malaise. It is a "term for the creative and preserving power of life. . . The hieroglyph 'ka' with hands raised in a defensive attitude was a magical gesture designed to preserve the life of the wearer from evil forces. The *ka* accompanied a person like a kind of double, but when the person died the *ka* lived on" (footnoted in Artaud, Eshleman and Bador 333). *I wondered what or who is performing when such moments of exquisite beauty and precision happen instantly in the DbD workshop. Are we simply allowing our* ka's *moments to play with one another? Such fascinating, fantastic thoughts and invented mythical stories these exercises lead me to ponder.*

Daniel Pinchbeck, a journalist who experimented with entheogens (as Artaud had in the Tarahumara peyote rituals) while pursuing his radical self-awareness, notes that the mystery of unseen forces and metaphysical activities are vastly ignored in Western cultures. He wonders if there are indeed "doubles" either helping us or harming us, and asserts that in Western, secular culture we have debunked these entities as merely psychosis:

Because we deny our intuition, because we don't believe in spirits or listen to our

dreams, because we have banished our potential shamans to mental institutions

and homeless shelters because we have imprisoned ourselves within virtual shells

of technology, it may be pathetically easy for ambiguous, supersensible entities--

demons or devas, Archons or rakshasas--to continaully operate on our minds,

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filling the vacuum we have created with sludge, anesthetizing us to deeper levels

of wisdom. (296)

For me, Pinchbeck's comments provoke a number of questions. I wonder: how we can rid ourselves of these "demons?"[136] Or, better stated, how do we acknowledge these demons masquerading as jealousy, hatred, greed, or violence? How do we make friends with the parts of ourselves that want to dominate the "nice" parts, the loving and kind parts? An angry demon is difficult to settle down if one does not have the tools or the knowledge to tame the beast writhing within. Taking DbD workshops with Rachel Rosenthal has provided me with an opportunity to confront such demons in a subtle and yet highly effective manner. Rosenthal encourages participants to seek out their unique "treasures" of artistic merit and integrity. She asks us, through performance, to face fears that inhibit or be block access to our treasures. The dreadful creature we may thought ourselves to be can be transformed and perhaps recognized as an illusion rather than actual oppressor to one's expressive chest of artistic gems.

Artaud also understood the same demons and he wanted theater to be the means whereby an alchemical shift could shape-shift or exorcise them into energies that could relieve his suffering. He wrote, "[T]here is a phosphorescent point at which all reality is recovered, but changed, transformed—and by what??—a point of magical utilization of things" (*Selected Writings* 82). This magic manifests every time an actor extends herself so vulnerably in Rosenthal's instant theater aesthetics, a space whereby, as Artaud writes, "an actor is seen as if through crystals. Inspiration in stages" (*Selected Writings* 80).

I often wonder what Rachel sees is as when she watches us work this magic. Are the stories that she is imaging, influenced by our performance, the same stories that the

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[136] Artaud often believed that malevolent spirits were constantly sucking at his energetic body, which caused him paralysis of language and thought.

performers are telling? Oftentimes, the themes are in alignment. Perhaps the intentions are not always so clear, but the dramatic unfolding of story, most often without words, is usually the same for all involved. I might have a different interpretation of what she saw, but the *essence of meaning* is the intentional affect. Is it about redemption, or a story of loss, or coming to terms with anger, or explosions of joy? Ultimately, the story is inexorably connected with our human connection to each other, our environment, and our art.

CLOSING THOUGHTS ON THE INTEGRATION OF ARTAUD, L'ÉCRITURE FÉMININE, AND "SHAMANISTIC" PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

I consider Rosenthal's work, and the DbD workshop in particular, feminist, not only because Rosenthal herself is an iconic, living example of feminism in her art and life, also named as a "Living Treasure" by the City of Los Angeles, but also because I identify myself as a radical feminist who participated in the workshop; I am *l'écriture féminine*. I *am* woman's writing by placing emphasis on my uniquely personal and experiential perspective, both during and after the workshop. *Through this workshop, I have shed a lot of bad "actor habits" such as fiddling with my fingers on stage, nervously pulling my shirt down to cover my belly out of self-conscious embarrassment, and dominating the stage space (or "upstaging") like a spoiled prima donna. I have learned to stop "indicating" as an actor, and instead, to be as fully present, awake, and sensitive to all the elements at play during a performance. I have learned how to trust myself on stage by letting go of insecurities, and instead, take more risks to bravely "do" the action. This commitment has been strengthened through the techniques and exercises Rosenthal taught in the DbD Experience. When in doubt, I remind myself to return to one*

of these techniques, similar to an athlete going back to a practiced game-play strategy when the choices for action seem limited.[137]

Also, the DbD workshop has given me both subtle and powerful tools for improving myself as a human being when I feel lost in a world that tends to look with antipathy and mistrust at artists. With shamanism, there is an intention to transform a person from one state to another, a mini-rite of passage of sorts. When I was on stage, feeling Rosenthal's penetrating gaze upon me, I felt as if she was able to see shadows that hold me back from authenticity in performance, from a more calculated but aware flow. The experiences I had at Rachel Rosenthal's Doing by Doing Experience were visceral, raw, transformative, and fragile. This is the heart and passion of the medicinal properties inherent in walking a path of personal healing that uses performance as a tool for personal change. Art, and in particular DbD, is a toolbox comprised of the curative elements of performance that can heal broken parts of a person's life stories. At least, it did for me.

The grace and beauty involved in each and every person's willingness to expose themselves to a bunch of strangers is a major element of risk in the DbD workshop. This generates a sense of making art that we hunger for, to become artists, instantly. Rosenthal encouraged us to take risks and extend our foolishness into the almost ludicrous notion that theater made instantly, on the spot, can resonate with the intricate patchwork and patterns of the human experience. Suddenly, I think of *Twelfth Night*, "There is no slander in an allowed fool," (76) wrote William Shakespeare.

The workshop's closing involved Rosenthal retelling the origin of the name of the workshop, DbD. She named it after a paraplegic pet cat she once lived with and took

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[137] "Units," "mirroring," "power at a distance," "repetition," "dolls," etc., are some of the vocabulary terms associated with the training. See Rachel Rosenthal, *The Dbd Experience: Chance Knows What It's Doing!* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010)

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everywhere. This cat taught Rosenthal lessons on love, devotion, commitment and patience, more than any human relationship she ever had. Rosenthal said that she preferred dogs to humans, indeed most animals to humans, because animals are more or less indifferent to our personal hang-ups and relationship dramas. Nor do humans respond to devotion in the same manner: "She [Rosenthal's cat DbD] taught me how to live and how to die, with calm, joy, and courage. She showed me how to perform in spite of limitations, and I learned, also suffering from leg trouble myself" (*The Dbd Experience* 120).

After she told the story of DbD, we gathered in a circle. We had the option to grab a percussion instrument, a drum or shaker, and to improvise sound together. I listened to our improvisational drum circle and vocalizations, full of passion and love, with our beloved "shaman" leader. Rachel Rosenthal was unable to end the circle with us on my last excursion to the DbD weekend due to an unforeseen event. The candle burning in the center was the same candle that has been used by Rosenthal since the first time she conducted a DbD workshop. *I breathed deeply, feeling a kind of loss that was both grateful and full of grief. I did not want to leave the workshop without having said goodbye to Rosenthal, but I do it in my thoughts, in my drumming, and in my tears.*

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I presented my analysis of Rachel Rosenthal's Doing by Doing experience. I applied Artaud's Theater of Cruelty criteria as an analytic tool, including an emphasis on "cruelty" and its manifestion in the workshop. In addition, I presented an integrated analysis that included Artaudian, feminist and "shamanistic" interpretations. I also applied performance analysis, reflexive-subjectivity, and performative poetic as interpretive techniques. I discussed the workshop experience as a wholly integrated

demonstration Artaud's Cruel Theater, Cixous' concept of *l'écriture féminine*, and transformative "shamanistic" characteristics. In discussed the workshop as a highly effective means to transport myself into ecstatic states of awareness of self through learning and performing specific exercises that break through emotional, psychological, and physical barriers in order to change and grow into a "better human being." The "cruelty" inherent in the workshop is, metamorphically, much like the cruelty one must endure to clean a wound in order for the wound to heal.

As with the other two chapters, my analysis of this case study also revealed three core findings, especially performance "in the extreme," and a personal-psychological portrayal of woman as "monster" (or "demon") and improvisational action as performed in a live theater context. In the next chapter, I discuss these findings in detail.

Figure 14:   Rachel Rosenthal

Chapter Five: Summary, Common Threads, and Implications

This dissertation explores Antonin Artaud's concept of Theater of Cruelty as a primary component of my three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool in order to understand transgressive and radical feminist performance practices and "shamanistic" performance practices in three different forms of contemporary performance. In particular, the analytic tool incorporates Hélène Cixous' notion of *l'écriture féminine* and "shamanistic" performance practices that exhibit transformative affects and effects upon spectators and performers. In this chapter, I summarize my major interpretations, offer discussion on common threads analyzed across the three case studies, and discuss implications for future research and scholarship in performance practices.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSES

The purpose of this study was to examine Antonin Artaud's theories and ideas vis-à-vis a radical (French) feminist perspective (i.e., difference, strategic essentialism, linguistic and poetic expression) and, in turn, to reassess Artaud's relevance and applicability to the performance studies discipline. Furthermore, I worked to unravel how Artaud's metaphysical approach to performance has notable similarities to "shamanistic" practices of transformation and ecstasy. I also applied performance analysis, experiential and experimental reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics techniques to enhance my analytical interpretation of three disparate cases of performance practice.

This research was inspired by three basic questions: (1) How can Artaud's musings on Theater of Cruelty be a useful approach to performing feminist sentiments about empowerment and transformation? (2) Which performances have I encountered by female artists that emulate Artaud's Theater of Cruelty concepts? (3) Can Artaud's work be appropriated and applied to women's contemporary performance practices?

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More specifically, I constructed a three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool from the extant and available literature that included applying Artaud's Theater of Cruelty criteria in a cohesive and comparative match to the performances featured in this dissertation. In brief, this analysis included (1) examining each case from an Artaudian perspective of theater as "plague," "double," and "cruel"; (2) applying Hélène Cixous' notion of *l'écriture féminine* (woman's writing) as counterbalance to Artaud's writing style and presentation in his manifestos about theater; and (3) applying general ideas about "shamanistic" performance practices discovered in the case studies and similar to Artaud's notion of creating a theater that evokes "spiritual therapeutics."

In Chapter Three, I discussed my analysis of the "First Person Shooter" episode of *The X-Files.* I demonstrated how Artaud's ideas on the theater and the "plague" intersect with feminist discourses on agency and political equity. In essence, my analysis included (1) understanding programming as a unique language of signs and gestures; (2) the VR environment (i.e., *mise-en-scène*) as prioritized over spoken words, thereby emulating an embodied and visceral utterance of agency and empowerment; (3) the mythic symbolism of Maitreya, a powerful corporeal amalgamation of desires, fantasies, and horrors as suggested by her name, dress, and origin; (4) the immersive and personal experience of a video game player who is essentially an interactive and participatory audience, thereby linking the game's drama and the player's emotional attachment to his/her outcome; (5) the game as a "theater in the flesh," with vulnerable and mortal players, who disengage from catharsis (as Artaud preferred) by enduring actual physical and psychological duress; (6) and the inducement of trance-like states during play when a player is committed and immersed into the stakes of the game.

My analysis also demonstrated Artaud's concepts of cruel performative practices within virtual reality video games that were employed in the "First Person Shooter"

episode of *The X-Files*. Along these lines, I showed that the avatar, "Maitreya," performed like a metonymic plague that eviscerated all that stood in her way. Indeed, I argued that video games in particular can be viewed as Theater of Cruelty performance practice according to the criteria I outlined earlier in this chapter.

My analysis of the "First Person Shooter" episode also suggests that (hyper)text, enveloped by narrative attachments and signs, can be substituted for a flesh and bone human body, and demonstrated through performative means, especially if the text is a program that implanted desires and needs into an embodied sign: *the avatar*. Put differently, if, for example, this avatar was programmed by a particular architect to illustrate engendered political, emotional, or activist motives, then the narrative message could be considered "cyberfeminism" à la Hélène Cixous' "women's writing" (*l'écriture féminine)*.

In addition, I discussed "cyberfeminism" in the context of Lykke's "goddess/monster/cyborg," as a representation of women in technological disciplines. The programmer, Phoebe, wrote a code that reflected a triple-threat symbol of feminist empowerment and identification. I analyzed her execution of this code as an example of *l'écriture féminine* ("woman's writing"). Phoebe expressed her dissatisfaction with her circumstances, and, as a consequence, "wrote herself" into the world, as Cixous urged in "The Laugh of the Medusa." Phoebe's writing as programming code was similar and different as compared to codes written by or for her male cohorts because Phoebe's code included a social and political agenda: to take revenge against both the male-centered focus on video game design and avatar as subjective identification. Phoebe's "writing" can be interpreted as a threat to the social and economic schema of the video game company and its strategic business plan.

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Maitreya, as avatar, can be viewed as an insurrection born from the mind and desire of her creator, Phoebe. Previously, I have stated that avatars are a means to brand the self, and as such, can have real impact on a player's life in reality. These avatar bodies in performance act as merged hybrids of virtual and physically embodied agents of change, similar to (shamanistic or ecstatic) transformative practices. Maitreya, the wild woman, remains untamed and devoid of any empathy and thus she can be seen as a semiotically functioning and performing as a shadow aspect of (patriarchal) hegemony. Her ecstatic expression ("shamanistic") and one-sighted mission of relentless trigger-happy firing is an extreme example of irrationality and empirical logic. With deadly terror, Maitreya created and controlled the world from which she originated. To stop Maitreya, Phoebe herself must embrace and empower herself, despite possible punishment and consequence from her peers and from corporate hierarchal powers. Essentially, Phoebe must transform herself and emerge from her cocoon of inhibition and her fears of losing both her employment and her personal creation, Maitreya. That is, Phoebe must transform herself in order to transform and then to destroy Maitreya, who could take down the entire landscape of the game. In total, the plague had been enacted, through cruelty and "shamanistic" powers of transformation, albeit it is more or less contained within the relatively safe environment of a video game gone terribly wrong.

In Chapter Four, I described a radical feminist ritual performance, *MetamorphoSex*, as an emulation of Artaud's notion of theater as "double." I showed that theater as "double" had multiple meanings, including how a spectator emotionally and intellectually positions herself/himself while watching a production. I suggested that, if viewed as pornography, defined as sexual activity for the purposes of spectator arousal, then *MetamorphoSex* "doubles" as an outward projection of social excess within the "shadow realm" of desires. I also argued that this extreme excess of women displaying

their sexuality in live performance can catalyze curative emotional effects on the performers and the audience.

Although I applied all criteria in my analysis of *MetamorphoSex* as representative of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, in my major interpretations I found that *MetamorphoSex* relied on (1) minimal spoken words; (2) ample use of sounds and movement; (3) images that could "shock" an audience out from complacent spectatorship; and (4) use of trance induction techniques such as chanting and rhythmic drum sounds. Moreover, the show evoked Artaud's concept of a highly visceral, metaphysical and physical theater. In addition, my analysis demonstrated that *MetamorphoSex* exhibited feminist characteristics vis-à-vis explicit sexual and personal expression in a live theatrical context. Through an embodied display of women performing with their bodies as "text" on stage, a performative example of *l'écriture féminine* or "woman's writing" is enacted. The performers' individual expressions took precedence over traditional theatrical narrativity and thus evoked a porous, ritualized structure. I also applied my experiential perspective as spectator and as a "sacred witness" to the production.

Finally, I discussed *MetamorphoSex*'s shamanistic features, including ritualized actions to intensify spectators' experience to achieve a position of sacred witnessing. I demonstrated that the show's production, with its ritual format, explicitly female-centered sexual emphasis and structure challenges ritual theories that tend to favor "masculine" histories and intentions. I also argued that women, by performing ritual as performance practice vis-à-vis Artaud's criteria of cruelty, have a strong ability to transform audiences as well as participants in profoundly powerful, "shamanistic" ways.

In Chapter Five, I presented my analysis of Rachel Rosenthal's Doing by Doing Experience. I showed that simultaneous presentations of workshop techniques and exercises exemplified Theater of Cruelty, notions of *l'écritcure féminine* and

"shamanistic" purposes including (1) an emphasis on specific performance expressions without using spoken words; (2) sounds and movement that evoke mythic stories in performative form, as evidenced by the vocal training exercises; (3) use of symbolism and signs to inscribe meaning, as demonstrated in the "Object Exercise"; (4) direct communication between the participants and audience, usually on a personal and emotionally vulnerable position, as displayed in the "No Focus-Focus" exercise; (5) staged scenes around recognizable themes or myths, such as in the "Mayan Temple" exercise; (6) trance-induction techniques designed to lure an audience toward an internalized experience of spectatorship, most vividly displayed in the "BIOYA" exercise.

My analysis revealed that the DbD Experience vibrantly emulated Artaud's Theater of Cruelty and as well as feminist and "shamanistic" characteristics. I explained how these analytical tools interrelate through reflexive-subjectivity and performative poetics as researcher. I presented my personal experiences in the DbD Experience as a "shamanistic" journey of exploration into the self. I concluded that the DbD Experience is a closely articulated version of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, and that it is also a transformative compendium of ecstatic moments in high-stakes and "extreme," improvisational performance practice.

In all three of the analyzed cases, I describe three core findings, i.e., common threads, including performing in the "extreme," portraying women as monsters or goddesses, and the use of improvisational performance practices. In varying degrees, I found that performing in "extreme" circumstances tends to generate an Artaudian spectacle. In fact, Susan Sontag claims that, "Artaud is one of the great, daring mapmakers of consciousness *in extremis*" (Sontag lvii). Also, feminism, if taken to an extreme (as described by Cixous), would include radically altering language in a

"woman's writing" style. This may not be considered feasible, but it would undoubtedly be ideologically thrilling. Indeed, Cixous excuses her far-reaching ideology when she writes, "I give myself a poet's right, otherwise I would not dare to speak" ("Extreme Fidelity" *The Hélène Cixous Reader* 132). Furthermore, the extreme nature of certain rites of passage in various traditions of shamanism (i.e., scarification, vision quests, and imbibing in hallucinogenic plant medicine), also suggests that transformation may occur most poignantly in extreme situations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PERFORMANCE AS PUBLIC PRACTICE

The three-pronged theoretical-analytic tool I have constructed and applied for purposes of this dissertation has unearthed multiple implications for future scholarship and research in the field of artistic performance as public practice. Some of these implications include examining theater practices that involve larger groups of spectators or a crowd of people who are also participants which is fundamentally an Artaudian Theater of Cruelty, and in varying degrees, has qualities of *l'écriture féminine* and "shamanistic" elements.

Jannarone describes Artaud's sense of the usefulness of crowds to engage the emotionality of an individual in the crowd. "[T]he spectator remains agitated and even ecstatic, while her/his individual intellect or will is immobilized under the overwhelming coercion of other forces" (116). These public spaces, where participants are also spectators of one another, can be found in private situations or at local clubs and bars, where thematic parties take place. Over the past several years, I have seen an emergence of performance practices manifest in late night, local Austin social events. A French brasserie hosted a Marquis de Sade night in which the performers, participants and party-goers wore sadomasochist and French vintage on Valentine's Day. On the "Transgender

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Day of Remembrance," an "unofficial" cultural holiday, hostess Angeliska Polachek devised a night of radical and queer performance artists to perform in between ecstatic dances amongst a heavily dragged, costumed and extravagant crowd, unifying them in one space and time. Another evening social event, titled Exquisite Corpse, brought together a Gothic crowd in an atmosphere of decadence and death, corsets, lace, 1980's New Wave popular music angst and revisited Surrealism.[138]

Figure 15:   Angeliska Polachek at the "Transgender Day of Remembrance"

Simply put, crowds "fulfill the desire to be uninhibited but in company, to run free while belonging, to break taboos en masse and therefore without any fear of repercussions." (Jannarone 120). Artaud's proscription for a Theater of Cruelty includes detaching oneself from "normalized" behavior and into an elevated state of physical, sensorial and emotional presence. In other words, he encourages breakage of taboos for the purposes of metaphysical arousal and transformation. In a crowd, whose participants

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[138] Dyer also writes about the obsession with death, dying and decay amongst whites. "Whites also seem to have a special relation with death, to yearn for it but also to bring it to others." {Dyer, 1997 #447@} 208.

share similar ideals or are in some way allied to each other for a specific purpose, mirrors of these ideals pop up throughout as various "doubles." These members in a crowd behave spontaneously, improvisationally and with less inhibition. However, a danger inherent in such crowds is mob mentality, where ideas and political agendas spread like a "plague," preventing any contrarian conversation or rebellious action from manifesting within the group before it is devoured *en masse.* Outsiders and skeptics are quickly dissuaded from participation because of the sharply focused themes: a participant either engages or she/he flees.

Various communities and interconnected networks of newly or firmly established friendships began to form, propelled by the influence of social media (i.e, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace). For example, hosts of the above mentioned events, post events on Facebook and then in an illustrious attempt to gather a crowd, various themes are presented to choose from, like an *à la carte* menu of social adventures. Patrons are offered a choice beyond simply picking a show to see as passive spectator on a given night. By suggesting, if not obligating, participants to be costumed, tiny, ephemeral communities that share a common connection with the event's theme are created.

More research and writing needs to be done regarding these performative public spaces and "extreme" performance artists are at the hub of many of these events. These artists aim to attract attention through specific "cruel" choices in sound and music, lights, and staging. The more spectacular the performance—vis-à-vis Artaud's Theater of Cruelty—the more willing a spectator may choose to participate beyond their everyday comfort zones, habits and behaviors. The artist(s) may symbolically represent in embodied form the shared idealism or connective theme that threads the purpose of the event.

Usually all it takes to book the venues of these events is the promise of an audience who would purchase alcoholic beverages. Many theater companies that own venues require rent (however minimal) to host a visiting show, whether from box office sales or a down payment on the venue rental. Many struggling artists who earn prohibitive salaries from their day-jobs (a majority in Austin have day jobs), find these venues more accessible to them, especially to experiment with new, developing work. Performance artists in particular are well-suited for music clubs as venues. As individual artists, they are more easily portable than a production with even minimal amount of set. They aim to please a diverse audience that has a short attention span, perhaps because of alcohol consumption and/or the loud and frenzied atmosphere of the space. On the whole, these performers present radical, transgressive or shocking acts. What they present to an audience typically reflects immediate resonance amongst the culture within the space, and possibly for a wider scope. Thus, performance personas frequently become inextricably linked to a particular issue.

By continuing to expose themselves for an audience, they continue to expose a particularly sore spot in the culture or specific community. This type of exposure leads to an acknowledgement that something needs to be healed, fixed, changed or re-examined. In other words, the performances mirror back to us, usually in not so subtle ways, the need to heal wounds, seek out justice, and find a better means to live in just, sane, and caring ways in our various identities and communities.

I think about how public moments can emerge, whether for good or ill, as possible places of performance. Artaud sought 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" (Artaud *T and D* 85). Artaud's vision of crowd uprising into ecstatic expression bears similarities to protest

movements. Currently, the Occupy Wall Street protest movement in the United States, propagated through internet technology such as Twitter feeds, along with multiple protests in Egypt, Syria, Lybia, and Yemen, termed the Arab Spring, resemble Artaudian notions of crowds in Theaters of Cruelty.

If performance is a public practice, then we have entered an era in which mobile technology can contribute to propelling our private moments into public acts through Facebook status updates, photo "tags" in social media, and the wildfire expansion of amateur video through YouTube. In 1995, when *MetamorphoSex* was performed, the Internet was mostly a place for techno-geeks, academic institutions, and the military. Events were publicized through paper leaflets, flyers, word-of-mouth, and newspaper press. The risks of performing this show were not as stark, since today anybody could sneak a camera into a venue and record the performance, and leak the video to a world-wide public audience. Does this mean private performances could become the next wave of intimacies performed on stages?[139] Although so-called "social media" is useful for gathering specialized niche communities in one time and space, I can also counter-argue that theater—live performance— as an intimate event, is a means to connect us with one another again, without necessarily depending on gadgetry or screens. No matter how many times I look at my gadget, it wants me to engage with somebody, somewhere and whatever content (public practice) they may offer. The dangerous theater and the desperate theater masterfully incorporate "cruelty" in both human and machinistic ways to reflect the complicated nuances of post-industrial, technologically-dependent life in the 21st century.

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[139] Ant Hampton & Glen Neath, visiting artists from the Netherlands who came to Austin for the annual interdisciplinary arts Fusebox Festival, set up a performance called "The Bench" in which two strangers sit next to one another on a bench in a park. They wear headphones that dictate to each of them what to say and do, to have a scripted conversation, while still maintaining both positions as spectator and performer.

I also suggest that reviews and critical essays that describe performances with poetic verve, with a sense that performances have the potential to heal, and that the theater space in particular, is not only a reflection of utopia, as Jill Dolan suggests, but also a medicine chest, a homeopathy of the heart. In his keynote speech at a Princeton University Performance Studies conference in 2011, Richard Schechner stated, "Performance studies is an activist discipline." *Thus, justice is the purpose of all our efforts,[140] a kind of absolute equality that I can hardly yet imagine, yet deeply intuit, having lived my life as a woman under the fingers of too many patriarchal constraints, orders, and rules that do not "speak" my "woman's language." I must use words that can be understood, each letter a sign and sound combined to make a larger sign and sound and image. But I know that my first language, the language I was born to speak, to innately express, is the language of art. For me, that art is performance.*

As a "daughter of Artaud," I advocate, creating performance that has the capacity to serve as a vehicle for transformations and healing, that shakes participants and spectators to their core, that awakens them to justice, and the possibility that we, as humans performing our lives, do not have to live in fear of one another, using ignorant violence and aggression, such as misogyny, racism, classism, and homophobia— whether in words or deeds—as weapons to oppress each other socially, economically, emotionally, and artistically. A doctor/healer/shaman must slice an abscess, the wound, the source of the disease, in order to excrete the poison from the body. This process is not meant to be beautiful, and neither is the art I am discussing. Cruel feminist performance

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[140] It is interesting to note that my case studies in this dissertation seem to suggest that justice and healing are meant for white people only. Another fruitful study may be one that might utilize the theoretical-analytic tool I constructed for an examination of racialized bodies in performance and challenge the tool's applicability. One particular case study could include William Pope L., the self-titled "friendliest black man in America," as a possible example of cruelty in performance. He crawled on hands and knees across Manhattan in a Superman costume in an endurance performance art piece.

of transformation is not a fairy tale or Hollywood blockbuster or Broadway showcase; it can be painfully honest and insulting, excising the toxic plague of hatred in challenging and transgressive ways. The alchemical magic manifests itself when the performance's after-effects— the shaman's medicine— is wholly digested and the world, whether big or small, internal or external, changes course towards justice and humanity, transforming us beyond a fleeting catharsis.

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