

UNFORGETTABLE CRUELTY: INFLUENCE OF ANTONIN ARTAUD'S
THEATER OF CRUELTY ON ABLA FARHOUD'S *JEUX DE PATIENCE* AND
WAJDI MOUAWAD'S *INCENDIES*

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ABSTRACT

JULEE LAPORTE: Unforgettable Cruelties: Influence of Antonin Artaud's Theater of Cruelty on Abla Farhoud's *Jeux de Patience* and Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies*
(Under the direction of Dominique Fisher)

The goal of the present study is to analyze the influence of Antonin Artaud's theater of cruelty on the present-day dramas of Lebanese-Canadian playwrights Abla Farhoud and Wajdi Mouawad. Their respective use of what Artaud calls the "concrete language of the stage" as well as their tendency to question the role of articulated language in the expression of trauma allows for new understandings of the theater's role within communities experiencing turmoil, displacement, and loss. By employing Artaudian cruelty on both a formal as well as a thematic level, the plays of Farhoud and Mouawad bear witness to the atrocities of war, while simultaneously offering new hope to victims and survivors of trauma by positioning the stage as a theater of witness.

To Turtles, Hawks & Scorpions of all sizes

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Cenci Artaud, Antonin. "Les Cenci." Artaud Œuvres. Ed. Evelyne Grossman. Paris: Gallimard, 2004. 601-38.
- Discours Glissant, Edouard. Discours Antillais. Paris : Gallimard, 1997.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Antonin Artaud's revolutionary *Le Théâtre et son double* was met with much scorn and little acclaim by its contemporary audience in 1931, but Artaud's vision for the theater has nonetheless exerted an enormous influence both on today's theater and the literary world at large, as it continues to incite writers, performers, and audiences alike to reconsider their role in artistic creation as well as art's role in life. Privileging the expression of cruelty¹ as a means by which the theater might return to its role as the original exposition of "le vrai spectacle de la vie" (Théâtre 509), Artaud challenged the Western theatrical tradition for its tendency to detach the theatrical act from its life-affirming essence through dependence on the text and mimetic modes of representation. Making good use of Artaudian cruelty in all its forms, Wajdi Mouawad and Abla Farhoud, two Canadian writers of French-expression of Lebanese origin, can be seen to incorporate Artaudian cruelty into their work through their use of the pestilent body,

¹ "Tout ce qui agit est une cruauté. C'est sur cette idée d'action poussée à bout, et extrême que le théâtre doit se renouveler. Pénétré de cette idée que la foule pense d'abord avec ses sens, et qu'il est absurde comme dans le théâtre psychologique ordinaire de s'adresser d'abord à son entendement, le Théâtre de la cruauté se propose de recourir au spectacle de masses ; de rechercher dans l'agitation de masses importantes, mais jetées l'une contre l'autre et convulsées, un peu de cette poésie qui est dans les fêtes et dans les foules, les jours, aujourd'hui trop rares, où le peuple descend dans la rue" (Théâtre 555-6). Both in terms of its thematic manifestations (incest, abject violence, murder) as well as its influence on language (foul language, silence), cruelty in Artaud's theater ultimately aims to disorganize established systems of thought, be they linguistic or social. Later in our discussion, we shall address how cruelty serves to reconcile the audience with the stage via the shock that often accompanies such violent theatrical acts and how this reconciliation can provide a new coping mechanism for communities in turmoil.

specters, incest, foul language, as well as the ultimate silencing of articulated language in favor of a “poetry in space,”² as they present the effects of war and trauma on individuals and families both in Lebanon and in the West. Indeed, in rethinking their collective pasts, Mouawad and Farhoud strive to come to terms with years of war and displacement as well as the cultural impact of these literal and figurative exiles on a given people. Through their participation within the never static “framework” of Artaud’s theater of cruelty, their plays allow for the most authentic theatrical outpouring of the trauma endured by a given people during times of civil unrest, as they simultaneously announce the unstable situation of their particular Lebanese-Canadian community along with those problems faced by other communities the world over.

Incendies is the second play in Mouawad’s epic tetralogy³ in which “[on] reprend la réflexion autour de la question d’origine” (Mouawad 7). The protagonists in *Incendies* struggle to reconcile with the painful memories of war and loss resulting from the Lebanese Civil War, and by attempting to communicate this trauma to their children, their families, and their friends, they in turn force themselves to come to terms with the gravity of their community’s situation. *Incendies* opens in the office of Hermile Nebel, notary of and friend to Nawal, whose children Jeanne and Simon await the reading of their mother’s last will and testament:

J’aimais votre mère... Elle m’a souvent parlé de vous. En fait, pas souvent, mais elle m’a déjà parlé de vous. Un peu. Parfois. Comme ça. Elle disait : les jumeaux. Elle disait la jumelle, souvent aussi le jumeau. Vous savez comment elle était, elle ne disait jamais rien à personne...

² “Cette poésie dans l’espace capable de créer des sortes d’images matérielles, équivalent aux images des mots” (Theatre 525). The aforementioned “images matérielles” would be constructed within the scenic space through the use of lighting, décor, gestures, sonorous outbursts, music, and other “concrete” elements of the stage.

³ Beginning with *Littoral* (1997), *Incendies* (2003), and *Forêts* (2006), Mouawad concluded the series with last year’s production of *Seuls* (2008).

Quand elle est morte, il pleuvait. Je ne sais pas. Ça m'a fait beaucoup de peine qu'il pleuve. Dans son pays il ne pleut jamais, alors un testament, je ne vous raconte pas le mauvais temps que ça représente. C'est pas comme les oiseaux, un testament, c'est sûr, c'est autre chose. C'est étrange et bizarre mais c'est nécessaire. Je veux dire que ça reste un mal nécessaire. Excusez-moi. *Il éclate en sanglots.* (12)

For several years before her death, Nawal refused to speak and lived in a world of complete silence. As the dramatic action progresses in the play, the spectator learns that Nawal's self-imposed silence stems from a realization that she had during an international tribunal against perpetrators of war crimes during the Lebanese Civil War, a revelation that she kept secret until her death. As executioner of her will, Hermille provides the twins with two letters, one addressed to their father and the other to their brother, both of whom the twins have never met. Jeanne and Simon are asked to travel to their mother's native Lebanon to return these letters to their father and their brother, respectively, and while both of the twins are hesitant to leave, Jeanne is the first to seek out her mother's past.

Upon arriving in Lebanon, Jeanne begins to retrace traces of Nawal's past: namely that she became pregnant with her first son, Nihad, as a teenager, and was forced by her family to abandon him, and that she later fled from her home in search of her son, only to become involved in an unidentified rebel movement during the years of the Lebanese Civil War, in which she was eventually captured by opposition forces and repeatedly raped in a prison camp by the notorious Abou Tarek, who fathered the twins Jeanne et Simon. Appearing as a ghost on stage, Nawal tells her son Simon, who stayed behind when his sister left for Lebanon:

J'ai besoin de tes poings pour briser le silence. Sarwane est ton véritable nom. Jannaane est le véritable nom de ta sœur. Nawal est le véritable

prénom de ta mère. Abou Tarek est le nom de ton père. Il te faut à présent trouver le véritable nom de ton frère. (71)

When Simon visits Lebanon after Jeanne's return, he meets with Chamseddine, an old friend of Nawal, who reveals that Abou Tarek, his rapist father, is also his long-lost brother Nihad, abandoned at birth by the young Nawal. Simon and Jeanne then met with Abou Tarek, now a prisoner in Canada, to return to him their mother's letters. In the letter addressed to Nihad, Nawal writes:

Alors c'est une grande histoire d'amour.
Mais en remontant plus loin,
Peut-être que l'on découvrira que cette histoire d'amour
Prend sa source dans le sang, le viol,
Et qu'à son tour
Le sanguinaire et le violeur
Tient son origine dans l'amour. (90)

Addressing the painful memories felt at the hands of her torturer while rejoicing over the fact that her family has finally been reunited, Nawal's letters tell the story of a woman in search of peace after a lifetime of conflict, a sentiment that rings true for many survivors of trauma, as well as their friends, families, and communities.

The characters in Farhoud's *Jeux de Patience* address similar questions of obscured family memory resulting from warfare as Monique and her cousin Mariam attempt to cope with the death of Mariam's daughter Samira. While the stage in *Incendies* bears witness to a multitude of diatopic times and spaces in which the characters explore with their recent past, Monique's small apartment in Canada stands as the sole site of recovered memory. Monique has been unable to write since her cousin's arrival in Canada, and she slowly begins to attribute what she once believed to be a small bout of writer's block to a much more profound sense of loss:

J'ai écrit la surface des choses. Pour endormir, pour bercer, pour plaire. J'ai écrit pour m'endormir, pour oublier. J'ai écrit en repoussant ma mémoire dans le fond de mon ventre. J'ai emprunté une langue et j'ai prêté mon âme. J'ai vécu entre le déchirement de la mémoire et le déchirement de l'oubli. (39)

Having moved to Canada with her family at a young age, in part to escape the troubling political situation of Lebanon during the early 1970's, Monique often finds herself in conflict with Mariam, who sees her cousin as a sort of cultural tourist, lacking all ties to her native land. Speaking of a visit Monique made to her hometown decades before, Mariam says: "Tu voulais tout faire, tout entendre, tout voir... On a été obligés de jouer les touristes avec toi, nu nous as épuisés... Et tu t'exclama! Notre pays est beau, mais s'exclamer comme ça! C'était vraiment démesuré (44)."

While Monique and her cousin oscillate between vicious attacks on one another and rather awkward silences that do more to express their geographic and existential exile than any dialogue ever could, Samira's spectral character can be seen traversing the entirety of the scenic space (stage, rafters, audience seating, etc), while simultaneously providing the spectator with insightful commentary on the events leading to her death as well as her personal views on the war:

La guerre de Viêtnam, je l'ai apprise dans les films : les Américains revenaient en morceaux, puis en faisaient des films. C'est pas ceux qui revenaient en morceaux qui faisaient des films. Non. Eux, ils étaient en morceaux ! La preuve, c'est pas ma mère qui va faire un film sur la guerre, c'est ma tante. Pourtant... je ne sais pas si ça donne quelque chose de faire des films ou des pièces de théâtre... ou des livres... Je ne sais pas... Ça fait pas assez longtemps que je suis ici... Est-ce que ça déjà fait reculer un char d'assaut ? Est-ce que ç'a déjà empêché un avion de lancer ses cochonneries ? Est-ce qu'une bombe a déjà rebroussé chemin à cause d'un livre, d'une pièce de théâtre ou d'un film ? Non ? C'est bien ce que je pensais ! Ça défoule ceux qui le font ! Ah ! ça oui, c'est sûr ! (56)

As the play continues, Monique struggles to convince Mariam that Samira is gone and will never come back, and that in many ways, her death was caused by her own volition (“Samira a choisi sa propre mort” [68]). When Monique finally reveals⁴ that Samira’s best friend Awal was abducted on the streets, violently raped, mutilated, and tortured until death in front of Samira, Mariam begins to understand that her daughter’s decision to march towards the music of bomblasts in the city of Beirut after leaving her home for school one day (70-1) was in essence her daughter’s last protest against the atrocities of war. Struggling with the weight of her daughter’s death along with that of her entire community’s loss during those times of civil unrest, Mariam exclaims: “... Dis-moi, est-ce que tu crois qu’il y a encore de la place dans nos os?... Est-ce que la souffrance se dissout à mesure... à mesure qu’elle rentre en nous... Est-ce qu’elle se dissout... pour faire de la place à ce qui va venir (76) ? ” The inherent cruelty of the dramatic themes and subjects presented in *Jeux de Patience*, as well as those found in *Incendies*, provides us with a rather solid foundation to begin an exploration of the influence of Artaud’s theater of cruelty on the memorial dramas of Abla Farhoud and Wajdi Mouawad.

While marked specifically by the collective trauma of the Lebanese Civil War, the theaters of Mouawad and Farhoud respond to exiled and displaced communities around the world, as their theaters set forth a new way to live through these traumas within the scenic space. These often violent but always poignant theatrical productions speak volumes on the undeniably turbulent past of many Lebanese exiles now living in Canada,

⁴ It is unsure as to whether Mariam was aware of these events, as she claims to have no recollection of Samira’s friend Awal (“Qui ça, Awal [67]?”). However, her intense protestation against the idea that Samira willingly chose to die [“Non non non non non non non. Ils l’ont tuée. Il l’ont tuée. Ils lui ont arraché la vie [72].”] is followed by a much more subdued reaction (“Tu veux vraiment m’achever... [73].”), and eventual acceptance (Monique then begins to rock Mariam to sleep [73]), which could lead one to believe that she was aware of her daughter’s choice all along.

as they simultaneously position the stage as a place of healing and recovery.⁵ And while Mouawad and Farhoud were certainly not the first⁶ to incorporate elements of Artaud's theater of cruelty into their own works, their use of his precepts allows for the theatrical expression of communities in turmoil, especially those suffering the tragic effects of civil unrest, war, even genocide. Furthermore, *Jeux de Patience* and Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies* continue the tradition established by Artaud and his followers whereby the physical qualities of the stage serve to forward and highlight all theatrical action.⁷ Displacing the power of repetition in theater, Artaud strove to make way for a new language of the stage, one that would accentuate the stage's physicality and return to it the mystical elements of Balinese theater and Tarahumara rituals. Marking their fidelity to Artaud, the main characters in *Jeux de Patience* and *Incendies* can be seen to question the efficacy of articulated language (both spoken and written) as they struggle to understand the violence that permeates their collective past and continues to threaten their future. By elevating the status of movement, gestures, sound, and music on the stage, Artaud's theater of cruelty provides essential scenic tools which can today be seen to allow for the oftentimes painful enunciation of collective trauma in the works of playwrights such as Mouawad and Farhoud. Moreover, Artaud's understanding of the role of cruelty in theater can be seen to possess a function in the revelation of collective

⁵ See Jane Moss's article, "The Drama of Survival: Staging Post-Traumatic Memory in Plays by Lebanese-Québécois Dramatists"

⁶ Ariane Mnouchkine and the *Theatre du Soleil* have often been cited as relatively faithful followers of Artaud's theater, even though there are several obvious differences (Mnouchkine's valorization of impromptu performance finds little support in Artaud's theater, for example). It is interesting to note that while Mnouchkine acknowledges her theater's debt to Artaud, she herself claims to have read very little Artaud as she wished to "discover" the theater on her own (Kiernander 141).

⁷ We shall explore this theme in greater detail in Chapter 1, "In Search of a New Concrete Language of the Stage."

trauma, as the cruelties presented on the stages of Artaud, Mouawad, and Farhoud (incest, murder, verbal violence) are neither gratuitous nor devoid of meaning, but rather aim to expose those truths which often lie hidden behind the silence of war and loss. By traversing various modes of representation, such as painting and cinema, in order to create a theater that serves as the double image of life⁸ itself, Artaud's establishment of the theater of cruelty provided the theaters that followed with a newfound strength to face the atrocities of the twentieth century.

While the present study aims neither to confirm nor deny the unequivocal participation of *Jeux de Patience* and *Incendies* within the entirety of Artaud's vision for the theater of cruelty, it will be our work here to demonstrate how certain Aratudian concepts – the search for a concrete language of the stage, the changes made to the role of articulated language in theater, as well as cruelty's function in revealing trauma through the theater's Doubles – can be seen to influence the plays of Mouawad and Farhoud, and how these themes and scenic devices allow for the theatrical realization of a more unmitigated awareness of the trauma inflicted upon communities in conflict.

⁸ “Le théâtre... doit être considéré comme le Double non pas de cette réalité quotidienne et directe dont il s'est peu à peu réduit à n'être que l'inerte copie, aussi vaine qu'édulcorée, mais d'une autre réalité dangereuse et typique, ou les Principes, comme les dauphins, quand ils ont montré leur tête s'empressent de rentrer dans l'obscurité des eaux” (Théâtre 532).

CHAPTER 2

IN SEARCH OF A CONCRETE LANGUAGE OF THE STAGE

While much of Artaud's writing may be considered obscure – and at its limit, vague –, he is unnaturally clear when he stresses that his theater of cruelty will refuse any attempts to subject the physical space of the stage and the *mise-en-scène* to the mandates of writing:

Comment se fait-il qu'au théâtre [occidental]... tout ce qui est spécifiquement théâtral, c'est-à-dire tout ce qui n'obéit pas à l'expression par la Parole, par les mots, ou si l'on veut tout ce qui n'est contenu dans le dialogue... soit laissé à l'arrière-plan ? (Théâtre 524)

Privileging movement and action in the theatrical space, Artaud violently rejected what he saw as the supremacy of the text in the Western tradition,⁹ whereby the unique qualities of the stage were dismissed in favor of writing and its various theatrical manifestations in dialogue, monologue, and discourse. “Le dialogue – chose écrite et parlée – n'appartient pas spécifiquement à la scène, il appartient au livre” (Théâtre 524). Artaud related this drive towards dialogue and discourse in Western theater to a more general trend of Western domination in which cultural and literary hegemony is realized

⁹ While Artaud may be correct in stating that the majority of classical French playwrights (Racine, Corneille) depended heavily on dialogue and discourse in their theaters, he failed to take into consideration the extreme theatricality of some 18th century dramatic representations, such as Marivaux's *La double inconstance* and Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro*, as both of these plays communicate meaning within and via the scenic space of the stage. Figaro's measuring of his marital chambers at the beginning of the play speaks volumes about his character's indeterminate social status as well as the important role of space in theatrical productions, while Marivaux's constant reference to those senses most commonly associated with the theater (hearing, seeing, feeling) also valorize the theatrical space in his theater.

through the implementation of a social system that has continuously failed to question its own efficacy, instead relying on the supremacy of the text and writing to maintain firm control over the arts as well as other domains of human understanding. A popular topic among many 20th century writers,¹⁰ this use of writing within the Western tradition is reiterated by Jacques Derrida decades after Artaud: “This representation [one based in writing] whose structure is imprinted not only on the art, but on the entire culture of the West (its religions, philosophies, politics) therefore designates more than just a particular type of theatrical construction” (234). In rejecting the text and the tools of writing in theater, Artaud hoped not only to create a new theater that restored to the stage its unique concrete qualities but also to overthrow a social system defined by its preference for writing, a system he described as “inique et bon à détruire” (*Théâtre* 527).

After attending the Colonial Exposition in Paris in 1931,¹¹ Artaud wrote : “Le premier spectacle du Théâtre Balinais qui tient de la danse, du chant, de la pantomime, de la musique, – et excessivement peu du théâtre psychologique¹² tel que nous l’entendons

¹⁰ Edouard Glissant is unrelenting in his assertion that writing is intrinsically related to the formation of atavistic cultures, meaning those cultures marked by their desire to define themselves based on conditions of exclusivity and what Glissant, borrowing a term from Deleuze, calls “single-root identity.” Furthermore, he states that most of the dominant cultures in the history of Western thought (French, Spanish, English, German, etc) are atavistic in nature and thereby assume the supremacy of writing in their own arts and use this presumed power of writing and language to dominate the arts and languages of non-atavistic peoples (ch 1-2 *Introduction*).

¹¹ While it is obvious that Artaud’s understanding of Balinese theater is inherently Westernized, his use of their theater to undermine the preferred modes of representation within the Western tradition itself calls to mind Edouard Glissant’s discussion on creole language, whereby one is able to combat the pretended supremacy of a language (in Artaud’s case, a Western system of representation) by corrupting it from the inside through the introduction of foreign elements (for Artaud, Balinese theater) that question the former’s unique legitimacy (ch 2 *Introduction*; ch 61-66 *Discours*).

¹² For Artaud, psychological theater is defined in the Western tradition by its tendency to address the mental and emotional states of individuals instead of those overarching themes that touch all of humanity. He says, “La psychologie qui s’acharne à réduire l’inconnu au connu, c’est-à-dire au quotidien et à l’ordinaire, est la cause de cet abaissement et de cette effrayante déperdition d’énergie qui me paraît bien arrivée à son dernier temps. Et il me semble que le théâtre et nous-mêmes devons en finir avec la psychologie” (*Théâtre* 551).

ici en Europe, remet le théâtre à son plan de création autonome et pure” (Théâtre 535).

The presentation of this Eastern theater on a Western stage before a Western audience had quite a profound effect on Artaud. Indeed, he would go on to build his theater of cruelty around the model of “pure theater”¹³ which he attributed to the Balinese. By requiring that all theatrical action be transmitted by and through the physical stage, the Balinese theater elevated the status of gestures, movement, and sound at the expense of articulated language; and in making the physical stage the focal point of all theatrical action, the Balinese theater offered a re-valorization of the Western notion of *mise-en-scène*. The relative absence of dialogue in Balinese theater as well as its insistence on movement and action exerted an enormous influence on Artaud’s theater of cruelty.

Hoping to escape the domination of the text and what he saw as its deadly stranglehold on Western theater, Artaud’s appropriation of the extreme physicality found in Balinese theater can be viewed as an attempt to bring new life to the Western stage, because for Artaud, the reign of articulated language and literature limited the theater’s ability to effectively communicate with its audience:

Tout vrai sentiment est en réalité intraduisible. L’exprimer c’est le trahir. Mais le traduire c’est le dissimuler. L’expression vraie cache ce qu’elle manifeste. Elle oppose l’esprit au vide réel de la nature, en créant par réaction une sorte de plein dans la pensée... Tout sentiment puissant provoque en nous l’idée du vide, le langage clair qui empêche le vide, empêche aussi la poésie d’apparaître “dans la pensée.” (Théâtre 547)

In order to combat this mortal function of language in theater, Artaud sought to establish a new kind of theatrical language within the Western theater that relied solely on the

¹³ This idea of “pure theater” was derived from the Balinese theater’s use of gestures, music, dance, and pantomime: “En somme les Balinais réalisent, avec la plus extrême rigueur, l’idée du théâtre pur, ou tout, conception comme réalisation, ne vaut, n’a d’existence que par son degré d’objectivation *sur la scène*” (Théâtre 535). Anne Ubersfeld also refers to dance as « le jeu pur » in her discussion of the usage of space in theater (81).

material qualities of the stage, so that the “emptiness” of poetic/theatrical thought, an emptiness which moreover finds its expression in space, might be left to speak for itself.

Like other French playwrights after Artaud,¹⁴ Abla Farhoud manifests strong tendencies towards Artaud’s questioning of language in the theater as well as its ability to effectively communicate truths concerning the extreme trauma that can be seen to mark survivors of – and witnesses to – violent civil unrest around the world. In *Jeux de Patience*, the efficacy of writing is continuously called into question by the main character Monique, a seemingly successful author of Lebanese origin now living in Canada, whose halting speech attempts to articulate her inability to write in the aftermath of her niece’s (Samira) death. “Je... sais plus comment... écrire. C’est la première fois que... je...” (26). Her cousin Mariam, referred to as “La Mère” in the stage directions, has recently moved to Canada after the death of her daughter, and while she speaks French well enough to communicate with Monique, she too expresses a distrust of articulated language: “Savoir une langue ne veut pas dire être capable de parler. Je n’ai pas encore parlé. Je ne sais même pas le nom de ce pays” (25). As mentioned by Louise H. Forsyth,¹⁵ Mariam’s declaration that she has not yet begun to speak stresses that this inability to express oneself does not stem from the difficulty encountered when speaking another language (“communicating across the barriers between natural languages”

¹⁴ It is important to mention here the influence of Artaud on other 20th century French playwrights such as Ariane Mnouchkine (*1789*), Samuel Beckett (*Oh les Beaux Jours*), and Jean Genet (*Les Bonnes*), as each can be seen to question the role of language as well as employ some aspect of the spatial poetry developed by Artaud in their theatrical productions.

¹⁵ “... Kaokab in *Jeux de Patience* is an established Québec novelist who has lost her fluency in Arabic. Mariam’s first language is Arabic, and the only one that allows her to be in touch with her own feelings and thoughts. It is not the difficulty of communicating across the barriers between natural languages that Farhoud highlights, however. Much more urgent in both plays is the inadequacy of words, even in one’s first language, to capture emotions, to explain the inexplicable, and to provide a glimpse of truths one can trust. The plays dramatize, as symptomatic of the exilic condition, the inaccessibility of the right words to express oneself and to explain the “where” of one’s situation” (Forsyth 803).

[Forsyth 803]). Rather, Mariam's frustration underlines the difficulty in which all language, even one's native language, remains inadequate in the expression of trauma.

One mechanism employed to overcome the communicative deficiency of articulated language in Farhoud's *Jeux de Patience* revolves around her use of silence within the scenic space. Silence stands as the antithesis of all articulated language and can moreover be seen to address the more physical needs of the stage as it exudes an acute understanding of the parameters of the scenic space, filling it with a sometimes painful emptiness. In *Jeux de Patience*, silence serves as one of the main modes of communication between Monique and Mariam, as the *didascalie* "Elles boivent leur café en silence" is repeated at least five times during the second scene alone. Wajdi Mouawad shares this propensity for silence, as dialogue in *Incendies* is often interrupted by silences, as also indicated in *didascalie* (17). The main characters of *Incendies* are moreover plagued by the silence of their mother Nawal both before and after her death. During an international tribunal in which she testified against her torturer, Abou Tarek, Nawal realizes that her rapist is the son she was forced to abandon at birth, Nihad, and thus decides to live the rest of her life in silence because she is unable to simultaneously communicate the horror of facing her tormenter with the joy of finding her long-lost son. Upon Nawal's death, the twins Jeanne and Simon are asked at their mother's behest to deliver a letter to their father, whom they had believed to be dead, and to their brother, whom they did not know existed. In her letter to Nihad, she writes: "A l'instant, tu étais l'horreur. A l'instant tu es devenu le bonheur. Horreur et bonheur. Le silence dans ma gorge" (87). Like many survivors of trauma, Nawal cannot unite the powerful and varied

emotions felt upon re-living trauma through its verbal articulation in testimony, and like so many others, she therefore chooses to remain silent.

During several scenes, Jeanne does nothing but listen to tapes of her mother's silence, recorded by a hospital orderly. The *didascalie* reads: "Jeanne écoute dans un walkman les cassettes. Le silence de sa mère emplît toute sa tête" (33). And again :

Jeanne donne l'un des écouteurs de son casque à Simon qui le plaque contre son oreille... Tous deux écoutent le silence...

JEANNE. Là. Ecoute. On l'entend respire. On l'entend bouger.

SIMON. Tu écoutes du silence!...

JEANNE. C'est son silence à elle. Derrière ce silence, il y a des choses qui sont là mais qu'on n'entend pas. (36-7)

Echoing Artaud's call to respect what is often masked by language, Jeanne understands that her mother's silence comports meaning, albeit one that is tortured and violent, as this meaning is created by the conflicting emotions often experienced by victims of war.

Instead of waiting for her mother to begin to speak, Jeanne instead hopes to understand what hides behind her mother's silence and the sort of meaning it could communicate.

For the spectator, the silencing of the stage as Jeanne listens to these cassettes creates a physical change in the atmosphere, presenting the audience with a (non)audible absence that expands and inhabits all areas of the scenic space.

Another example of the silencing of articulated language occurs during Simon's revelation of incest in *Incendies*. In terms of narrative action, Jeanne and Simon do not immediately read the letters given to them by their mother but instead travel to Lebanon in order to uncover their sordid family history. Moreover, the scene in which Simon learns of his mother's rape and of his birth ends with Chameseddine, a friend of Nawal, telling the twin, "Sarwane, reste avec moi. Ecoute-moi. Ecoute-moi bien" (81), and then the stage darkens as the revelation of incest is left verbally un-announced. Leaving this

revelation clouded in silence, Mouawad announces the failure of language in the articulation of the trauma encountered by victims of exile and displacement. Much like the painting *Les Filles de Loth* by Lucas van den Leyden, extolled by Artaud in *Le theatre et son double* for its ability to communicate the incestuous act and its cruel implications via a non-mimetic form of representation, the silence under which incest is communicated in *Incendies* allows for a questioning of the function of language in the revelation of such acts of cruelty.

If it can be said then that articulated language no longer succeeds in communicating meaning on the theatrical stage, at least for Farhoud and Mouawad and potentially for other playwrights dealing with trauma, civil unrest, and genocide,¹⁶ how then might one arrive at the realization of the theatrical act? Artaud's theater offers a way in which these playwrights might combat the pretended supremacy of articulated language in theater with what, for the sake of convenience, we shall call his "concrete language of the stage."¹⁷ Referred to throughout his writing as "physical language," "active language," and even "athletic language," Artaud related this concrete language of the stage to his notion of "poetry in space," one in which the *mise-en-scène* would occupy the theater's primary communicative function instead of dialogue. "Cette poésie très difficile et complexe revêt de multiples aspects: elle revêt d'abord ceux de tous les moyens d'expression utilisables sur une scène, comme musique, danse, plastique, pantomime, mimique, gesticulation, intonations, architecture, éclairage et décor" (Théâtre

¹⁶ In *The Drama of Survival: Staging Post-Traumatic Memory in Plays by Lebanese-Québécois Dramatists*, Jane Moss cites Bernard Antoun as another Lebanese-Québécois playwright who can be seen to question the efficacy of language in the articulation of trauma, as he gives preference instead to its communication via what Artaud would define as the concrete language of the stage (175-6).

¹⁷ "Je dis que la scène est un lieu physique et concret qui demande qu'on le remplisse et qu'on lui fasse parler *son langage concret* (Theatre 524)." [emphasis added]

525). Not limited to human expression – be it verbal or physical – this concrete language, itself constituting the most unique function of the theater, valorized the physical space of the theatrical performance and all that emanated from it. He went on to say that this concrete language did not produce meaning by accident, but rather had “un sens précis, qui ne nous frappe plus qu’intuitivement, mais avec assez de violence pour rendre inutile toute traduction dans un langage logique et discursive” (Théâtre 536). Eliminating the role of improvisation in his theater’s appropriation of a more concrete language, Artaud insisted that the *mise-en-scène* could definitively communicate meaning, albeit in a way quite different from that of the system of referents commonly deployed in articulated language.

The Tarahumara of Mexico contributed a great deal to Artaud’s formation of a new concrete language of the stage, as he observed that many of their rituals assumed a more physical relationship with their world of ideas, their own metaphysics. “La vérité est que les Tarahumaras méprisent la vie de leur corps, et qu’ils ne vivent que par leurs idées; je veux dire dans une communication constant et quasi magique avec la vie supérieure de ces idées” (Tarahumaras 755). However, instead of living in a complete state of ascetic deprivation in which the body would continually be denied its physical needs, the Tarahumara developed a different way to communicate with their supreme ideas, one that required constant participation with the physical space surrounding them. For example, Artaud tells us that the Tarahumara lacked any concept of “sin” or “vice” in terms of a well constructed Western moral system intended to guide one’s behavior such as is the intended purpose of religion in the West, but that the ultimate – and perhaps, only – evil for the Tarahumara consisted of a lack of awareness of the dual nature of

one's being, of its belonging to two separate realms, one physical and the other metaphysical. He recounts a ritual particular to the Tarahumara in which each member of the community must place a rock at the foot of a cross in order to be reminded of the inherent duality of their existence:

Ce n'est pas la croix du Christ, la croix catholique, c'est la croix de l'Homme écartelé dans l'espace, l'Homme aux bras ouverts, invisible, cloué aux quatre points cardinaux. Par là, les Tarahumaras manifestent une idée géométrique active du monde, à laquelle la forme même de l'Homme est liée. Cela veut dire: Ici l'espace géométrique est vivant, il a produit ce qu'il y a de mieux, c'est-à-dire de l'Homme. La pierre que chaque Tarahumara doit mettre, sous peine de mort, au pied de la croix, en passant, n'est pas une superstition, mais une prise de conscience. Cela veut dire: Marque le point. Rends-toi compte. Prends conscience des forces de la vie contraire, car sans cette conscience tu es mort.
(Tarahumaras 755)

This "prise de conscience," enacted through a physical gesture (placing the rock at the foot of the cross) which transmits its message with all the pretended legitimacy of the spoken word, is a performance of the Tarahumara's understanding of themselves as a people. It is important to note that for the Tarahumara, this revelation of their nature, of their native philosophy, passes through a gesture occupying space in the phenomenal realm rather than a text or a proclamation reliant on the structures of human language and therefore relegated to a world of abstract systems. For according to the Tarahumara gesture, even the idea of mathematical perfection is subject to the active components of humanity. We can see that, for Artaud, this privilege given by the Tarahumara to the gesture and its role in space lends itself to his concept of concrete language.

Enjoining this notion of space in the Tarahumara with the dance and gesture of the Balinais, Artaud hoped that the stage would become the focal point of consciousness for all who took part in it. Much like the Balinese production described by Artaud in *Le*

théâtre et son double,¹⁸ the opening scene of *Jeux de Patience* begins with the parade of the spectral body, as it announces the power of space and action to dictate existential states of being. Rather than distinguishing the deceased Samira from other characters by way of her physical appearance – she takes the form of a living body on stage, that of a young, sprightly adolescent girl –, Farhoud defines Samira’s separation from the world of the living in terms of her relation to other characters in space. While Samira’s spectral body can be seen to inhabit all areas of the scenic landscape, as she moves freely on stage, in the rafters, as well as in the audience, Mariam and Monique inhabit restricted areas of the stage, indicating their confinement to the phenomenal world, the world of the living. In the opening scene and throughout the majority of the play, Mariam can be seen to take up a very small area of the stage, in the corner with her back to the audience, while Monique enjoys a larger, but still confined, area near center stage. These spaces inhabited by the characters in *Jeux de Patience* serve as a reflection of their ability to cope with loss, displacement, and exile. Samira, liberated from the trauma of war through her death, is free to move as she pleases, while Monique, whose repeated efforts to write express her desire (albeit unrealized) to understand the loss of Samira and so many others during the Lebanese Civil War, is nonetheless limited in her ability to occupy various areas of the stage. Meanwhile, Mariam occupies the smallest space in relation to the other characters because, unlike Monique, she refuses to come to terms with her daughter’s death and as such has not even begun to mourn her loss, thereby

¹⁸ “Il est très remarquable que la première des petites pièces qui composent ce spectacle et qui nous fait assister aux remontrances d’un père à sa fille insurgée contre les traditions, débute par une entrée de fantômes, ou, si l’on veut, que les personnages, hommes et femmes, qui vont servir au développement d’un sujet dramatique mais familier, nous apparaissent d’abord dans leur état spectral de personnages, soient vus sous l’angle de l’hallucination qui est le propre de tout personnage du théâtre, avant de permettre aux situations de cette sorte de sketch symbolique, d’évoluer” (*Théâtre* 535).

signaling her refusal to undertake “la prise de conscience” of the Tarahumara, the theatrical action of understanding as represented by movement in space.

This elevation of the status of the theatrical space can also be seen in Mouawad’s *Incendies*, where geographic and temporal locations are not designated by one’s position on the stage but rather through sonorous outbursts which announce their presence in space, again calling to mind Artaud’s injunction to a more concrete language of the stage. For example, between the ninth scene (the death of Nawal’s grandmother in Lebanon during the 1970’s) and the tenth scene (Nawal’s own funeral decades later in Canada), there is no verbal indication of a shift in time and space. Rather, this *décalage* is made known at the end of the ninth scene by the incessant ringing of a portable phone (29). And again, after their mother’s funeral during a meeting with her notary Hermille Lebel, the twins’ conversation is repeatedly interrupted by the sound of a jackhammer until the frequency and volume of the noise increases, completely covering their voices and causing a watering-can to start spouting blood (48); immediately following this event, Nawal (at the age of 20) arrives on stage and begins talking to her friend Sawda (offstage, also deceased) of the horrors of a bus-bombing she had witnessed in Lebanon. By enabling his characters to float through time and space and marking these dislocations via sounds and noises, Mouawad reminds his audience that the memory of trauma is always present in the mind of the survivors, just as these diverse geographical and temporal locations are simultaneously made present on the stage through concrete language.

Again employing elements of Artaud’s concept of concrete language as found in Balinese theater, the use of music, sound, and various other sonorous outpourings in *Jeux de Patience* escapes the inefficacies of articulated language and lends itself more readily

to an expansion in space. Described as “musique et bruits de guerre” in the stage directions, these sounds possess a function similar to that found in the Balinese theater whereby music presents “des moyens de la [musique] faire agir directement sur le cerveau comme un réactif physique” (Théâtre 523). Moreover, the inherent cruelty of these sounds lies in the audience’s association of them with images of war and turmoil. While Samira’s spectral body is unable to communicate directly with the other characters on the stage via articulated language, Farhoud’s use of concrete language of the stage creates a correspondence between the movements of Samira and Monique that continues to draw strong parallels with the importance of music and sound in the Balinese theater as described by Artaud. “La musique et les bruits de guerre s’amplifient. Samira reçoit une décharge et tombe sur le corps de Monique/Kaokab endormie. Monique/Kaokab se réveille en criant. Les yeux de Samira sont fixés sur elle” (15). The “décharge” here is figurative, non-material, for nowhere in the surrounding lines nor in the scene itself do we hear or see any sign of a (physical) weapon on stage, allowing us to say that Samira’s movement is guided by sound. By making theatrical action contingent upon sound instead of articulated language, Farhoud appears to follow Artaud’s call to concrete language in the theater of cruelty as it draws strong parallels to the coordination of sounds and movements as seen in the Balinese theater:

Un jeu de jointures, l’angle musical que le bras fait avec l’avant-bras, un pied qui tombe, un genou qui s’arque, des doigts qui paraissent, se détacher de la main, tout cela est pour nous comme un perpétuel jeu de miroir où les membres humains semblent se renvoyer des échos, des musiques, où les notes de l’orchestre, où les souffles des instruments à vent évoquent l’idée d’une intense volière dont les acteurs eux-mêmes seraient le papillotement. (Théâtre 537)

While the sonority of *Jeux de Patience* does not consist of the “natural” sounds of the Balinese theater (wind, rain, etc), its impact is no less important. By making theatrical action submissive to the sounds of war and turmoil, *Jeux de Patience* reveals the chaotic nature of war-torn communities all the while maintaining a certain distance between theatrical action and articulated language, thereby giving preference to the concrete language of the stage in the revelation of trauma and loss experienced by the exiled body.

CHAPTER 3

QUESTIONING ARTICULATED LANGUAGE: AGAINST REPETITION

Artaud's theater remains very conscious of the diverse implications the formation of this concrete language would have both for the stage and for the literary world at large. Indeed, he wrote that this movement towards a new theatrical language could possibly serve as a remedy to what he viewed as the "sickness" of the West: "Si le signe de l'époque est la confusion, je vois à la base de cette confusion une rupture entre les choses, et les paroles, les idées, les signes qui en sont la représentation" (*Théâtre* 505).¹⁹ In order to remedy this situation, Artaud believed that the theater should rid itself of its dependence on articulated language because it only continued the depravation of the European psyche through the repetition and constant reiteration of signs that had come to lack all meaning and purpose. Comparing his idea of concrete language with "la poésie dans l'espace," Artaud hoped that this spatialized poetry of movement and gesture would restore to the stage the anarchical powers of all true poetry, "dans la mesure où elle [la poésie] remet en cause toutes les relations d'objets à objet et les formes avec leurs significations" (*Théâtre* 528). In rethinking the role between objects, their meaning, and the system designed to communicate this meaning, Artaud wanted to create a new scenic

¹⁹ In *Les Mots et Les Choses: une archaéologie des sciences humaines* (1966), Michel Foucault addresses this topic in much greater detail by analyzing the relationships between signs and the objects they signified during various *epistemes* of French literary history.

language that would disrupt the normal patterns and systems of representation known in the West so as to renew the stage along with its Western audience.

In order to restore fully the scenic and physical qualities of concrete language and to ensure their privileged function in theater, Artaud insists that this concrete language of the stage must dominate the stage at the expense of articulated language. One way in which Artaud's concrete language can be seen to suppress the predominance of articulated language in the theatrical performance is through its ability to escape the repetitive function of language in which the linguistic sign retains its pretention to truth by means of its ability to be repeated and further strengthened through subsequent repetitions. As Jacques Derrida notes,

Artaud wanted to erase repetition in general. For him, repetition was evil, and one could doubtless organize an entire reading of his texts around this center. Repetition separates force, presence, and life from themselves. This separation is the economical and calculating gesture of that which defers itself in order to maintain itself, and that which reserves expenditure and surrenders to fear. (245)

If it can be said then that one of the primary goals of Artaud's theater of cruelty is to escape the "sickness" of the West, of its dependence on stagnant systems of referents, then escaping repetition would be an obvious necessity in the theatre of cruelty.

While Derrida acknowledges the importance of escaping repetition in Artaud's theater of cruelty, he believes it to be an impossible task and thereby pronounces Artaud's theater as ultimately un-realizable: "There is no theater in the world today which fulfills Artaud's desire" (248).²⁰ However, other critics have questioned the

²⁰ Listing a variety of ways in which a given play could be "disqualified" from consideration as a functional representation of the theater of cruelty ("Representation" 243-6), it seems as if Derrida would surreptitiously deny even Artaud's own dramatic offerings their proper place within the theater of cruelty. By severely limiting the very possibility of a truly cruel Artaudian realization, Derrida verges on a dogmatic reading of Artaud's work and in doing so exiles this life-affirming theatrical process to the realm

validity of Derrida's statements regarding the impossibility of Artaud's theater, claiming that the physical properties of concrete language are non-repetitive and therefore serve as a means by which the theater of cruelty might escape the mimetic function of language.

Dominique Fisher contends that Derrida's dismissal of the possibility of realizing Artaud's theater of cruelty on the stage today fails to take into consideration the "extra-linguistic" qualities of concrete language. She writes,

La représentation théâtrale appelle une pluralité de codes. Outre le code linguistique, inséré dans le texte écrit de l'auteur, le texte de théâtre met en œuvre un système de signes extralinguistiques faisant intervenir un code acoustique (voix des acteurs, sonorisation), un code visuel (scène, décors...) et un code gestuel (acteurs). Ces signes comme l'a démontré Umberto Eco, revêtent une iconicité conventionnelle car ils ne prennent leur sens que dans la représentation et dans l'événement du moment... L'extrême mobilité existant entre l'ensemble des signes textuels et l'ensemble des signes de la performance permet à la représentation théâtrale d'échapper à la loi de la répétition. ("L'abstrait" 172)

Fisher thereby maintains that the use of concrete language in the form of gestures, music, lighting, and décor, combined with the immediacy of this new language, meaning its capacity to impart a temporally and linguistically unmediated reaction from the spectator do indeed allow Artaud's theater to escape repetition within the scenic space.

Artaud's own writings seem to support this claim that the physical qualities of *la mise en scène* and its position of superiority in the theater of cruelty vis à vis traditional Western theatrical modes of representation (dialogue, etc.) provide his theater with the necessary means to avoid patterns of repetition. "L'acteur qui ne refait pas deux fois la même geste, mais qui fait des gestes, bouge, et certes il brutalise des formes, mais derrière ces formes, et par leur destruction, il rejoint ce qui survit aux formes et produit

of the impossible, the static, the non-theatrical. It is perhaps also important to note that Derrida approached Artaud from a philosophical standpoint and ignored many of the more concrete applications of Artaud's theater.

leur continuation” (Théâtre 508). By moving away from the linguistic sign and its tendency to repeat itself and refer to other forms, the actor’s performance²¹ as well as the combined plastic elements of concrete language in the theater of cruelty contribute to the formation of a language of gests that have no meaning outside of the theatrical performance. In limiting the scope of the reception of the theatrical performance to the stage and to its immediacy in space and time, Artaud exhausted the power of theatrical repetition in the theater of cruelty as he rejected the representation of a non-present present in favor of direct presentation, meaning the presentation of an immediate and unrepeatable present that can only find meaning in the moment of its (non-verbal) enunciation on stage.

Again underlining his preference for action in the theater, Artaud claimed that the verbal expression of language only “acts” once – that is at the moment of its articulation.

Laissons aux pions les critiques des textes, aux esthètes les critiques de formes, et reconnaissons que ce qui a été dit n’est plus à dire; qu’une expression ne vaut pas deux fois, ne vit pas deux fois; que toute parole prononcée est morte et n’agit qu’au moment où elle est prononcée, qu’une forme employée ne sert plus et n’invite qu’à en rechercher un autre, et que le théâtre est le seul endroit au monde où un geste ne se recommence pas deux fois. (Théâtre 550)

Furthermore, repetition can be seen to find its power in the establishment of uniform and systematic representations whereby the same linguistic sign will always refer to another sign and will continue this cycle of repetition indefinitely. However, Artaud contends that gestures and all other elements of concrete language can escape this pattern of reference and repetition because of their uniqueness – their unique position in time and space as

²¹ Speaking on the actor and his/her performance, Artaud compares him/her to a hieroglyph: “On voit que ces signes constituent des véritables hiéroglyphes où l’homme dans la mesure où il contribue à les former, n’est qu’une forme comme une autre, à laquelle du fait de sa nature double, il ajoute pourtant un prestige singulier” (Théâtre 26). This hieroglyphic actor could then be seen as an image and “read” (understood) like the picture-writing of hieroglyphs. In short, the actor’s body should be seen as a theatrical sign, just like the signs we would find in lighting, décor, music, and sonorous outbursts.

well as within the context of the totality of the theatrical performance, whereby each scenic element's complex relation to other elements of the stage could never be repeated or replicated. This unique trait of the theatrical act is reinforced by Anne Ubersfeld in *L'École du Spectateur*: "Il n'y a pas de distance entre l'émission et la réception, il n'y a pas de réflexion et pas d'appel. Ce caractère instantané est lié... [à] son caractère immédiat et éphémère. Il n'y a pas de traces de la représentation, ni de retour possible. Si on va revoir un spectacle, c'est une autre représentation. (19)"

By redefining the hierarchy of theatrical expression such that *la mise en scène* and concrete language become more important to true theatrical expression than the written text and its compulsion to forward theatrical action via dialogue and discourse, Artaud insisted that his goal was not to expel articulated language from the stage, but rather to change its direction.

... faire servir le langage à exprimer ce qu'il n'exprime pas d'habitude : c'est s'en servir d'une façon nouvelle, exceptionnelle et inaccoutumée, c'est lui rendre ses possibilités d'ébranlement physique, c'est le diviser et le répartir activement dans l'espace, c'est prendre les intonations d'une manière concrète absolue et leur restituer le pouvoir qu'elles auraient de déchirer et de manifester réellement quelque chose, c'est se retourner contre le langage et ses sources bassement utilitaires, on pourrait dire alimentaires, contre ses origines de bête traquée, c'est enfin considérer le langage sous la forme de *l'Incantation*.²² (Théâtre 531)

In order to escape the dominance of *la parole* and all of its implications for the theatrical arts, the theater of cruelty demands that articulated language, whether in the form of dialogue or monologue, subject itself to radical changes both in its form and its message.

²² As seen in acts of magic and sorcery, this idea of "incantation," whereby certain words, once pronounced, would be capable of producing physical effects in the phenomenal realm, is evoked in *Jeux de Patience*. After Mariam asks Monique to produce the eyes of her lost daughter Samira, Monique declares that she is not a *djinnia* (37) and is thus unable to make Samira physically reappear. Monique's inability to produce such magical words further strengthens our argument that articulated language often fails to accurately articulate trauma and loss.

Much like Artaud's injunction to promote the concrete language of the stage in theater, articulated language must also undergo a similar metamorphosis in order to truly and effectively operate on the scenic level. While he remained somewhat vague on the specifics of the changes articulated language must enact in order to be considered appropriate for the theater of cruelty, Artaud was quite explicit when he said that articulated language must strive to imitate the concrete language that is the theater's primary language by making the linguistic aspects of articulated language submissive to their more physical qualities such as voice and intonation.

Despite the failure of writing as announced by Monique in *Jeux de Patience*, Artaud's theater provides another possible avenue of expression via articulated language in his valorization of the scream, or *le cri*. In *The Theatre of Seraphim*, Artaud outlined the importance of the scream and its impact on the theatrical space: "Pour dépeindre le cri que j'ai rêvé, pour le dépeindre avec les paroles vives, avec les mots appropriés, et pour, bouche à bouche et souffle à souffle, [le] faire passer non dans l'oreille, mais dans la poitrine du spectateur" (598). Screams, therefore, are more effective than normal modes of articulated language in Artaud's theater because they evoke an immediate and visceral reaction from the spectator, thereby creating a response that is initially physical rather than intellectual, and thus fulfilling the ultimate goal of the theater of cruelty in which the body serves as the point of departure for all human understanding and revelation. Farhoud incorporates this esthetic into her theater, as we see Monique letting out a loud scream when Samira's spectral body falls onto her during the first scene (14). Forsyth credits Samira's falling body and Monique's scream as a motivating force behind Monique's heightened understanding of the trauma of war:

During Samira's labored entry, which ends in a recreation of the moment she was shot, Kaokab, described as a "lion in a cage" (13) confronts in her mind the intimate horror of the material body of the dying Samira. She refuses to resign herself to the intolerable situation, tossing away the game of patience she has been playing and urging herself to take action. (812)

On the diegetic level in *Jeux de Patience*, this *cri* can be seen to incite action onstage (Monique tosses aside her *jeux de patience* and begins to move around the stage only after she has screamed), mirroring the intended effect this scream is to have on the audience. The scream can therefore be seen to function as yet another revelatory action whereby the characters in the play, as well as members of the audience, must come to terms with the trauma of war.

Characters in Mouawad's *Incendies* can also be seen to yell throughout the play; however their preferred method of surpassing the intellectual constraints of articulated language lies in their propensity to swear and to employ various curse words from many different languages in an attempt to restore to language its primary physicality. Simon's foul tirade at the beginning of *Incendies*, in which he curses his deceased mother for asking him and his sister to track down their father and brother, is intended to shock the spectator out of a sense of complacency and thereby to become more involved with the spectacle: "Elle nous aura fait chier jusqu'au bout! La salope! La vieille pute! La salope de merde! L'enfant de chienne! La vieille câlisse! La vieille salope! L'enculée de sa race! Elle nous aura vraiment fait chier jusqu'au bout!... Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" (14).

Indeed, these *jurons* import a startling prowess, as they allow Simon to express his rage and anger, an expression that would be weakened by an over-reliance on dialogue but instead finds its strength as well as immediate reception by the spectator in its physical projection onto the theatrical space. While the use of violent language and swear words

by characters in *Incendies* could be seen as a return to the more normative usages of articulated language in that these words refer to linguistic signs and are therefore able to be repeated, Mouawad nonetheless manages to present this language as broken and incomplete by blending together various *jurons* in English, French, and Canadian *jaoul*. Simon's violent outbursts manifest ruptures within a unified system of referents as they pass from one system of signs to another, calling to mind the importance of creolized languages according to the critical theory of Edouard Glissant (ch 2 *Introduction*). By creolizing language, that is, by blending different languages together so that each component is changed by their meeting, characters in *Incendies* are able to disorganize the unified system of referents presented within a single language and are thereby able to escape its call to repetition. This new creolized articulated language therefore allows for the expression of anguish encountered when addressing questions of war and trauma.

Likewise, characters in *Jeux de Patience* attempt to change the direction of articulated language so as to better express their sense of loss. In the second scene, Monique haltingly exclaims: "Le... mot est un peu faible...(23)" However, there is one phrase repeated throughout the play that seems at least a little stronger than all the others as it refers directly to the characters' search for a language capable of expressing their suffering. After announcing her inability to write about Samira, Monique becomes the object of Mariam's rage, as she screams: "Tous ces mots?! Tous ces mots?! Il doit bien y en avoir un en forme de couteau, plus fort que le silence d'un mort" (Farhoud 63) ! And again in an argument with Monique:

MONIQUE/KAOKAB. Tu parles toujours de la mort. Il n'y a pas que la mort. La mort, c'est simple, mais la vie...

LA MÈRE. (*Elle reçoit la phrase comme un coup de couteau.*) La mort, c'est simple ! Quand tu seras touchée dans ta propre chair, tu m'en

parleras, pas avant ! (63)

This idea of a language that would be capable of provoking a very real physical reaction similar to that of a knife entering the body is entirely supported by Artaud's writings as he too searches for a way to "briser le langage pour toucher la vie" (Théâtre 509). The image of the language-knife can also be seen in *Incendies*, when Jeanne/Jannaane tries to convince her brother that their mother's last words – "Maintenant que nous sommes ensemble ça va mieux" – contained some sort of meaning: "Hey! L'infirmier l'a entendue... Pourquoi il aurait inventé? Il n'aurait pas pu. Pas pu inventer quelque chose de si vrai. Vous le savez, je le sais, on le sait tous, une phrase pareille, ça lui ressemble comme deux couteaux ! Alors on ne peut pas nier" (Mouawad 18)! While this knife analogy could be understood as a mere colloquialism, the context of these particular plays and their consistent questioning of language warrant further analysis. Comparing articulated language to a knife with all of its physicality and propensity to violence, it would seem that both Mouawad and Farhoud are conscious of the fact that articulated language must be made concrete and active on the stage in order to penetrate the emotional barriers created by loss and anguish in the face of such tragedies as those presented in *Incendies* and *Jeux de Patience*.

CHAPTER 4

CRUELTY AND THE THEATER'S DOUBLES: TOWARDS A NEW THEATER OF THE COMMUNITY

By avoiding repetition within the scenic space and providing the theater with a more concrete language of the stage, Artaud could be seen to traverse various modes of theatrical representation through his use of Balinese dance, song, and sounds, as well as the emphasis on space borrowed from the Tarahumaras, in an attempt to incorporate into his theater of cruelty those arts which he considered to be the Doubles of all true theatrical expression. These Doubles included painting²³, cinema²⁴, and alchemy, among others²⁵. The inherent “theatricality” of these Doubles lies in their rejection of mimetic forms of representation, thereby giving rise to more concrete modes of re-presentation²⁶ which lend themselves to what we would today call performance. Fisher explains the use

²³He cites *Les Filles de Loth* by Lucan van den Leyden, a 16th century Dutch painter whom Artaud credited for his ability to move the spectator without resorting to mimetic representation (Théâtre 522).

²⁴ He cites a scene in the Marx Brothers' film *Monkey Business* whereby the actors are able to make a cow's moo possess “une dignité intellectuelle à celle de n'importe quel cri de femme” (Théâtre 528), thereby highlighting the anarchical power of laughter and its capacity to overturn normative modes of signifying relationships.

²⁵ In the paragraphs that follow, we shall discuss in greater detail the role of the plague and that of incest in Artaud's theater, as well as in the plays of Mouawad and Farhoud.

²⁶ According to Ubersfeld, “Le mot même de représentation est impropre quoique usuel (il est difficile de s'en passer) dans la mesure où il suppose que serait re-présenté quelque chose qui dans un autre espace (celui du livre ou du livret) aurait été déjà présenté une première fois. Or la représentation est une présentation” (10).

of these Doubles in theater in terms of their relation “to a space *hors-texte* and off-stage that, although not directly depicted on stage, is re-presented through the expedient of visual, gestural, and sonorous elements as well as scenic elements” (*Staging* 104). She thus echoes Ubersfeld’s commentary on the function of signs in Artaud’s theater:

La fonction propre des signes de la représentation est double. Le signe au théâtre est à la fois signe d’autre chose, renvoyant à un quelque chose dans le monde qu’il signifie, et signe-pour-soi, élément d’une performance qui est un pratique spectaculaire, “signe” sans signifié, analogue à un pas de danse, à une séquence musicale. (38)

According to Ubersfeld and Fisher, we can then say that Artaud’s theater as well as its Doubles highlight that which is simultaneously present (action and movement in theatre) and non-present (that which this action and concrete language would signify in the phenomenal world) within the scenic space. The use of the numerous Doubles in Artaud’s theater thereby serves to further strengthen the theater of cruelty’s break from classical forms of Western representation while simultaneously allowing today’s contemporary theaters to oscillate between various modes of representation that, when combined, come nearer to approaching the diverse and multi-faceted nature of their experiences in war and genocide than any theater before.

This conception of the theater’s Doubles proves extremely important on a thematic level in the plays of Farhoud and Mouawad because of its ability to articulate the fractured subjectivity of the characters in question. In *Jeux de Patience*, the character Kaokab changed her name to Monique after arriving in Canada as a young girl to avoid being bullied by other children, but only as an adult did she realize that her new name also signified a break with her family and her heritage in Lebanon. Likewise, the *didascalie* refer to Mariam only as “La Mère,” as she too has undergone a transformation

upon her arrival in Canada after the death of her daughter. While Mariam no longer occupies the role of mother (she barely speaks to her remaining children), the name remains as a reminder of that which is no longer present and accessible to her character (her daughter Samira's living body), neither in the diegesis nor on the stage itself. After discovering that they were the product of an incestuous rape and that their mother had abandoned them at birth only to find them again before emigrating to Canada in an attempt to erase all traces of their traumatic past, the twins Jeanne and Simon of *Incendies* discover that their birth names (Jannaane and Sarwane, respectively) differ from the names they had been accustomed to using all of their lives. In both plays, the characters' doubles serve to highlight the precarious existence of exiled peoples and displaced communities as they are often perched between two sometimes opposing identities: one that is immediately knowable to them (present) and another that remains hidden by the trauma of violence and war (non-present).

Artaud's theater, like most theater, is also doubled in terms of its dual existence in a textual form (the script) as well as its realization on the stage. While Artaud was staunchly opposed to the domination of the text through dialogue in theatrical representations, one cannot ignore the fact that we are able to read most of his plays in written form. Again, Ubersfeld proves helpful in highlighting this distinction:

Nous avons pu ailleurs tenter la double tâche paradoxale de dire le texte de théâtre comme illisible et d'essayer en même temps de le lire comme le socle d'une pratique ou plus exactement d'un réseau de pratiques signifiantes. Il nous sera donc impossible de considérer la « représentation » comme la traduction d'un texte qui serait complet sans elle et dont elle n'apparaîtrait que le double ou la doublure. (9)

Like Artaud, Mouawad confirms the importance of theatrical action and what Ubersfeld refers to as “representation” in that he writes his plays while they are being performed.²⁷

In his preface to *Incendies*, Mouawad writes:

Je tiens à dire combien l’engagement des comédiens fut crucial. Simon n’aurait jamais été boxeur si Reda Guerinik n’avait pas participé au projet. Sawda n’aurait pas été en colère sans Marie-Claude Langlois et Nihad n’aurait probablement pas chanté si je n’avais pas travaillé avec Éric Bernier. Il s’agissait de révéler l’acteur par le personnage et de révéler le personnage par l’acteur...(7)

Mouawad’s refusal to submit the realization of the theatrical act to its textual double further confirms his affiliation with Artaud’s theater of cruelty as both can be seen to give complete priority to the theatrical performance over the written text.

Revealing another Double of his theater of cruelty, Aratud began his famous *Le Théâtre et son double* by establishing a relationship between the theater and the plague. For Artaud, the corporal decay and physical deformation which define the outward manifestations of pestilence symbolize a more vicious spiritual/mental affliction that defies empirical and scientific evaluation. Artaud saw the plague as “la révélation, la mise en avant, la poussée vers l’extérieur d’un fond de cruauté latent par lequel se localisent sur un individu ou sur un peuple toutes les possibilités perverses de l’esprit” (*Théâtre* 520). However, pestilence is not the originating force of these cruelties, according to Artaud, as he sees them as already in operation in humanity: “Le théâtre, comme la peste, ... dénoue les conflits, il degage des forces, il déclenche des possibilités et si ces possibilités et ces forces sont noires, c’est la faute non pas de la peste ou du théâtre mais de la vie” (*Théâtre* 521). *Jeux de Patience* and *Incendies* seem to confirm

²⁷ According to Adrian Kiernander, a former participant in the *Theatre du Soleil*, Ariane Mnouchkine applies a similar approach to “writing” theater in that she collaborates with the actors in the creation of her theatrical productions while they are being performed. (20-27)

the pre-existing nature of cruelty in humanity, as the violent acts of rape, incest, and murder referenced via the concrete language of the stage (made “present” on the stage) in these plays find their all too real counterparts in communities (“non-present” on the theatrical stage) that must undergo the traumatic experiences of civil unrest and war.

The character of Nihad/Abou Tarek in *Incendies* can be seen as the perfect theatrical incarnation of cruelty in much the same way that we might elect the father in Artaud’s *Les Cenci* to the same illustrious position, as both characters demonstrate an awareness of their own cruelty as well as its relation to theater. In the very first scene of the first act of *Les Cenci*, the father Cenci announces, “Je cherche et je fais le mal par destination et par principe” (Cenci 604) and goes on to qualify this statement throughout the rest of the play as he repeatedly rapes his daughter Béatrice. Cenci reiterates the importance of cruelty in theatrical action when he says:

Ce qui distingue les forfaits de la vie de ceux du théâtre, c’est que dans la vie on fait plus et on dit moins, et qu’au théâtre on parle beaucoup pour faire une toute petite chose. Eh bien, moi, je rétablirai l’équilibre et je le rétablirai au détriment de la vie. J’élaguerai dans mon abondante famille. (Cenci 604)

Artaud is therefore deliberate in his association of cruelty with the theater, even on the level of diegesis and character development, as he claims, through the character of Cenci, that the primary realm of cruelty is found in the theater. Nihad/Abou Tarek, while unaware of the fact that he has tortured and raped his own mother, nonetheless possesses the same inclination to cruel action as he shamelessly and somewhat joyfully kills a journalist while simultaneously capturing the moment of his death in a photograph (Mouawad 74). The character of Nihad/Abou Tarek, like Cenci, can moreover be seen to relate his cruelty to a type of performance. Following the murder of the journalist, Nihad

imagines being interviewed for a television show in which he sings popular songs and talks at length in garbled “franglais” about the people he has tortured and killed: “You know, Kirk, sniper job is fantastic job... Yeah! It is an artistic job... Every balle que je mets dans le fusil, is like a poème. And I shoot a poème to the people and it is the précision of my poème qui tue les gens et c’est pour ça que my photos is fantastic” (Mouawad 78).²⁸ During his trial, he claims that the testimony of his heinous acts as brought against him by various witnesses bores him: “Que ce processus était un ennui! Sans rythme et sans aucun sens de spectacle. Le spectacle, moi, c’est ça ma dignité” (84). Through the mouthpiece of a character that purposefully embodies cruelty and relates his dignity – that which best characterizes his cruelty – to spectacle and to theater, Mouawad can be seen to acknowledge his debt to the theater of cruelty as he consciously places cruelty within the realm of the theatrical experience.

Perhaps more importantly for our study of Artaud’s influence on the theaters of Farhoud and Mouawad, pestilence requires the full participation of the community due to its contagious nature, which for so long now has surpassed all attempts made by science to understand its patterns of development and geographic displacement, as it appears to infiltrate the community and leave no member unthreatened by its ravenous destructive tendencies. In the same way, Artaud’s theater of cruelty – through its use of screams and other elements of concrete language that force an immediate and visceral reaction from the spectator – transforms the spectator into an active participant, unable to avoid the “contagion” of the stage and its presentation of violence, as the shock of cruelty

²⁸ This passage can also be seen as another example in which creolized language disrupts the perceived unity (and therefore superiority) of articulated language, as previously demonstrated by Simon’s character in the same play.

commands him/her to enter into dialogue with the actions presented before him: “Au point d’usure où notre sensibilité est parvenue, il est certain que nous avons besoin d’un théâtre qui nous réveille: nerfs et coeur” (Théâtre 555). Artaud hoped to place the spectator at the center of the spectacle (Théâtre 554), and Mouawad and Farhoud’s use of cruelty seems to aspire to the same ends. Because the revelation of the theater’s Doubles allows that which is both present and non-present to be represented in the scenic space, the stages of *Jeux de Patience* and *Incendies* can be seen as “sites of trauma” according to Jane Moss. “Instead of experiencing the catharsis associated with classical tragedy, the audience shares the anxiety and bewilderment that accompany unexplained violence, dispossession, loss and death” (175). Specifically referencing the theatrical works of Abla Farhoud and Wajdi Mouawad in her article, Moss signifies their movement away from traditional modes of catharsis, where the spectator was forced to distance him/herself from the stage in order to understand that the tragedy presented therein could and should be avoided. However, the tragedies of war and genocide as seen in the world today defy all logical explanation and comport no definitive moral lesson. Rather than trying to explain the inexplicable, the theatrical presentation of the cruelties of war in the works of Mouawad and Farhoud allow the spectator to confront these images as they are presented onstage with the hope that he or she might be able to overcome them.

Inviting further comparisons between Artaud’s notion of the plague and the theaters of Mouawad and Farhoud, Artaud claimed that a community menaced by the pest may also be transformed into a community strengthened by the plague as members must unite together to face a common threat:

... le théâtre est un mal parce qu’il est l’équilibre suprême qui ne s’acquiert pas sans destruction. Il invite l’esprit à un délire qui exalte ses

énergies ; et l'on peut voir pour finir que du point de vue humain, l'action du théâtre comme celle de la peste, est bienfaisante, car poussant les hommes à se voir tels qu'ils sont, elle fait tomber le masque, elle découvre le mensonge, la veulerie, la bassesse, la tartuferie... et révélant à des collectivités leur puissance sombre, leur force cachée, elle les invite à prendre en face du destin une attitude héroïque et supérieure qu'elles n'auraient jamais eue sans cela. (Théâtre 521)

For Farhoud and Mouawad, the idea of theater as pestilence would allow them to unite the diverse members of their respective communities through the theatrical act so that together they might face and triumph against the forces that threaten to destroy them. The revelation of cruelty seen in pestilence and its presentation as the Double of theatrical action by Artaud would then allow communities the world over to find the strength needed to overcome the obstacles presented to them by war, trauma, and civil unrest. In this way, *Jeux de Patience* and *Incendies* may be seen to take part in what Karen Malpede calls “the theater of witness”:

The theater of witness offers the *hope* of resistance in place of the *fear* of misfortune; it emphasizes *compassion* (an interactive stance) over (isolating) *pity*. Instead of catharsis as purgation, theater of witness offers a passage through an intense experience in order to arrive at a state of integration of previously disorienting, fragmented memories. (2000 302)

By bearing witness to the trauma of war and genocide, the plays of Farhoud and Mouawad allow displaced communities to overcome the literal and figurative exiles imposed upon them, and in doing so, these plays provide the spectator with an opportunity to reconcile their own past traumas with their present realities.

While one might be tempted to categorize the theatrical “witnessing” of *Jeux de Patience* and *Incendies* as pertaining exclusively to the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War, both Farhoud and Mouawad clearly state that the cruelties presented in their works apply to all communities in turmoil across the globe. In the stage directions proceeding

the first scene of *Jeux de Patience*, Farhoud writes: “Le pays en guerre dont il est question peut être n’importe quel pays” (11). She goes so far as to offer her work to “tous ceux qui ont perdu leur enfant, leur pays, leurs rêves, le goût de la vie” (9). In an article on the role of memory in *Incendies*, Rainier Grutman and Heba Allah Ghadie highlight the opacity of Mouawad’s play and its ability to transpose and *travestie* all clear references to the situation in Lebanon (106). Indeed, even in his preface, Mouawad explains that his play deals not only with the war in Lebanon, but also with questions of territory, reconstruction, divorce, marriage, theater, God, the war in Iraq, and the discovery of America. By opening their theaters to a plurality of “non-present” referents via a multitude of re-“present”-ational forms as seen in their theaters’ respective manifestations of Artaud’s Doubles, Mouawad and Farhoud invite all communities in turmoil inhabiting the world today to take part in the healing power of their theaters.

The plays of Abla Farhoud and Wajdi Mouawad respond to some of the most troubling questions posed by the 20th century, including those offered by brutal acts of war, gratuitous violence, dispossession, displacement, and exile. However, these playwrights do not fall prey to the silences of traumatic memory, nor do they remain inactive in the face of such horrors. Instead, the characters and theatrical action in *Jeux de Patience* and *Incendies* promote a re-integration of the exiled body and restore to this body its ability to move, to reach out into the scenic space as well as into the audience, thereby making reconciliation and mourning possible within the parameters of the theater. Echoing Edouard Glissant’s call to creolization as an act of resistance that does not necessitate violence but often understands it (*Introduction* 51), the multitude of representational forms employed in their theaters – including sonorous outbursts, music,

movement, gesture, and space – set the stage for the most accurate and unyielding presentation of the effects of trauma and war on a given people in the 20th century. Moreover, Mouawad and Farhoud’s ability to incorporate elements of the concrete language of the stage originating in Artaud, as well as his injunction to subject the mandates of writing to this concrete language, provide them with the scenic tools needed to effectively operate a change both on the stage and in the real-world communities presented therein, as the new role of the spectator (now made participant) also signals a change in theater’s role within the community. Making theater the source of life, inspiration, and perseverance for all who despair, Artaud, Mouawad and Farhoud offer great hope for the future of exiled and displaced communities, as they now possess a theatrical art capable of combating the violence that threatens to tear them apart.

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