Athleticism Is Not Joy: Extricating Artaud from Deleuze's Spinoza

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Abstract

Deleuze's writings often bring Spinoza and Artaud into close proximity, and given that the latter is often first encountered by many anglophone readers through Deleuze, the tendency to think of Artaud as a Spinozist risks becoming conventional. In fact, much of Artaud's metaphysics is incompatible with Deleuze's Spinozism, not least the relation between a body and its constitutive outside, and the questions of affect and expression. In reading Artaud's 'An Affective Athleticism' essay and with recourse to his final works, this article will explore these differences with particular reference to vitalism, experimentation and unilateral difference.

Keywords: Artaud, Spinoza, affect, suffering, ethology, body

Of the skeins of philosophers and authors who are woven through Deleuze's œuvre, it is Spinoza and Artaud who are the dye in the wool of its fabric, forming and structuring the thought and the style of writing at the deepest level of Deleuze's philosophy. In the process, Artaud and Spinoza seem to become fused, such that the figures of one come to be used by Deleuze and Guattari – as if without complication – to refer to the other: Spinoza is the 'crowned anarchist' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 158) and his *Ethics* is the 'great book' of 'the body without organs' (153), both figures taken from Artaud's works. What would seem to bring Artaud and Spinoza so close, for Deleuze, is their profound, original and intricate calculations of the differential relations between a body and its outside; the body's constitution from the stuff of the outside and, in turn, its actions upon the outside. But if Spinoza's *Ethics* solicits

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Deleuze's lifelong attention because of its bringing together of affect, metaphysics and the movement of bodies, he is much less thoroughgoing in his readings of Artaud's writings on these precise same matters.

Perhaps the earliest of Artaud's texts to lay out a programme for the knotting of affect, metaphysics and the muscular organism is his *Theatre and Its Double*, especially the section titled 'An Affective Athleticism' (Artaud 1974: 100–6). The final chapter of the book to be completed, 'An Affective Athleticism' is, put simply, a practical guide to acting, where the latter becomes a question of producing and directing expressive force through, or despite, externally imposed necessities. By locating this early text on the body and affect within the contexts of Artaud's theatre training, and by tracing these themes into his later works, it becomes clear that the proximity of Artaud and Spinoza which Deleuze perceives is not at all justified. The crucial difference concerns the modes of internalising and abreacting the outside; or, put more abstractly, it is the difference between Artaud's concerns with repulsion and unilateral difference against Deleuze's Spinozist preference for an economy of reciprocity running between a body and the outside which affects it. Breathing, food and affections – the necessity of taking the outside into the body and the unbidden sensations which traverse that body – take on a metaphysical importance in Artaud and Deleuze's Spinoza. But even if these two agree that the problem of the body most pointedly involves the synthesis of external necessity into a capacity to act, a fundamental incompatibility remains. At the furthest pitch of this problem, the very compossibility of acting and life is at stake, as the production of expressive force takes on a character antithetical to the ethos of vitalism and the demands of organic survival.

Expressive Force

> This voluntary breathing incites the spontaneous reappearance of life.
> (Artaud 1974: 103)

It is the breath, Artaud explains in 'An Affective Athleticism', that mediates between the physical exertion of the muscular organism and the affective states of the body. A mastery of the breath, he infers, leads to a mastery over the body. Moreover, as the affective states and the musculature of the body are inseparably bound, sovereign modulation of breath not only produces affective states in the body, but determines the poses and gestures of the muscular body. And, as Artaud had argued earlier in *The Theatre and Its Double*, the body's gestures and form

are its means of producing an unencrypted expressive force, or what he calls 'hieroglyphs' (e.g. Artaud 1974: 27, 68). As such, the breathing exercises promise sovereignty over both the form and force of the body. Under no circumstances may this expressive force be misunderstood as psychological expression; nor is it a derivative of any pre-existent state. As Artaud explains:

> I am quite aware that the language of gesture and attitude [...] are less capable of elucidating a character, relating a person's thoughts, or exposing clear and precise states of consciousness than verbal language, but who ever said that the theatre was created to elucidate a character, or to resolve the kind of human and emotional, contemporary and psychological conflicts with which our modern theatre is filled? (Artaud 1976: 234; translation modified)

And more starkly put, when a few years before Artaud laid out his priorities for the theatre: 'We do not think that life should be represented in itself, or that it is worthwhile to pursue this direction' (Artaud 1976: 161). Here, the continuities of Artaud's ideas with those of his predecessors, teachers and colleagues in the theatre of early twentieth-century Paris are most evident – even if Artaud himself tended to stress their disagreements (e.g. 1976: 367, 631). Of particular note is the use of masks introduced by Jacques Copeau as part of the training regime at the Vieux-Colombier theatre school, which he had founded in 1921. For Copeau and Suzanne Bing, masking an actor eliminated any reliance on facial expressions. As such, mask-work effects a break with the 'old' kind of theatre which stages individualised psychological conflict. For Artaud, the death of the old theatre is necessary to reawaken a theatre which explores the expressive capacities of the whole body. In place of representation of interior psychological states, Artaud calls for a 'sacred' theatre which would mobilise the whole body to produce expressive force (266), a force which would touch the audience directly. These goals and means are not so dissimilar from Copeau's aims with the mask-work – and it is no coincidence that Artaud would later praise Jean-Louis Barrault, Copeau's closest collaborator in the 1930s, for developing the breathing techniques outlined in 'An Affective Athleticism' (367).[1]

With both the mask-work and Artaud's own theatre projects, the theatre was to become a place where affective states are produced, not reproduced; the actor's body would become (to borrow a phrase from Deleuze and Guattari) more a factory than a theatre (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 24). It is such a break which Eleanor Duse, a frequent visitor to the Vieux-Colombier in its earliest days, had in mind when she wished a plague upon the theatre (Leabhart 1989:

28–9). Copeau, too, became fond of this image, and in turn the plague became a core theme for Artaud (Artaud 1974: 7–21; Dorcy 1961: 8). Despite the eschatonic images it conjures, the plague as Artaud thinks of it does not entirely break with the past. Like Étienne Decroux's often misunderstood suggestion that speech be banned from the theatre for twenty years (and slowly reintroduced via a five-year transition phase of only asignifying speech or 'sound-mime'), Artaud's notion of plague is, rather, a sorting mechanism. Rather than effecting a wholesale destruction in order to fill the resulting vacuum with his own vision, Artaud is calling for a stripping back to some sort of fundamental actorly tools and purposes. What he seeks is akin to what, for Deleuze and Guattari, 'was present in art from its beginning, but was hidden' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 24); an art which accesses what Jacques Lecoq – whose teaching of mime is openly indebted to Artaud – calls the '*fond*': the base or source (Felner 1985: 150–1). The plague, then, is less an end than a return to the beginning: counterintuitively, the plague is purifying. But if this purification requires a going back, it is not the recreation of a moment in history. This slip back to an extreme youth – a time before history – is already operative in 'An Affective Athleticism' and, I will argue, becomes an increasingly frequent sleight in Artaud's later writings, especially as relates to the production of a body freed from suffering.

New Sickness; New Science

> For if a science of breathing sheds light on the tenor of the soul, it can stimulate the soul all the more by aiding it to flourish.
>
> (Artaud 1974: 102)

Artaud's call for a theatre which will revivify its sacred function will necessarily involve refinding an unmediated efficacy of gesture, one which affects the audience directly. Shortly after filing the final changes to *The Theatre and Its Double*, from Mexico City, Artaud embarked on a trip to the Sierra Tarahumara. Artaud's lectures in the capital urged the Mexican students to look to the indigenous peoples of their country rather than to the Western 'revolutions' of surrealism and communism (Artaud 1976: 370–4), and his journey to the Tarahumara was undertaken in search of an audience unsullied by Western values. He writes, 'soon I am going to reach the Indians [. . .] and there I hope to be understood' (365). Nearly a decade later, from the asylum at Rodez, Artaud recalled: 'I did not go to Mexico on a voyage of initiation or for a

pleasure trip [. . .] I went there to find a race of people who could follow me in my ideas' (452). What is at stake, here, is precisely that which was at stake in the search of an audience for his theatre projects of the late 1920s, and in all of Artaud's subsequent endeavours:

> If I am a poet or an actor it is not in order to write or recite poems but in order to live them. When I recite a poem I don't do it to be applauded but to feel the bodies of men and women, I said *bodies*, tremble and turn in unison with my own, turn [. . .] to the bodily and physical materialization of a total being of poetry. (Artaud 1976: 452)

The Western audience, for Artaud, had proved itself too sick to understand his work. But if there is invective against the theatregoing public, it is exceeded by the severity of the demands he makes of his own body. For Artaud, as for Copeau: 'for the theatre to be reborn, all *actors* must die of the plague' (Dorcy 1961: 8; emphasis added). If the connection to the audience has been lost in the theatre, it is the body of the actor – the 'affective athlete' – which will 'reforge the chain [. . .] breath for breath' (Artaud 1976: 276). This affective athlete, in overcoming psychological drama and returning expressive force to the body, will heal not only himself but all the sick bodies of the world: for '[t]o arrive at the emotions through their powers instead of regarding them as pure extraction, confers a mastery on an actor equal to a true healer's' (Artaud 1974: 102).

For Artaud, the project of healing the world – and himself – through the actions of his own body fundamentally involves the systematic development of an understanding of 'the points of the body that must be touched [. . .] to throw the spectator into magical trances' as well as rigorous training based on breathing exercises (Artaud 1976: 276, 618–20). Necessarily, Artaud explains, the return to sacred theatre requires both knowledge of the body and new modes of embodiment of knowledge; a new science paired with rigorous training:

> In the theatre, poetry and science must henceforth be one [. . .]
> And it is from this precious kind of science that poetry in the theatre has long been estranged.
> To know the points of localization in the body is, therefore to reforge the magic chain.
> And with the hieroglyph of a breath I want to rediscover an idea of sacred theatre.
>
> (Artaud 1976: 276)

As 'points of the body' suggests, practices such as acupuncture are informing Artaud's notion of a poeticised science of the body. Having

been greatly impressed by treatments administered by George Soulié de Morant – the man often credited with bringing acupuncture to Paris (at least to its white population) – Artaud's notebooks of this period testify to a continuing interest in Eastern philosophies and esoterica, not least the Kabbalistic ternary which underwrites the breathing techniques elaborated in 'An Affective Athleticism'.[2] What attracts Artaud, he writes, is that in these 'Eastern' philosophies, '[m]etaphysics is part of the daily practice of life' (Artaud 1976: 191). It is precisely this kind of unmediated contact with metaphysics which Artaud seeks for the theatre, and it is to be achieved through the actor's body. What is at stake in the new physico-poetic science of 'An Affective Athleticism' is the elaboration of practical means of transformation of the body using only what is given: autopoiesis, or the body transforming itself.

From Doubling to the Puppet-body

Throughout Artaud's œuvre, there is an escalating need to determine his body's own relation to the outside, as his sufferings increase in variety and intensity. From his earliest writings he reports the awful theft of his thought, and by the time of writing 'An Affective Athleticism' he is addicted to opiates and in constant pain. The privations to which he would be subjected whilst interred in asylums during the Nazi occupation – starvation, electroshock – were supplemented by his reports of succubi and other black-magical forces arraigned against him. From a stated desire to heal the world through his body, Artaud becomes increasingly concerned with healing and protecting himself from perditions which threatened his very being. As such, he determines, if the body is to transform itself, it must be by using its suffering against its tormentors: a body which Artaud creates 'suffers the world and disgorges reality' (Artaud 1976: 413).

The world causes suffering in at least two ways, here: it assails the body with affects not of the body's choosing; and it demands that the organism breathe to continue living. Two necessities oppress the body: the ontological anteriority of the world of affect before the organism; and the organic necessity of sustaining life through the outside. Through affective athleticism, the affects which assail the organism are returned to the world as a force. In the process, expressive force is given a new origin – it no longer originates in the outside, but is the organism's self-determination from the very base, *fond*, of being. The reinvention of the body which Artaud begins in 'An Affective Athleticism' slips the body out from under necessity – refinding a bodily integrity older than

its suffering. This anteriority, this radical youth, is the body of the sacred theatre.

The apogee of 'Affective Athleticism' is not the muscular refinement of the body-beautiful, then, but more like a puppet which poses itself (Artaud 1976: 215, 442): an expressive body for which every gesture is absolutely determined and which is not bound by the organic necessities of life and death. This autopoietic puppet determines its own gestures and expressions, its form and force. By seeming a fiction – seeming to have less depth than the 'real' world – it unbinds itself from this world and finds 'a reality deadlier than the former and unsuspected by life' (Artaud 1974: 103). This autopoiesis is, in one sense, made out of a body's history – necessarily, for Artaud, its suffering – but it is not reducible to it. The actor is affected, he reproduces the organic necessity of breathing which correlates to that unchosen affect, and he slips in before that affection, before the world touched him. Remade as a body which *produces* expressive force but *is produced* by nothing but itself, the 'Affective Athlete' is no less than 'the bodily and physical materialization of a total being of poetry' (Artaud 1976: 452). In 'An Affective Athleticism', then, Artaud turns from describing what the theatre should become to developing the practices to achieve it. He asks how it is possible to make a true body out of the suffering, false body imposed by transcendental forms and immanent external forces. The question becomes that of how to act: how to synthesise or convert external necessity into the capacity to act. And this is precisely the question of *The Ethics* in Deleuze's reading of Spinoza: how does the body buffeted by affect convert it to affection; what is the conversion of passive to active, from anonymous sensations to subjectivity? It would seem that Artaud and Deleuze's Spinoza share the same concerns. For Deleuze, this problem of metabolising the outside into the inside is called, simply, Life; and the science of it is ethology. I will argue that it is precisely on the matters of being in the service of life, and of the conversion of passive to active that Artaud and Deleuze's Spinoza are, in fact, least compatible. I will attend to Deleuze's reading of Spinoza at some length, here, before returning to Artaud and athleticism.

Deleuze's Spinoza

> In reality we are never judged except by ourselves and according to our states. The physical-chemical test of states constitutes Ethics, as opposed to moral judgement.
>
> (Deleuze 1988: 40)

If, as Deleuze asserts, '[w]e do not even know what a body can do' (Deleuze 1983: 36), we are faced with at least two consequences. On the one hand, there is an imperative to experiment in order to discover or test what a body is capable of; on the other hand, discourse about bodies must not proscribe that experimentation or erect pre-existing forms against which bodies are measured. A science of the body – an immanent ethics and ethology – will replace moral judgement. Indeed, Deleuze writes, the 'ethical test is [...] the contrary of the deferred judgement: instead of restoring a moral order, it confirms, here and now, the immanent order of essences and their states. [...] the ethical test is content with analyzing our chemical composition' (Deleuze 1988: 41). Here, Deleuze is taking his lead from Spinoza. This 'chemical composition' concerns what can be incorporated into a body, and what must be repelled. On the one hand, there is good affect and joyful encounter (composition or adequation); on the other hand, there is bad affect and sadness (repulsion). There are encounters which increase a body's capacity to act, and those which decrease it; these nutritions and poisons are joyfully incorporated or sadly abreacted. In his 1978 lectures on *The Ethics*, Deleuze adopts Spinoza's terms *affectus* and *affectio* to distinguish being affected (*affectus*) from producing affects or the capacity to act (*affectio*) (Deleuze 1978). The conversion of *affectus* to *affectio*, then, resembles what Artaud calls athleticism – the conversion of a passive necessity to a capacity for producing expressive force. Where for Artaud this relation is a one-way street – a unilateral difference – in Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, it is an open process driven by an ongoing reciprocal relation between being affected and the capacity to affect. The field composed by this reciprocity is the plane of immanence; a 'One-All' beyond any opposition of passive to active. It is both yet to be found (constructed by experimentation) and immanent, or always-already here. Through the ongoing reciprocal relation between *affectus* and *affectio*, an organism experiments with its environment, composing itself by abreacting bad affects and seeking joyful encounters. These joyful encounters, in turn, are divided into two categories: those which are impermanent, and those which pertain to essence; or, those which temporarily pass into the composition of the organism, and those which abide atemporally. As part of its composition, both of these increase the organism's capacity to act, but only one is essential (Deleuze 1978).

Bad affect diminishes the capacity to act, decomposing the organism. In the ethico-chemical 'testing' of affect, Deleuze explains, 'bad occurs when extensive parts that belong to us in a relation are caused by

external factors to enter into other relations; or when we meet with an affection that exceeds our capacity for being affected' (Deleuze 1978). The fact that an element is demonstrably alienable from an organism's composition at any given time necessarily entails that 'destructions and decompositions do not concern either our relations in themselves or our essence', and whilst a poison may 'belong to us for the time being' this composition does not pertain to essence (Deleuze 1988: 42). Nonetheless, it cannot be firmly known in advance what is poison. Only by testing, entering into encounters, can an organism raise up composition over decomposition, to find adequate affects such that 'the inevitable sadnesses [...] will lose their exclusive or tyrannical character to the profit of notions and action' (Deleuze 1998: 144). Experimentation, supplemented by the chemical wisdom of selection, is not only the path to finding essence and continuity with the One-All, it is also the immanent constitution of it.

If in sadness 'the parts of the human body have a different relation of motion and rest to one another' (Spinoza 1985: 569; Deleuze 1988: 33), the limit of this diminished state is suicide. The decomposition of the organism through an excess of sad encounters means that 'unknown external causes so affect the body that one takes on another nature, contrary to the former' (Spinoza 1985: 557; Deleuze 1988: 42). This is the body disintegrating through the terminal diminution of its power of acting, which is to say, the ultimate sadness is an inability to compose *affectus* and metabolise it as *affectio*. If the triumph of bad affect, here, is equated with death, its opposite is Life, where Life is not merely a path through the world, but also a mode of constituting world: it is both means and ends, experimentation and One-All. Deleuze elaborates the coextension and reciprocity of *affectus* and *affectio* under the name 'ethology'.

Ethology

In the final chapter of his *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Deleuze takes up Jakob von Uexküll's treatment of the life of a tick (Deleuze 1988: 122–30). For Deleuze, the world of the tick (its '*Umwelt*' as Uexküll calls it) is understood as its 'affects and capacities for affecting and being affected' (124). Three affective relations compose this *Umwelt*: with light; with the olfactory; and with the thermal. These three affects determine the organism's behaviour: guided by light it 'climb[s] to the top of a branch'; drawn by smell it 'let[s] itself fall onto the mammal that passes beneath the branch'; and led by thermosensitivity it 'seek[s]

the area without fur, the warmest spot' (124). Having reached this spot, the tick feeds. The longevity of this three-affect world is dependent on transgressing neither an optimal nor a pessimal limit of ingestion of the outside: 'the gorged tick that will die, and the tick capable of fasting for a very long time' (125). The result of transgressing either limit is the same: death, be it by over-gorging or by starvation. Nonetheless, the way of life – the ethics – which Deleuze's ethology advocates is not temperance, but to cleave as closely as possible to the optimal limit without ever exceeding it. The maxim implied is not 'be moderate', but 'know your limits'.[3] Establishing these limits, Deleuze tells us, is, again, a matter of experimentation.

At the other end of the spectrum from morbid obesity is fasting, the capacity to wait. In Deleuze's Spinozism there is no ethical value to cleaving close to this pessimal limit: a capacity for going without food is certainly useful, but going without *per se* is best avoided. The capacity is solely instrumental: hunger is seen to produce nothing as and of itself, but it merely serves the feeding, the promise of feeding. Indeed, asceticism and abstinence – holding the outside in abeyance – is only ever useful. The action which hunger makes possible is its own negation: eating, the move toward the optimal limit just short of gorging. This Spinozist ethology is predicated on the avoidance of excess and the capture of ascesis for implementation towards particular, conservative ends: the successful organism is that which nets a metastatic equilibrium, and Life as the capacity to act rests on the controlled internalisation of the outside as preservation and prolongation.

Through ethology, then, affect is arranged around the idea of survival. It is not simply a matter of cutting off from the world, but of the organism managing the internalisation of the world on its (the organism's) own terms: a question of economics, cost–benefit analysis. The organism must be able to move from being acted upon, to incorporating the outside in accordance with its will. This incorporation is the synthesis of *affectus* into *affectio*. Given Deleuze's organisation of the problem around longevity, eating and the conversion of ingestion into action, I will call this synthesis metabolisation. Again, there is no pre-given formula for metabolisis. Rather, for Deleuze, metabolisation of *affectus* to *affectio* is a question of experimentation.

Experimentation: Life and Idiocy

> The approach [of ethology] is no less valid for us, for human beings, than for animals, because no one knows ahead of time the affects one is capable of; it

> is a long affair of experimentation, requiring a lasting prudence, a Spinozan wisdom that implies the construction of a plane of immanence or consistency. (Deleuze 1988: 125)

If ethology is the study of an organism's metabolisation of *affectus* into *affectio*, experimentation is the immanent search for modes of metabolisis which are suited to prolonging life and convening with the One-All. This unfolding, reciprocal relationship between the world and the organism – their ultimate conjunction – is what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'best' plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 59–60). At the end of his life, Deleuze gave this 'pure' plane of immanence another name: 'A Life' (2001: 25–33).

Deleuze had once remarked of Artaud and the risks of experimentation that, '[i]t would be irresponsible to turn a blind eye to the danger of collapse in such endeavours. But they're worth it' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 240). These endeavours are what Deleuze and Guattari call, in *Anti-Oedipus*, the 'Artaud experiment' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 370). They place Artaud at the 'schizorevolutionary' pole of art, which they define as art's 'authentic modernity, which simply consists in liberating what was present in art from its beginnings, but was hidden' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 371). The 'Artaud experiment', then, is art in all its vitality: 'the pure process that fulfills itself, and that never ceases to reach fulfillment as it proceeds'; which is, equally, 'art as "experimentation"' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 371). A footnote quoting John Cage reiterates an important proviso: 'The word experimental is apt, providing it is understood not as descriptive of an act to be later judged in terms of success and failure, but simply as of an act the outcome of which is unknown' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 371, n.1; Cage 1961: 13). Experimentation, here – as Life – designates an open process for which neither means *nor ends* are predetermined. Similarly, in *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari reject the teleology of the Enlightenment 'image of thought' which they argue is merely a method of 'following tracks' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 53). Against such a pre-ordained path for thought would be an experimentation which 'lacks the compass' to orient itself toward Truth and Virtue (Deleuze 1994: 130). The persona which embodies this productive disorientation is, they say, the idiot. For the idiot, thought does not await comparison to a transcendental measure, but discovers here and now what it immanently produces – its force:

> as Kleist or Artaud suggests, thought as such begins to exhibit snarls, squeals, stammers; it talks in tongues and screams, which leads it to create, or try to.

> If thought searches, it is less in the manner of someone who possesses a method than that of a dog that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps.
> (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 55)

Experimentation, then, derailed from the Enlightenment tracks to knowledge and fully engaged in this 'idiocy', risks a decoherence which is the conceptual correlate of affective sadness. Indeed, idiocy, for Deleuze and Guattari, 'involves much suffering without glory' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 55). Thought, it would seem, courts collapse in a way 'Life' is reluctant to.

Whilst the experimental thought of the idiot is a problem which Deleuze approaches largely through readings of Nietzsche, it is Artaud who explicitly straddles the problem of affective *and* conceptual breakdown: the idiot who suffers. Even in Artaud's earliest writings, the collapse of thought manifests as suffering in the body. Indeed, this is precisely Artaud's suffering: thought leaping about in him without his volition, just as anonymous affect traverses the untrained body like maggots under the skin. But this suffering idiot-body would seem to be precisely what Deleuze raises up in the name of 'Life': if '[t]here is no longer a form, but only relations of velocity between infinitesimal particles of an unformed material'; and if, as such, '[t]here is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force' (Deleuze 1988: 128), then 'Life' describes precisely what Artaud experiences as suffering – the suffering body that 'Affective Athleticism' would deliver him from.

An Artaudian Ethology?

Certainly, this experimental ethology restores the question of composition to the composed, to the body and to life – and this would seem to be consistent with Artaud's goals. But in finding 'pure immanence', Deleuze's *Ethics* delivers the body to a different outside which composes the body's forces and directs its experiments. Far from beginning an aleatory process through which essence might be reached, for Artaud affect is nothing but an unstinting assault at the level of the nerves and a violation of the proper boundlessness of the body: 'this unframed hole, / that life wanted to frame' (Artaud 1995: 107).

As Maurice Blanchot observed, the fullness of life and the nostalgic (if still violent) urge to recuperate a lost power of composition might once have been Artaud's concern, but at most this urge continues only so far

as the correspondence with Jacques Rivière of 1923–4 . Subsequently, Blanchot argues:

> by a sure and painful development, [Artaud] comes to reverse the polarity of the impulse [to restorative healing] and to place dispossession first, not the 'immediate totality' of which this dispossession seemed at first the simple lack. What is prime is not the fullness of being; what is prime is [. . .] erosion and destruction, intermittence and gnawing privation: being is not being, it is the lack of being, a living lack that makes life incomplete, fugitive, and inexpressible, except by the cry of a fierce abstinence. (Blanchot 2003: 38)

This 'fierce abstinence' is, I would argue, very different from the kind of abstinence Deleuze describes for his fasting Spinozist tick. For the tick, abstinence functions only as a promise toward its own negation. Abstinence has no value in itself, it only awaits its own effacement. This is not at all the ferocity which Blanchot observed – the ferocity which I would call Artaud's weaponisation of suffering. Artaud does not bravely suffer, all the while consoled by an eternally deferred promise of redemption. Rather, he begins to develop means of metabolising external necessity into an absolute self-determination or autopoiesis.

As Blanchot observed, the fullness of being is not a given which has been taken from Artaud. Rather, it is something which must be constructed at the very origin of his being. It is a means not only of abreacting bad affect but of evading any external cause whatsoever. On his body, Artaud insists, there must be no 'generative slime' – no trace of the outside as a progenital cause (Artaud 1995: 52). Through the refusal of an origin external to itself, this metaphysical, muscular, affective body is to be both constructed and found 'always-already' there beneath the suffering body. This suffering body is a false body, but it nonetheless remains the only resource with which to build the true body – there is only cruel *affectus* from which to execute the athletic slip to extreme youth. As I will continue to argue below, the 'Affective Athleticism' which Artaud lays out, and the more general ontology which develops in his later work along similar lines, do not map a reciprocal relation between being affected and the production of expressive force. Rather, Artaud is concerned with doing away with causes. He is not seeking a higher unity, or unity with a higher cause, but to take hold of himself, of his body, from the very first – to produce from *affectus* an *affectio* metaphysically older than that which historically precedes it. The true body of pure *affectio* is to be built – metabolised – from the false, suffering body traversed by *affectus*. Even the historical sequence of this

metabolisis is considered false, and must be recast as an expression of the true body, never its progenitor.

Of course, Spinoza, too, condemns the false body. But the names Spinoza and Artaud give this false partitioning are quite opposed, and reveal the extent of their incompatibility as thinkers of metabolisis: for Artaud the false body is that which labours under the dogmatic image of 'life' which 'want[s] to frame' it; for Spinoza it is sadness, poison, suicide. The opposition is crucial and insuperable: beneath the false body Artaud finds himself, Antonin Artaud; whereas Spinoza finds that essential part of himself which partakes of God as the always-already of the body, as One-All – what Deleuze calls pure immanence, or 'A Life'. It is precisely the problem of the construction and discovery of the 'true' body which Deleuze and Guattari tackle in the sixth plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus* – and thus it is here that the explicit conflation of Artaud and Spinoza is at its most pronounced and most pernicious.

Abreacting the False Body; or, How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?

For Deleuze and Guattari, affective metabolisation is experimentation as Life, and it constitutes what they call the 'body without organs' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 7–13). It is also, for Deleuze and Guattari, precisely the operation under consideration in Spinoza's *Ethics* – 'After all', they ask, 'is not the *Ethics* the great book of the Body without Organs?' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 153), and, again, 'all BwO's pay homage to Spinoza' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 154). Yet this figure of a body without organs is, in fact, one of a series of images created by Artaud to describe that 'total being of poetry' freed from external forms and forces.

Deleuze's earliest adoption of Artaud's term 'body without organs' comes in *The Logic of Sense* where it designates 'blocks of coexistence' (Deleuze 1990: 224) – prefiguring the Spinozisation of composition it would later be put in service of in the collaborations with Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 1987, 1994). Experimentation is not an important part of *Anti-Oedipus* – there, the body without organs simply appears, or 'miraculates' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 10–13). By the time of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the BwO is a properly ethical question, and a whole chapter, or 'plateau', is given to its experimental construction. Whilst the BwO accompanies every body as its 'own milieu of experimentation', the watchwords are care, wisdom and dosing (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 164). The motive for this rhetoric of

prudence is the ease with which construction of a BwO can be 'botched'. For every successful or 'full' BwO, there are myriad botchings, which fall into two categories: botching 'at the level of constitution' and botching 'at the level of what passes or does not pass across it' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 152). The difference between a 'full' BwO and botched BwOs correlates to the true/false body problem which both Artaud and Spinoza explore.

The three BwOs – two false or 'botched', one true or 'full' – relate to the three types of deterritorialisation Deleuze and Guattari have described in an earlier plateau:

> the first type is relative, proper to the strata, and culminates in signifiance; the second is absolute, but still negative and stratic, and appears in subjectification [...]; finally, there is the possibility of a positive absolute deterritorialization on the plane of consistency. (Deleuze and Guattari: 1987: 134)

For Deleuze and Guattari 'Artaud was constantly grappling' with this 'three-body problem' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 163). From it, two questions arise: 'How can we tell the three Bodies apart?' and 'How can we fabricate a BwO for ourselves without its being the cancerous BwO of a fascist inside us, or the empty BwO of a drug addict'? (183). The two kinds of botching infer two tests for a BwO: '(1) What type is it, how is it fabricated, by what procedures and means (predetermining what will come to pass)? (2) What are its modes, what comes to pass, and with what variants and what surprises'? (152). These are questions of composition, which is to say, ethological questions. Or, put another way, questions of the metabolisation of *affectus* to *affectio*.

Either kind of botching interrupts proper reciprocity with the plane of immanence: either they fail to metabolise *affectus* to *affectio* at all, or they radically diminish their capacity to be affected. Deleuze and Guattari seek to excavate an experimental vitality from potentially destructive, 'botching' behaviours, so that breakthroughs need not give over to breakdowns and there will be no suffering without glory. Inevitably, this experimentation advances through questioning: 'There is a fascist use of drugs, or a suicidal use, but is there also a possible use that would be in conformity with the plane of consistency?' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 165). Or, again, '[c]ould what the drug user or masochist obtains also be obtained in a different fashion in the conditions of the plane, so it would even be possible to use drugs without using drugs, to get soused on pure water [...]?' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 166).

What is at stake, here, is discovering if and how a false body can provide means for constructing a true body or full BwO. But there is a vitalist imperative shaping these experiment-questions: how can one use historically established technologies of anomalous encounter without immediate or long-term risk to organic survival? Or, how can we exploit these technologies of the self without the 'tyrannical character' of poisonous affect winning out over the accrual of essence and communing with the One-All which is experimentation's proper reward? (Deleuze 1998: 144).

Artaud's Body

Again, Deleuze's argument would put Artaud and Spinoza in agreement. Deleuze's reading of Spinozist ethology traces an aleatory emergence from passive *affectus* to an 'essence' – and we could be forgiven for believing that it is just such a trajectory which Artaud advocates in his own formulation of the body without organs from 1947:

> When you have given him a body without organs,
> then you will have delivered him from all his automatisms
> and restored him to his true liberty.
>
> (Artaud 1995: 307)

The exercise of this true liberty, Artaud explains – the capacity which it promises – will be 'to dance inside out' (Artaud 1995: 307). And, he goes on, 'that inside out will be his true side out' (307). But far from finding the absolute, positive deterritorialisation of Life which Deleuze's Spinozist formulation of the BwO seems to seek – which is to say, its continuity on and as the plane of immanence – Artaud's own programme is more macabre. He describes a process of removal or decomposition, rather than joyful encounter: 'man' must:

> undergo once more but for the last time an autopsy
> in order to remake his anatomy. [. . .]
> We must decide to strip him in order to scratch out
> this animalcule which makes him itch to death.
>
> (Artaud 1995: 307)

This remade body will not be bound to what is called life – indeed, it is already on the dissection table. Where Deleuze follows Spinoza in drawing a distinction between good and bad affect, for Artaud

both composition and decomposition – both joy and sadness – conspire to deliver the true body to the always-malicious outside. *Affectus* of any kind is, for 'the perpetually guarded poet' (Robert 1996: 27), suffering and the theft of his body from himself, just as thinking was the theft of his thought (e.g. Artaud 1968: 41–2). Life and death, then, as the limits of the two kinds of affective encounter (joy or sadness) are, for Artaud, one and the same. If Deleuze's Spinozist ontology of immanence is one of joyful encounter, accumulation and Life, Artaud insists instead on the primacy of his body against Life or death as the two limits of encounter with the outside. The body, here, is not an organism at the crossroads between life and death, but is an ontological substance prior to the opposition life/death – older than their disjunction. The body, for Artaud – the body *of* Artaud – is a system of technologies of the self which aggressively unbind the body from any economy of organic survival and orient it toward autopoiesis. One of the earliest elaborations of this body is in the figure of the affective athlete.

Binding Death in the Body

As early as 1927 Artaud is finding himself on the other side of life: 'Life no longer exists, life does not inspire or accompany the things I think. I say LIFE. I did not say the colourings of life. I mean real life [...] this nucleus. I feel the nucleus inside me is dead' (Artaud 1968: 203). And twenty years later he recalls 'looking carefully at this life I remember being dead in it really and corporeally at least 3 times, once in Marseilles, once in Lyons, once in Mexico and once at the Rodez asylum in the coma of electroshock' (Artaud 1995: 83). The striking quality of these deaths is that 'in reality one never leaves one's body' (Artaud 1995: 83). In his body, for Artaud, contradiction is overcome: in his body, 'yes and no, black and white, true and false, although contradictory in themselves have melted into one man's style, that of this poor Mr. Antonin Artaud' (Artaud 1995: 82). This binding of death and life in his body is articulated most clearly in the late poem-cycle 'Artaud le Mômo' (Artaud 1995: 97–177). *Mômo* is Marseillan slang for 'idiot', but it also invokes *momie* – mummy, as in the undead.[4] The poem presents an idiot-undead figure which has made for itself – *of* itself – an integrity older than any disjunction or contradiction. 'Artaud le Mômo', the body of Artaud, is unbound from the necessities of thought (to pursue the True) and of Life (to pursue joyful encounters). In the same way, as we saw with the autopoietic puppet of 'An Affective

Athleticism', the organic necessity of breathing holds no sway over the undead body. External necessity, through athleticism, is bound in the body, and recast as the capacity for producing expressive force.

This bodily force, for Artaud – older than even the separation of life and death – sits at the end of the series which includes the affective athlete and the body without organs. What all these figures designate is the return to a true body prior to all contradiction. At the time of writing 'An Affective Athleticism', it seemed to Artaud that what blocked him from accessing this body was mimesis and psychological theatre. In later years, these furtive forces take on an occult character, and in response the breathing techniques take on a magical force. It is no longer the theatre which will be healed by a plague, but the body which must be protected from black magic: in late 1945, from Rodez, he writes of struggling 'against the evil spirits and the demons with the breathing system which I have invented and which I mentioned briefly in "Affective Athleticism"' (Artaud 1976: 464). This struggle is undertaken, on one level, by reciting the poetry of Baudelaire, Poe or Nerval 'to a tone of rhythmic and incantatory psalmody' (464). Those names are not by-words for poetic œuvres; they invoke bodies: 'What was Baudelaire, / what were Poe, Nietzsche, Gérard de Nerval? / BODIES' (515). Through the breathing techniques, Artaud mobilises these bodies in his defence. The counterattack to which Artaud rallies them must strike at the very metaphysical foundations of suffering and its occult agents:

> These spirits do not want to be cast out because my body is good, because my pain is good for them, and because it is while I am suffering from poison, from comas, from bad food, and from the deprivation of opium that the beings of evil spirits seize my forces in the cadaver which I am, the walking cadaver that has been wandering through life like a living dead man. (Artaud 1976: 464)

With his breathing exercises Artaud not only masters breathing, but refinds a body which, unbound from the horizon of survival, has no need of respiration. If the 'living dead man' is the state of perdition, it is also the beginnings of a weaponisation of the body at a metaphysical level: athleticism. Poetry, for Artaud, is not the recitation of words – not some spell – it is the inflection of breath through which he makes contact with other bodies. In making this contact and accessing his own body – the unsuffering body – his cadaver is weaponised as the idiot-mummy, the body of 'Artaud le Mômo': a figure not bound to life any more than its thought is bound to the pursuit of Truth.

'Artaud le Mômo' produces expressive force quite beyond any ethological economy of survival. As Artaud writes, his body is not at all constructed by 'accidents and hazards in the unity of an entire body' (Artaud 1976: 515). Such an ethology is, in fact, no more than another attack on his true body:

> For the great lie has been to make man an organism,
> ingestion,
> assimilation,
> incubation,
> excretion,
> thus creating a whole order of hidden functions which are outside the realm of the
> *deliberative* will;
> the will that determines itself at each instant.
> (Artaud 1976: 515)

Artaud is insistent that this body is not a fixed, molar thing. Rather, he explains, 'I want to be sempiternal, that is, a self that moves and creates itself at every instant, and not eternal, that is, having an absolute self which governs me always from the height of its eternity' (Artaud 1976: 465). It is not change which he is against, it is change caused by anything outside of his body – which would include anonymous affections or historical causes 'older' than his body. There can be no form or force prior to Artaud's body: no ahistorical abstractions and no history. For Artaud, as for Deleuze's Spinoza, transcendence must be had done with, but the swelling sea of anonymous affections which the latter bob on and weave is, for Artaud, no less suffering than those 'doubles of the past, entitled eternity' which would deliver the body to the outside (465).

Conclusion: Athleticism as Pluperfect Retroaction and Paranoiac Autopoiesis

Artaud's athleticism does not seek a higher continuity with the world through the abreaction of poison and adequate aggregation of essence. Rather, all the world, all affect which falls on the body, is poison, is a noxious force which would determine that body. What is at stake in Artaud's athleticism is binding the force of affect such that it might be wielded by his body as expressive force. The repetition of an affect – the doubling of an affective state through the modulation of breath – is the means of claiming that force as a product of the body rather than vice versa. Put another way, athleticism is the wholesale

recasting of all *affectus* as *affectio*. As such, athleticism already involves what I suggest would later become the primary and most characteristic Artaudian cosmological proposition: if the body is an effect of some older form or force, then the body is suffering; and, as such, the body must reinstantiate itself prior to all historical cause which it is apparently a consequence of. Having come about (into suffering), the body must retroactively become the cause of itself – and this means ultimately finding the body at its 'extreme youth', prior not only to its biography, but to History.

So, quite unlike Spinoza, there is no foundational reciprocity for Artaud between *affectus* and *affectio*. On the contrary, the determination of the capacity to produce affect is wrested away from the outside by Artaud: expressive force is found as an ontological antecedent, an extreme youth which is, again, historically consequent to *affectus* but *metaphysically prior*: 'Me, Antonin Artaud, I am my son, my father, my mother, / and me; / leveler of the imbecilic periplus where begetting impales itself' (Artaud 1995: 193). As I have shown, this field of reciprocity between *affectus* and *affectio* is what Deleuze calls a plane of immanence, or 'Life'. It is around this word 'Life' that the dissimilarities arise between Artaud's 'Affective Athleticism' and the Deleuzian–Spinozist metabolisation of *affectus* to *affectio*. Artaud, especially in his late poem-cycle 'Artaud le Mômo', slips himself before organic life to bind life and death in his body. This shift from a body determined (by parents, God, *affectus*) to a self-determining or autopoietic body is not an aleatory one. Rather, it submits reciprocity to a force which is ontologically prior to it and which acts unilaterally. To this extent, athleticism reverts *affectus* to a more primal *affectio* which is pure autopoiesis: the absolutely anterior ontology of expressive force. I would call this slip back to before causation: 'pluperfection'. The past perfect tense of *affectus* is pre-empted by the pluperfect tense of the body's self-determination; which is to say, the always-already-having-been of 'Artaud le Mômo'. The aleatory passive constitution of the body which Spinoza and Deleuze lay out is a seamless series of syntheses, productions and 'chemical tests'. At the 'end' of this becoming one finds what has always been there: essence and, ultimately, God as One-All or pure immanence. What Artaud would forge from the 'end' of this sequence is an ontological anteriority older than historical time; older than any God in whose image a body might be formed; unbound from the organic necessities of life; unthreatened by the finitude of death; and never delivered to the One-All.

Calling on a philosopher who is now much more widely known, Deleuze notes in a footnote to *What Is Philosophy?* that:

> François Laruelle is engaged in one of the most interesting undertakings of contemporary philosophy. He invokes a One-All that he qualifies as 'nonphilosophical' and, oddly, as 'scientific,' on which the 'philosophical decision' takes root. This One-All seems to be close to Spinoza. (Deleuze 1994: 220, n.5

If, as I have been arguing, Artaud's body destroys *affectus* or historical causation – if he, rather, slips in before causation such that all which had seemed to make up the body is in fact its progeny – then athleticism is not only retroaction but a profoundly embodied science. To borrow Laruelle's notion of the 'non-' as a designation of absolute ontological priority, or the 'extreme youth' of something: in raising up an Artaudian ontology against a Deleuzian–Spinozist one, we might then rewrite *affectio* as *non-affectus*; expression as non-feeling; determination as non-passivity; or the idiot-undead body of 'Artaud le Mômo' as non-suffering.

Postscript on Suffering

If the cosmos in its entirety is evil, for Artaud, it is because it is constantly causing suffering – from the cellular level to the metaphysical. It is only the body capable of mobilising and weaponising this state of affairs – without seeking consolations – which can refind the autopoietic body, with its deliberative will directing its every moment and every molecule. This is art's sacred dimension, for Artaud – and it is arrived at neither through beatitude nor the grace of inspiration carried on the muses' breath, but through physical and metaphysical suffering. Neither body nor art are made by digesting the anaemic offerings from the outside and delivering back 'pigshit' (Artaud 1968: 75).[5] For Artaud, they are made by feeling intensely all the uninvited suffering, and not resting until it has been evaded. For 'no one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built or invented except literally to get out of hell' (Artaud 1976: 497).

The poetry which Artaud can approve of and mobilise is precisely that which goes 'to the point of poisoning' (Artaud 1976: 448). Poetry is an excremental act which brings the poet 'painfully close to losing his soul' (448). This poetry is never the 'work of a coward who [is] not willing to suffer his work before writing it'; not 'the work of a man who ate well' (449). These are 'the poems of the starving, the sick, the

outcast, the poisoned'; poetry 'like a buried iron collar which produces its verses out of its malady, being, and does not let you forget it' (449). Ultimately, for Artaud, 'a poem made of the superfluities of existence has always done more than bore me, it exasperates me.–I do not like luxury feelings, I do not like poems of nourishment but poems of hunger' (448). This is not the hunger of Deleuze's Spinozist tick, the hunger that can wait for food. This is hunger as privation and suffering recast or weaponised as a metaphysical assault on both transcendental forms and vitalist hydraulics.

The body without organs which Deleuze delivers to Spinoza is made to affirm Life: to live such that 'the inevitable sadnesses [. . .] will lose their exclusive or tyrannical character to the profit of notions and action' (Deleuze 1998: 144). In Artaud's case, these sadnesses take on a metaphysical weight such that it is through necessity, from under its cruelty and the pounding power of cruel determination, that an autopoietic body, the true body of Artaud's body without organs, can produce itself with that 'fiery abstinence' (Blanchot 2003: 38):

> and it is then that I smelled the obscene
>
> and that I farted
> out of folly
> and out of excess
> and out of the revolt
> of my suffocation.
>
> The fact is I was being pressed
> right up to my body
> and right up to the body
>
> **and it is then**
> **that I exploded everything**
> **because my body**
> **is never to be touched.**
>
> (Artaud 1995: 303; translation modified)

Notes

1. On Artaud and Copeau, see Murray 2003: 28–33. On Copeau and Barrault's collaborations, see Dorcy 1961: 6–15, 42–58; Barrault 1974: 50–76.
2. Artaud's most intense study of esoterica coincided with his acupuncture treatments in the early 1930s. See especially his notebooks from this period, e.g. Artaud 1976: 189–95.

3. Spinoza himself does advocate moderation, praising 'temperance, sobriety, and presence of mind in danger' (Spinoza 1985: 530, 541).
4. For a discussion of the translation, see Eshleman's notes (Artaud 1995: 336). It is striking that Deleuze himself makes a connection between Artaud and the undead in *Cinema 2*, wherein a 'Mummy' ('this dismantled, paralysed, petrified, frozen instance' [Deleuze 1989: 166]) is unearthed between the abstract and the figurative – between the formalisation of thought and psychology. It is quite apposite that Deleuze is drawn to Artaud at this juncture in his investigation of cinema as the production of movement, for Artaud's project is heavily invested in the restoration of thought to himself through movement, that is, through gesture, the actions of the body. Of course, Deleuze is discussing the shock of cinema, here, its *nooshock*, or the force it delivers to the viewing body (Deleuze 1989: 156). As Artaud had explained, the cinema, no less than the theatre, must repel psychological drama, preferring 'the very substance of our vision and not [. . .] psychological circumlocutions of a discursive nature which are merely the visual equivalent of a text' (Artaud 1976: 151). Whilst Deleuze bemoans the brevity for which Artaud 'believed' in the cinema, doubtlessly many of Artaud's writings beyond cinema can be usefully mobilised in discussing this knotting of affective force and shocks to thought – not least, that so many of Artaud's texts on theatre bark an analogous warning to that issued by Deleuze to cinema, namely that the force of shock might 'be confused, in bad cinema, with the figurative violence of the represented instead of achieving that other violence of a movement-image developing its vibrations in a moving sequence which embeds itself within us' (Deleuze 1989: 157).
5. Victor Corti translates 'pigshit' as 'trash', but I have modified it here in line with Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 134. Artaud does use the image of pigs in the subsequent lines.

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