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A Theological And Aesthetic View Of Theatre by Asher Radunsky

For both Soren Kierkegaard and Antonin Artaud, the two thinkers central to this essay, theatre is a representational manifestation that arises from the source of life. The term "*theatre*" is used in this essay as a general term incorporating two different types of theatrical events: first "formal theatre," denotes theatre proper; second, "*spectacle*," denotes especially religious but also secular life events qua story and drama, particularly events with a significant revelatory aspect. Kierkegaard treats the "source of life" as the Christian God, nevertheless it largely embraces Plato's Form of the Good. Everyday life is the imitation, metaphor, and theatrical embodiment of this hidden source of life. Theatre proper is then the imitation of an imitation. As Antonin Artaud puts it, "If the theater is the double of life, life is the double of the true theater." The important thing about Artaud's term, "true theater," also "true spectacle," is that this terminology denotes equally the source of life, mystical rapture, redemption, glory, and human responsibility that Kierkegaard attributes to divine revelation. For Kierkegaard and Artaud, just as for Plato, the levels of imitation create the framework for one's relation to the sacred. For both modern thinkers the dilution of the intensity and value of experience that occurs with distance from the source of life is a problem that demands some kind of solution. Kierkegaard and Artaud both believe that the source of life must be considered the true basis of evaluating behavior. Kierkegaard considers the eternal law to be the true and final judgment of all human action, therefore one should interpret behavior according to the eternal. Artaud also believes that one's identification with the source of life should be as full as possible, that the theatrical purgation possible through a truly radical theatre is a means of avoiding the lies and baseness that are symptoms of a more ego based life.

For both thinkers, the division between the source of life and theatre is more flexible and possesses an instinct towards their equalization to a greater extent than Plato. I only mention Plato here to introduce

in a familiar way the basic framework, his chain of being, which Kierkegaard employs in a state relatively intact from the Dialogues. This essay will explore formal theatre and the spectacle of everyday life as a theatrical event with the possibility of a redemptive catharsis through an engagement with phenomena that strives to fulfill Christian love in the Kierkegaardian sense. The argument finds comparisons between love as discussed by Kierkegaard, and the unification of distinct elements in terms of aesthetic theory and modern theories of perception, especially in terms of avant-garde theatre.

Kierkegaard believed in the involvement of theatrical forces in religious texts such as the Bible, in formal theatre, and in everyday life. His philosophy incorporates this sense of theatrical involvement. For instance, he speaks in ways which personify the great theatrical forces: ethics "*does not trifle with dignities, it places a heavy responsibility on the hero's frail shoulders. It denounces as arrogant his wanting to play providence with his act.*"¹ Or, "*esthetics, then, demanded the hiddenness, and rewarded it; ethics demanded the disclosure and punished the hiddenness...But, when the hero, by his action, has a disturbing effect on another man's life, it demands disclosure.*"² As shown in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard views theatre as an evidentiary source capable of revealing the rules for the ethical and the aesthetic. The Bible reveals moral perfection no less in stories (drama) than in moral precepts. So it is clear that for Kierkegaard, esthetics and ethics impose on human beings certain determinant factors of how actions will be interpreted. To become a hero means to please these determinant factors. "The tragic hero demonstrates his ethical courage in that he himself, not pray to any esthetic illusion, announces Iphigenia's fate to her. If he does that, then the tragic hero is ethic's beloved son, in whom it is well-pleased...*Ethics loves him for the very reason that he always expresses the universal.*"³ Kierkegaard advocates the transformation of oneself into a hero, into a knight; his entire philosophy is staged as a great drama with the absolute as one extreme and the abyss as the other, which nevertheless always preserves a human scale, as does theater. In this sense Kierkegaard promotes the development of the true theater in one's own life. His pseudonymous authorship is a form of these attempts.

It is true that for Kierkegaard the aesthetic is the lowest stage: it must be raised up into an ethical and religious mode. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard's treatment of the aesthetic is complex, and the aesthetic must in a disciplined sense be involved in love.⁴ Theatre is a crucial form of the aesthetic for Kierkegaard that he analyses in several different contexts. Formal theatre is considered legitimate evidence about the nature of both aesthetics and ethics, but is generally entertainment in the lower sense of the term. For example:

"When you're sitting in the theater, intoxicated with esthetic pleasure, then you have the courage to acquire of the poet, that he let the esthetic win out over all wretchedness...you to whom life has not provided the occasion to test your strength... You also have pathos, courage, and *os rotundum* [round mouth], from which eloquence gushes, and a vigorous arm. You and your kind conquer; you applaud the actor, and the actor is yourselves, and the applause from the pit is for you, for you are indeed the hero in the actor. In dreams, in the nebulous world of esthetics, there you are heroes. I do not care very much for the theater."⁵

The Church represents a related, though special use of "theatre," typically to make the point that the Church acts out an artificial drama meant to pacify and exploit normal Christians. The most important aspect of Kierkegaard's use of the term theatre in its application to the Church is that he does not criticize the dramatic, he criticizes the artificiality, the lack of actual danger, of that drama. This application of the term stems from his view on formal theatre as in many ways worthless and fake. (In respect to the typical theatrical canon, Artaud is in complete accord with Kierkegaard.) If Christianity were well understood, and the gospels well taught in church, in their demands and conflict with the easy life, people would find this to be a greater theatre, a greater drama than the Sunday morning religion. Christianity is a drama in every sense of the word. Despite the fact that Kierkegaard would not use the word theatre of true Christianity, because by that word he implies a falsity, if one becomes an "actor" in the right way, then one fully remembers

the divine law, as we will see below in a passage from *Works of Love*.

Kierkegaard's third sense of "theatre" refers to how humans in their everyday lives stage themselves as characters in a drama. This is neither inherently noble nor ignoble; it is the basis of a human perspective on life. The eternal intervenes in human life as hope. Provided the individual does not despair, the eternal, in the form of hope, pushes one's drama further.⁶ *Works of Love* essentially recommends the attitude of seeing oneself (in one's dissimilarity) as an actor in order to be a true Christian.⁷ The identification of oneself as an individual in the world must be understood as in some ways fictive, because the value of the neighbor cannot be seen through worldly dissimilarity. The Church is "theatre" to Kierkegaard in the same sense that one watches theatre, and somehow feels a reprieve for their lack of heroism through voyeuristic association with the story of heroism. But to be in proper relation to the absolute transforms oneself into an actor, establishes cognizance of whose drama one is really in, and creates the heroic as a personal demand.

"Just look at the world that lies before you in all its variegated multifariousness; it is like looking at a play, except that the multifariousness is much, much greater. Because of his dissimilarity, every single one of these innumerable individuals is something particular, represents something particular, but essentially he is something else. This you do not get to see here in life ... but when the curtain falls on the stage, *then the one who played the king and the one who played the beggar, etc. are all alike; are all one and the same - actors.* When at death the curtain falls on a stage of actuality (it is a confusing use of language to say that at death the curtain is raised on the stage of eternity, since eternity is not a stage at all: it is truth), then they, too, are all one, they are human beings. *All of them are what they essentially were, what you did not see because of the dissimilarity that you saw - they are human beings.*"⁸

Every human being, in their dissimilarity, is like an actor; the dissimilarity is disguise, .all human beings are essentially similar, and in their most important aspect they are the same. Whoever is an

actor "is one and the same" with other actors. Human beings have the choice to deceive themselves with their roles by identifying themselves as the role or part they play.

"Yet if someone is truly to love his neighbor, it must be kept in mind at all times that his dissimilarity is a disguise... *Christianity has not wanted to storm forth to abolish dissimilarity... but it wants the dissimilarity to hang loosely on the individual, as loosely as the cape the king casts off in order to show who he is, as loosely as the ragged costume in which a supernatural being has disguised himself. In other words, when the dissimilarity hangs loosely in this way, then in each individual there continually glimmers that essential other, which is common to all, the eternal resemblance, the likeness.*"

One must be aware of the similarity while permitting the transient existence of dissimilarity. Christianity does not want to abolish dissimilarity, and Christ's life was as constructive as it was a negation or ground clearing, but to love as a Christian is to *view people* in their similarity. Kierkegaard's idea of equality means a slow process of submersion in similarity. By commitment to the duty to love, one submits to the path of equality and submersion in the divine. Law, Kierkegaard says, creates an equality because all are equal before the law no matter how multifarious the criminal behavior. This equality is a glance into an inner unity. Just as a metaphor never reveals a hidden sameness in the concrete, but reveals similarity to the intuition, so both law and a duty to love are institutions that unravel the illusion of difference.

"In the life of actuality, there the individual in his temporal growth grows together with his dissimilarity; this is the opposite of eternity's growth, which grows away from the dissimilarity. The individual becomes deformed; from eternity's point of view, every such human being is a cripple."

If one is stuck in his own role identity he has lost his freedom and is deformed. There is a problem here insofar as we are all seemingly stuck in temporality. Does this mean we are bound to become

crippled by temporality's growth? "Eternity's equality, every day saves the soul from the dissimilarity in it which still remains - [at least] this would be the reflection of eternity." So by reflecting eternity through an identity rooted in similarity one can reverse the deformity of worldly growth.

At the same time, Christ comes with an absolute demand, an absolute confrontation, and Kierkegaard also describes the terror of seeking salvation.

"[God] takes infinitely everything if you truly hold fast to him... therefore flee from him. Even to approach a King, if you want to be something, can be dangerous enough, and the proximity of a powerfully endowed intellect is dangerous, but it is infinitely more dangerous to draw near to God."

Kierkegaard goes further in exposing the jeopardy of being a Christian, not only does God "take" everything but He offers the complete annihilation of the self. Though annihilation in God is blessed, is salvation, the natural man flees from it like death and other dangers to his freedom. For Kierkegaard, running from God may be understandable, but one should also realize its futility. One can only end in annihilation of another sort.

Artaud characterizes the conflict between everyday life as a self-developed theatre of ego-magnification and true, self-annihilating theatre in a form nearly identical to Kierkegaard's. "The theatre must make itself the equal of life - not an individual life, that individual aspect of life in which characters triumph, but the sort of liberated life which sweeps away human individuality and in which man is only a reflection." Despite the fact that Kierkegaard's description of self-annihilation emphasizes pain, and Artaud's is by contrast joyful, the comparative tone of these excerpts is actually reversed in a wider reading of the two thinkers. Kierkegaard's approach is more gentle. For instance in *Works of Love* one must recognize the fruits of love (or hatred) as they appear, and be transformed largely through this process of careful discernment. He does not, to my knowledge, advocate forcing the hand of the soul. He does advocate intense

awareness. This attitude may stem partially from the conviction that an image is only an image, dissimilarity is only an illusion, and through gentleness he provides a path to engage the eternal.

A more representative quotation from Artaud, on the other hand, states that in the theater one must feel as though one is "burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames." A commentator explains the quotation this way:

"This rich metaphor tempts many readers to associate these tortured ones with the actor: his priestlike function in a holy theater has now fallen to being that of a victim, and he is like a martyr or scapegoat sacrificed for the community of onlookers, to whom he signals, that is speaks in the gestural language Artaud proposes, while the very flames consume him, that is, as he becomes diaphanous and is eventually eliminated through Artaud's relentless reductio."

The actor is a martyr because he permits his own destruction in order to become a spectacle which is enlightening for the audience. Why is this enlightening? Because, assuming the success of the reductio as a spectacle, it proves the immanence of negation, it emphasizes that negation is an aspect of every moment of temporality but that a "liberated life" in which individuality is beautifully overwhelmed can stem from this fact. In fact, the importance of the script, props, the character actor capable of inspiration, the destruction of the stage, the entire plasticized canon of theatre, Artaud seeks to destroy. We should also note that the image of a man signaling through the flames is not restrictive to the actor but ideally includes the audience members as well. Almost like Houdini, disappearing and reappearing, he demonstrates that the self is diaphanous, that the ego and audience stripped bare do create a spectacle.

Avant-garde theatre brings attention to itself as a theatrical event but in exposing that which is contrived the power of the real event exposes itself. Implicit in much avant-garde theatre, particularly guerilla theatre, improvisational theatre depending on found objects, and theatre creating non-repeatable phenomena, is the assertion that

all life is theatre, or at least potential theatre. Culture effectively creates hierarchies in which some people or situations have more status, and are worthy of a more direct alliance than others. Kierkegaard points out that Christ however never for a moment relaxed from his divinity. "His divine human love was equal love for all people ... Christ's life was sheer love, and yet his whole life was only one single workday." The implication is that the continuous connection of the eternal with temporality, or continuous devotion, is the essence of selflessness, in contrast with Kierkegaard's descriptions of the aloof, selfish, preferential treatment of certain moments and certain people. Both avant-garde theatre and Kierkegaard seek a great leveling in which every moment is given its due as alive and powerful. This is a very ancient problem tackled also by the Buddha who teaches that the experience of distraction, of the idea of a lesser moment, is an unnecessary fragmentation of the world. Both modern theatre and Kierkegaard envision all of life as theatrical, but by recognizing the insubstantiality and temporality of artifice one is encouraged to engage his passion for life more fully. Both Kierkegaard and theoreticians of avant-garde theatre, especially Artaud, contrast this approach with the safe but relatively sterile world they find around them.

Artaud attacks canonized theater on the grounds that it pretends it is "true culture" or represents "true life" but it is actually completely false and dependent upon a prestige that has been ritualized and canonized. Theatrical revelation occurs in avant-garde theatre through a variety of techniques meant to expose the illusion of theatre while maintaining an intensity now aimed at something concealed rather than revealed. Theatre has always carried a heavy sense of temporality, but now that sense has become intensified and made overt through a variety of techniques. Avant-garde theatre employs a variety of techniques grouped as the *via negativa*, or, way of negation, as a form of confrontation of the audience, of imminent death, the continual passage of each moment, and of the absurdity of the performance context. "The empty space asks for a continuity between theater event and life event - that is, it claims that the theater event is a kind of life event, not a copy of one."

Avant-garde theatre is the active destruction of the theatrical imitation of an imitation, and the new involvement of theatrical space as an opportunity to illuminate relationships between actor and audience, through an aggressive, though genuine interaction with the audience members. Avant-garde theater creates a greater challenge to its audience through the direct address, which is a somewhat modern innovation, especially when taken to the lengths of "performance," or "involvement" theatre. In Artaud's "the theater of cruelty," is the "demand that the audience participate in an almost masochistic way to achieve both enlightenment and therapy." This kind of confrontation is within the Christian tradition, particularly in certain stories of Jesus from the Gospels. Kierkegaard views his attacks on "Christianity" as a Christian act. He wants to destroy the illusion that the Church imitates Christ, because in its mild complacency toward the challenges within Christianity it is hypocritical, it is completely false and dependent upon a prestige that has been ritualized and canonized.

Artaud was completely enthralled with what he considered to be the magical power of "primitive" techniques of spectacle; theatre beyond the narrow concern for "realism." This theatre is at once ascetic, more spiritual, and more practical than Westerners expect of their own theatre. Artaud said of Mexico, "things are made for use. And the world is in a state of perpetual exaltation. Such cultures have not yet buried the instinctual life under layers of sophistication and refinement,' and it is in such cultures that Artaud seeks the renewal of his race: `all true culture relies upon barbaric and primitive means of totemism whose savage, i.e., entirely spontaneous, life I wish to worship.'" Truly ancient theatre employs mimicry and pantomime as a source of magic. Dancers wear masks of "animals, Gods, heroes, and others." Supernatural and animal noises are imitated. Elaborate costumes and body paint are used to conceal the familiar human body. Ancient theatre also uses straightforward pantomime through movement. All of these techniques are designed for ritual, usually sacred use.

Is imitation not one of the most basic, profound accomplishments; the ability to imagine oneself as another and then become that? There

could be no apprenticeship and no culture without the ability to imitate. But the nature of ancient theatre, in which there was little or no separation between performer and others, suggests that mimesis came with great ease, or that everyone was capable of mimesis. To say that in tribal theatre everyone performed a repetitive, reiterative mimicry suggests a form of communality also reflected in the far greater universality of skills and apprenticeships in tribal cultures than in modern Western societies. If the entire audience had to join in a performance of a modern play at the same level as the actors, even if given adequate time and preparation, it would scare most of them away. The gulf one needs to cross for mimesis is far greater today. Perhaps one of the most remarkable facts about the current state of progress is that the mimesis of apprenticeship, and in a greater sense, the mimesis one attempts toward the true life, or even a worthy life, is so difficult as to be almost impossible.

Ancient theatre is a term used here to denote modes of formal spectacle either predating, or unrelated to the theatrical developments that began in Ancient Greece. Early Greek theatre was, by the standards previously discussed, identical with all other world theatre in its time. Ancient Greece is given the lion's share of credit for the creation, or discovery, of representative and pure democracy, and of what we consider today as philosophy. Greece's role in the development of formal theatre was even more single-handed, more difficult to advance beyond, and approximately contemporaneous with these other two developments. Greek drama can be traced to the 7th century as Dionysian ceremonies began employing dialogue. The first democracy occurred in Sparta in the early 7th century, not becoming adopted by Athens however, for another century and a half. I am not an expert on how the origins of philosophy should be properly dated, but the origins of formal theatre predate the Milesian and Ionian Schools of the 6th century, including Thales and Anaximander, who preceded the Pythagoreans, Heraclitus, Xenophanes, and Parmenides. The contiguity of these three developments is bizarre, and the suggestion following is that these cultural technologies (techne) may be symbiotic, and that the development of theatre should be mentioned in the same breath with the origination of democracy and philosophy.

The various innovations of Ancient Greek theatre work in one direction; toward the cultivation of a fictive theatre which would appear real as narratives of actual human lives. Earlier I explicated a large passage from the *Works of Love* which expressed Kierkegaard's perception that human beings consider the world theatre of their own egoistic dissimilarity as the true relation of the world, avoiding proper cognizance of the other pole of perception in which all human beings are perfectly similar. Kierkegaard suggests that the persuasive ability of theatre (in the every day sense) produces a sort of drugged narrow mindedness that is hard to dispel.

"The theatre of art is like a world under a magic spell. But just suppose at some evening all the actors became confused in a common absentmindedness so that they thought they actually were what they represented. Would this not be what we might call, in contrast to the spell of the dramatic arts, the spell of an evil spirit, a bewitchment."

But this moment of crossing poles, of falling under a magic spell, can be traced in formal theatre precisely to Ancient Greece. The Bacchanalia, famous for derailing a sense of grounded reality, in particular the formal ritual of the "goat song," was the direct predecessor of these developments. Many people consider Plato's severe views on poetry and theatre to be among his most incomprehensible, but his historical proximity to the *techne* of making the false seem true (as he always said of the sophists) - the intoxication that may have accompanied that moment - may have guided the extremist stance of *The Republic*.

After the innovation of dialogue came the creation of playwright, actor, division of performance and audience, the use of a stage, and a new *raison d'être* for theatre: entertainment. All of these formal qualities came under the direction of the playwright.²⁸ This may be a somewhat idealized characterization, but as an overview one can say with a factual basis that characterization in theatre progressed from pure, all inclusive dancing, to preferential dancers wearing masks of highly symbolic (allegorical) characters, to human heroes, and slowly

toward the modern era with increasingly flawed human characters. A similar overview of the progression of the use of sound leads from chanted music, to song, to song with dialogue, until dialogue is used exclusively. The Greek chorus represents an archaic communal element which has been almost entirely abandoned. Every single one of these developments shows an impetus away from theatre as a ritualized mode of inspiration (one can picture the Bacchae or African tribal dancing and pantomime) toward a secular theatre with a human scale. *A Short History of Drama* points out that ancient theatre relying purely on pantomime and dance tells most of the same basic stories, from a distance it has the same plots, that theatre still has - boy meets girls love stories, coming of age tales, and the situation of the protagonist in conflict with a powerful force. Formal theatre shifts the perspective toward the ego of the main character as he navigates the world to satisfy personal desire; the spectacle is no longer a communal allegory; it becomes concretely representative of an imaginable human being. In terms of psychology, there was the same shift Kierkegaard describes: from a spiritual emphasis in which externality has a symbolic role - where externality is essentially fictive, toward an identification of personal psychology as based in a more permanent ego dissimilarity.

Philosophy, shortly thereafter, developed the idea of a fixed attainable truth, or, Truth. There are two relevant aspects of philosophy here in the sense of its originality. First, "Truth" becomes something that one must work very hard for, and be lucky to acquire; there is perhaps not the same casual acquaintance with reality as in a world ignorant of philosophical questioning. If someone could get out of the cave they were to be highly honored. There is a gulf between a person and the "Truth," which leads us to the second aspect: that truth is attainable for oneself. This seems different than a relationship with sacred powers which was interactive and personal, but also highly practical; the oracle, for example. The Greeks said that some people are nearer to the truth than others: Socrates is nearer to the Truth than Alcibiades. Some people are advantaged at conceptual apprenticeship, or what comes to the same thing; can somehow successfully mimic the Truth. Philosophy, at least until the last century, has almost always been devoted to mimicry, whether

through thought or another kind of action.

Democracy is strangely similar to philosophy in certain ways, particularly Greek philosophy. The democratic premise is that regulation of the government, proscribed human action within the government, can successfully attend to the interest of the whole society. If one applies reason to a situation, to reality, one can wield the power of truth and attain this power for the betterment of society. If the nation were a single individual, a successful rational democracy would be, particularly in Greek eyes, identical to a Philosopher King. As a quick contrast, monarchies are not expected to benefit everyone equally, nor are they generally assumed to be based on reason - confidence is rooted in other domains. In representative democracies, and every major democracy has been to some extent representative, even more so in highly bureaucratic democracies, the United States for instance, government is believed to benefit through the rational diversification of human roles. Democracy attempts to bring diversity of situation, the dissimilar population, under the management of reason for utilitarian purposes.

The creation of a fixed attainable truth, of the ego and human scale as a theatrical fiction, and of organized self-interest all occurring simultaneously at the same space-time location marks an enormous explosion of civilization. If we accept the truism that Western civilization is rooted in Ancient Greece, then that moment in space-time was the greatest facilitator of cultural progression that we know of. What I would like to suggest is that the interplay of these three cultural technologies combined to create a means of mimicry. The interconnection of these elements is like the creation of a race. Theatre legitimizes and establishes the runners in their egoistic costumes; philosophy establishes the points to which the racers race; and rational government prescribes the rules by which the racers individually should run. I am not suggesting that before the formal representation of characters speaking lines on stage people did not think in egoistic terms, but I do mean to say rather, the more limited idea that the drastic revolution of theatre represents a shift in personal identification. The shift is from communal participation, communal revelry - a relatively open mode of life - into a society

based in dissimilarity. Kierkegaard maintains that relationships based in dissimilarity manage egoistic interest by means of "little alliances,"²⁹ thereby disguising the fragmentation of society. The means of management then, become reason, as opposed to inspiration or tradition, or a more casual practical arrangement. Reason, at least in this context, will always perceive dissimilarity, and govern rewards according to dissimilarity rather while protesting against "absurd charity." The benefit of this theory is that it helps explain our tremendous commitment to the division of labor and the diversification of roles, as well as the near total personal identification with that role. In ancient theatre pantomime was an intensely perfected craft, but that form of play acting means to wear a mask that can be easily discarded. Ancient Greece marks a moment when mimicry exploded as a way to become the fiction. As Socrates always said, 'one must go to the cobbler to learn how to make shoes. One must go to the shipmaker to learn to build a ship. One must go to the trainer to become a great athlete. One must go to someone wise to become wise.' That explosion of technology and mimesis has, with the return of democracy, only accelerated. In a tribal environmentsometimes even parenthood is communal, and if someone can build a ship, it would probably be said, "he can build a ship," not "he is a ship-builder," at least for the mere reason that there must be many people who can build ships.

Avant-garde playwright Jean Genet organizes elaborate dramas which seek the renunciation of civilization's roles but find absurdly that the role has a greater permanence than the individual. Sartre once said that for Genet, "All of life is a game, and the origin of the masquerade is in Creation itself. The origin of the world is in play, and society is organized when the rules of the game are fixed. The established order consists of roles in a national drama. Everyone plays his part, policeman and murderer, functionary and rebel, saint and sinner." So Genet can feel in a truly historical sense that "the greatest men are only the greatest actors"

When one looks to society for profit, functioning according to dissimilarity, one may be ignorant of the ways in which the role one plays determines one's decisions, successes, and failures.

Dissimilarity abounds through dissimilarity because it is a mode which perpetuates through the desire for profit. If a person depends on other people, "the others," for his understanding of love, essentially one joins another Tower of Babel. The love requirement, the duty to love, is Kierkegaard's primary surgical utensil in his effort to pry self-love away from his readers and bring their attention overtly and directly to God, and secondarily to others.

If "the merely human determination of what constitutes the Law's requirement is supposed to be the Law's requirement: we help ourselves upward with the fanciful dizziness 'the others,' and down here we support each other by means of a little alliance ... But to what can we compare the confused state just described? Is it not a mutiny? ... Is not each individual under an obligation to God to stop the mutiny, not of course, by loud noise or fancied importance, not by domineeringly wanting to compel others to obey God, but by being unconditionally obedient oneself, by unconditionally holding to the God-relationship and to God's requirement, and thereby expressing that insofar as he is concerned God exists and is the only sovereign, whereas he is an unconditionally obedient servant?"

In *Works of Love*, the proper relation to oneself is as the neighbor, one must love oneself as a universal human partaking in God because this is the reality of the self Obeying love's duty as prescribed by God is the only possible way to love other human beings correctly even if this necessitates that love is rewarded with hatred. It is clear now, that for Kierkegaard, to come in proper relation to the divine means at least to threaten the egoistic self, particularly selfishness - which, thankfully for Kierkegaard, cannot survive a complete encounter. That on the worldly dimension divine love can be returned with hatred is only one danger of the refusal to build the Tower of Babel. Just as Kierkegaard spoke of the human desire to preserve themselves against the selfannihilation in God, and Artaud spoke of the individual being swept away by unity, art theorist John Elderfield notices the same existential tension in pictorial harmonies. Harmony evokes the jeopardy of negation - of the negation of the objects and along with that negation a certain poignancy of something

threatening to fall away.

"A Cezanne painting, however, constitutes an equilibrium of pictorial forces, interacting with each other to effect a sense of constancy and unity of the natural world beneath its changing appearance. Often, and especially in the case of his late work, the pictorial field appears to be in only provisional equilibrium. The extraordinary tension that exists between the pictorial elements - largely because they seem simultaneously anchored to the literal surface and descriptive of space behind it - places the equilibrium of the pictorial field as if in constant jeopardy."

A Cezanne is a painting formed of two alternatives. The first is that of the two dimensional, "literal surface," of paint on canvas. The second is a representation of three-dimensional space. Perhaps the description of a Cezanne is an excellent metaphor for the way in which Kierkegaard situates the human. To exist in a worldly way, to think only in terms of distinction, is much like moving only within a three dimensional *surface*. Furthermore, to become aware of the dimension of depth means that the surface image must to some extent, slip away.

The greatest paradigm, or synecdoche, of a human mediation of the gulf between God and man; unity and specificity, is Christ. Christ was broken on the Earth; his body was broken and his human life was taken on the cross. Christ was also broken in his unity with the Upper Kingdom, at least at the moment of crying out to God, "*God, why have you forsaken me?*" because any betrayal from God the Father is for Jesus a betrayal of the unity of the upper kingdom. The cross itself is a symbol of complete opposition if not fragmentation. This moment is the climax of the drama of Christ, not because he was betrayed, but because he tried to utter the unutterable - the poignancy and ache of his disunity. Christ found the tension unavoidable, avoiding that tension was a lie. His greatest act of divinity was to devote himself to a complete act of harmony selflessly.

In experiencing oneself, one experiences dissimilarity. Dissimilarity is the tension, the disunity, of discrete elements. If Christ performed a spectacle of unity as he was experiencing an agonizing disunity; this event signifying a revelation of love, this must be considered an unusual outcome of tension. Without denying the mystery of the crucifixion on a dramatic and conceptual level, the opposition to Christ, the violence, could not be more clearly defined. The drama of violence, and Christ's reaction of voluntary selflessness, could not be more overtly demonstrated. The portrayal of unity *as a revelation*, must have a clear antithesis in disunity. Without this, the Gospels would be stories based far more in speech than in action - than in salvation. The sense of infinite space has to be produced by form - through form the overcoming of form - as Li Young Lee says we are presented with an infinite verticality every time we are under the sky, but no one would walk around saying, "mommy, hold me, I'm falling up!" as he once heard a child say in a Cathedral. Through architecture, art, form, we express potential in a meaningful way that can thereby be incarnated and enjoyed in a human being.

In the philosophical domain, oftentimes definition, by exposing the nature of the discreteness of terms, has a counterintuitive result from what one may expect from finitude; the relationships between terms are clarified, opening up the thought. In the case of writing, good syntax and punctuation are essential for lucid communication. This is also true in the case of visual art. Matisse viewed his period of paper cutouts as a higher expression of his theoretical aim for *unity because there were no painted outlines blurring the distinction of objects*. With the absolute contact of objects in his paper cut-out period Matisse portrays the paradox of the completely distinct and completely together. "The paper cutouts were conceived by 'one movement linking line with color, contour with surface.'... This forms the ultimate sign, for the interior generates the exterior and is coextensive with it." With one invisibly perfect distinction, two objects are drawn completely together. A preference for the opposite, for painted outlines, can also be considered as a different route to the same aesthetic ideal. A painted outline of an object is certainly a prescribed technique to lend discreteness to the internal and the external and thereby bring about a connection. How can a blurred area, a buffer,

lend definition to an object? Take the example of a piece of property: a long driveway, an expansive lawn, then a well defined courtyard with a central fountain, a path onto the porch, a door, then an inner foyer, finally the house. Physically, it is true that this blurs the definition of the home, but the experiential effect is a magnification of the feeling of the internal. One walks into the vast lobby of a hotel and thinks, "I have arrived!" but arrived at what? There is something captivating about a pictorial unity; it draws one into the interiority of the painting. To experience the drama of involvement, to be granted potentiality, and with it, choice, intensifies the feeling of personhood, and intensifies the entrance.

Much of *Either/Or* can be understood as a debate on this issue: what does one do about involvement? The judge emphasizes the value of involvement, while the aesthete emphasizes the risks. The Judge defines love as the attempt to enter deeply into relations in contrast to the aesthete's enjoyment of arbitrary surface details. The judge seeks salvation by moving into an inner relation, expressing the presupposition that there is a unified ground "beneath" temporality. To accept the invitation of reality, to enter interiority, means to take on duty. Or, as Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love*, the eternal law. The Judge argues that by opposing duty in favor of the arbitrary, the aesthete rejects love. According to Kierkegaard, Christ has done everything that should be done, and has done it perfectly - his message is an invitation to all people. An invitation to suffer and die on the cross? The gruesome spectacle of the crucifixion, in its most widely appealing form, was to conquer death by destroying the body, to call the bluff on the necessity of the body for life. Christ has reputedly regained everything on the interiority of the painting, and he returns to show himself to his disciples. He used his body as a confrontational spectacle in order to negate temporality. The spectacle of Christ, his triumphant *via negativa*, was perfect avant-garde theatre, or rather avant-garde theatre is an ancient practice, as it tends to claim for itself as the "true theater."

The tension in a painting between the objects of a single dimension, typical in Matisse, is relevant to a Kierkegaardian analysis of life. The correlation between the visual and philosophical theories of unity, in

Elderfield and Kierkegaard, is that distinct elements exist in tension, a tension capable of sublimity insofar as it transforms distinctions into a harmonious unity. This critical tension is reminiscent of the lover described in the Phaedrus who must ache for his emerging beloved until his wings are capable of bringing them together. Perhaps an utter harmony, an absolute harmony, is the greatest transformation, the greatest sublimation, the greatest obedience. However, to the extent to which individual elements are felt as definitely separate every harmony must have tension. But distinct elements, conceived even in the sense of tension, or longing, are themselves revelatory of the beyond. Elderfield expresses it this way, "the web of signs seeks fusion, the emotion of the ensemble; this being so, wholeness is marked by the release of emotion." One commentator on Matisse, DiPiero, "noticed how his art `desires a complete expression of particulars which are absorbed but not disintegrated into a welded whole." Art, and theatre in particular, is an organized technology which can produce this affective experience, sometimes as a visual phenomenon, sometimes on a more profound level of the psyche, in the same sense that the alienation of the neighbor's mind and physicality from oneself is a structural institution inviting the application of love.

The attraction to plays in the theatrical canon is largely based upon ego magnification, which is one kind of synergy, a synergy that intensifies the identification with dissimilarity in its own desires and triumphs. The causal momentum in theater involves every character in a dramatic synergy. The mark of a poor playwright is the inclusion of a character who does not contribute to this coherent interaction and thereby slackens the tension by offering that which is truly unrelated. This dramatic synergy is greater and more of a whirlpool than the experience from the standpoint of the main character. "In drama, I see the mutually isolated elements together in the situation, in the unity of action." Nevertheless, in a Kierkegaardian depiction of great theatre the contributing elements in the greater whirlpool must significantly relate and magnify the story of the protagonist, as in *Don Giovanni*.

"The other figures in the opera are not characters, either, but... are

posited by Don Giovanni....Just as in the solar system the dark bodies that receive their light from the central sun are always only half luminous, that is, luminous on the side turned to the sun, so it is also with the characters in this piece. Only that part of life, the side that is turned toward Don Giovanni, is illuminated."

Therefore a well conceived plot, while on the one hand, a properly constructed interaction of concepts navigated by the protagonist, is at the same time, an egomagnifying device in terms of the main character.

Theatre is essentially a meaningful dialectic which attains wholeness through its conclusion. A good plot has an impelling force toward the future development of the play. For instance, if a significant desire is expressed early in the play the audience expects this desire to at least seek its fulfillment. If the main character falls in love but has not does not seek to attain his love, then, since the audience anticipates a synthesized totality, this is the same as if they saw an object dropped off a tall building - they recognize the incompleteness of that temporal stage. Theatre is in this way full of irony, that is, full of the ignorance fitting to a given stage of the dialectic with an implied, a natural insufficiency. A play with a satisfying ending places the actions of conflict into their just conclusion. The ending, always a matter of fortune, is cathartic only insofar as it is an appropriate response to the characters of the play. But where does this "appropriate response" come from? Kierkegaard, as he expresses himself in *Fear and Trembling*, certainly believes in the a priori forms of the aesthetic and the ethical, and that these forms determine the development of a good play. In life, people move from the sphere of the aesthetic to the ethical not because of a societal convention, but because these are the inherent modes of our relation to a larger dialectic. Furthermore, that tragedy and comedy are so enduring is evidence that these esthetic systems of truth - or karmic systems - are an a priori condition. The response of the eternal beyond is brought into the play, even if it is, as in "Don Giovanni," in the form of retribution. The play is then in relation to the absolute, through the ending, and also through the meaningful interaction of scenes and

characters, which are a symbolic representation of cause and effect. The author's ability to perform this feat in a way that gives satisfaction to the audience through catharsis is an interesting phenomenon. It both presumes an amount of knowledge on the part of author and audience that is not the typical frame of reference in the everyday life, as well as potentially illuminating the nature of the human relation to the eternal insofar as it is preoccupied with eternity in the form of a condensation of possibility and conflict.

These just relations express the law in the world thereby providing enduring continuance in events. Kierkegaard believes that there are two things in time, the eternal and the temporal, and they coexist at every present moment but they are not the same. By contacting the eternal, one is given enduring continuance providing the unity to individual moments. The human "stands and falls with the law of eternity - but then, of course, it never falls. Such love is not dependent on this or that; it is dependent only on that alone which liberates - therefore it is eternally independent."⁴⁴ Even if someone falls before the law, the law is applied perfectly, and all are equal before the law.

Through extreme condensation the spectator has the opportunity to assemble conflicts into a unity. But the ability of a spectator to assemble conflicts into a unity according to a permanent law - to perceive the application of the law mirrors the power of eternity. "Only the eternal can be and become and remain contemporary with every age; in contrast temporality divides within itself, and the present cannot become contemporary with the future, or the future with the past, or the past with the present." By condensing temporality into a microcosm spectators can more easily perceive a model of eternity's interaction.

For a dialectical *stage*, to be insufficient in a given way, it must be in relation to a higher overarching theatre - an intervening theatre. The equation of gravity works on a just dropped ball as the equation for tragedy works on a hubristic character. Kierkegaard speaks of contemporary Christians as so complacent, so presumptuous of their own place in eternity that they are in no way cognizant of the implicit

irony, the danger in the wings that always exists for someone who wants to be an easy Christian. Contemporary Christianity possesses the falseness of theatre, a theatre in which the actors smugly assume they are saved but thereby enter a hypocrisy in which they do not extricate themselves from the blood-guilt of their fathers for the deaths of Christ and the "prophets." For Kierkegaard one way of talking about this is the concept of hereditary sin, particularly in relation to blood-guilt. Kierkegaard believes that modern Christians must overcome their own blood, their own hereditary sin, and they must do this by realizing the theatrical or poetic irony of their own situation.

"We all know what it is to play at war, that it is to simulate as convincingly as possible everything that happens in war... everything, just as in war; only one thing is lacking - the dangers. In the proclamation, as it is in the New Testament, the whole emphasis falls on the personal - this accounts for the dangers; when we play at Christianity, the thing to do (but carefully, convincing them) is to draw attention away from the personal - so the dangers are also absent. The significance of this is that Christ died on the cross, suffered, in order that people could follow him. What Christianity wants is: imitation. What the human being does not want is to suffer, least of all the kind of suffering that is authentically Christianity, to suffer at the hands of people."

Christ enacted a drama in his life; establishing a model of the absolute, perfect life, the God-Man, but through revelation it made major demands on everyone he encountered. Christ's appearance in the world demanded a response from everyone he contacted, and that response had real consequences in the afterlife. Only through confronting this demand could a person save their soul.

Kierkegaard's perspective is that we have not been released from this rigorous demand because of the crucifixion. In speaking of a modern Christian's hypocritical relationship to the building of "the tombs of the prophets and the graves of the righteous" Kierkegaard says, "Adornment, no, there will be no sparing of gold, and diamonds, and rubies, etc.; no, pastors find that very acceptable and make people think that this is Christianity. But rigorousness, the

rigorousness that is inseparable from the earnestness of eternity ... The New Testament is: in fear of God, to suffer the doctrine at the hands of people."

The conclusion drawn from these passages about the rigorous earnestness of eternity and suffering at the hands of the people is straightforward; because of Christ's existence, because of the demand he placed on every human through the intervention of eternity, every human being begins with a blood guilt, begins with hereditary sin. The Church as theatre serves not as a development of dialectic that reaches toward wholeness, but as a mock-up of an already accomplished salvation - which nevertheless engages in a true grand narrative under the eternal law - and therefore the Church stands in an ironic relation to God. Kierkegaard tries to expose, to make ridiculous and obvious the lies that before now they have swallowed in order to awaken Christians to their ironic relation.

The idea of human drama as manipulated by a higher theatre is present in both the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible as well as Kierkegaard. People who come across the concept of hereditary sin in the Hebrew Bible before being inculcated to accept the idea, typically object to it on the grounds that it seems a violation of justice understood as a principle of personal accountability for one's own actions. Kierkegaard's use of the term hereditary sin could be taken as figurative because he does not imply a guilt that stems literally from one's ancestors. However, even if hereditary sin is a metaphor for the hidden reserves of punishment to be meted out upon the unknowing sinner this still raises questions about whether such a punishment is just. Artaud's key metaphor for the theater is the plague, i.e. the Black Plague.

"The plague is infective and forces a crisis that ends in death or purgation. The theatre, like the plague... releases conflicts, disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these possibilities and these powers are dark, it is not the fault of the plague nor of the theatre, but of life ...*It appears that by means of the plague, a gigantic abscess, as much moral as social, has been collectively drained; and that like the plague, the theatre has been created to drain abscesses collectively.*"

In other words, the plague can properly be thought of as a moral infection stemming from a primal offense, with a condition which worsens or improves in time depending on how crises are dealt with. The infection, perhaps moral trauma in general, can only be understood as a moral inheritance for Artaud. This is exactly the same phenomena which people finds so offensive in its Biblical form. Artaud's concept of historical infection differs only in a seemingly greater emphasis on the collectivity of guilt and trauma than even the Hebrew tradition. The plague also echoes, to a lesser degree, the idea of original sin.

Then why should Artaud make an absolute rule excluding a sense of memory from his theatre, "Artaud's affectivity contains no memory, it is a means of perceiving the present." Artaud *deletes* all historical sense precisely because history is huge and hugely important. History, a primal scene we were absent from, is nevertheless presently living in us. "The psychotherapeutic model he has in mind ... can be reduced to a mental reenactment of primal scenes and primal offenses to rid their patients of trauma in the present." Therefore a proper relation to history is not the civilized, cultured, and canonized reenactment of conflict, but a confrontation of the primal right now.

"Artaud wishes to cut through these lies and deceptions, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of the world. Similar to the Great Mysteries - the Orphic and Eleusinian rites - it is based on sacrifice and revolves around crime; but ... it acts as a catharsis and drains his violence."

Antonin Artaud, in the book, *The Theater and Its Double*, is fascinated by the idea of the imposition of theatrical forces upon everyday life. Theater, for Artaud, is an opportunity to confront these theatrical forces, which he conceives of through the metaphor of a plague, in an effort to purge and help heal the unresolved and undisclosed

elements of this theatrical force. Artaud spoke of actors as athletes of the heart, because of their role in incarnating, expressing, and liberating these forces. In Artaud's account of historical episodes from plague epidemics, he claims that people turn their entire lives on their heads. The dandy will parade in front of the charnel house. The miser will throw his money out the window. The old maid will become a prostitute. Through absurdity, they demonstrate that their whole life was not merely what it was, and in that sense cannot die. Through publicly demonstrating the latent value of their personality, frequently the devaluation of their predominant aspect, they show the mind as ever-active, ever-evolving, and therefore, defiant of death. Here we have someone acting out, theatrically, eternity within him or herself through paradox. Kierkegaard has noticed similar phenomena.

There is actually a moral dilemma in this phenomenon, because the historical force, or the theatrical dialectic, can overcome the individual and change his behavior in ways that seem to contradict free will. But the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament, take up this issue of the individual being swept up by theatrical force. For example in the Gospels, Judas can reasonably be understood as the best disciple, as depicted in the book, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, yet in the name of the religious drama that had to be acted out, Judas is cast as the ultimate traitor. The scene with Pontius Pilate is interesting in the sense of what is usually termed poetic irony. Pontius does not realize the world-historical significance of that one action. For a God-killer he is a relatively innocent, likable bad guy. His major flaw is his very smug self-satisfaction. That one could so easily trip up in such a ghastly way, serves to remind posterity it is easier to kill Christ than live with him.

The involvement of Pilate, and perhaps Judas, in the betrayal of Jesus, seems a culpable act on the part of God because their souls are supposedly condemned to hell, despite the fact that they were essential in serving God's plan. There is a very similar event in the story of the Exodus, in which the Pharaoh was willing several times to let the Jews go, until God hardened his heart. This begs the question, because it led to many Egyptian deaths and was a direct

interference with the Pharaoh's free will. The Jewish response is telling as much in what it does not say as in what it does say. Their response is that God was gathering the chosen people together for their great formalized covenant, and that he had to demonstrate his commitment to his people, and to the world, dramatically, i.e. theatrically. The justification cannot claim the direct morality of the act of forcing Pharaoh's hand into the fire, and significantly, it does not try. The necessity for a great spectacle, a great act, great theater, overrides the importance of the moral consideration. Then this spectacle, like almost every miracle in the Jewish tradition, has much in common with the crucifixion, insofar as the moral consideration can be subordinated to the public proof of God's love. In fact, it is a major emphasis of the New Testament that love is beyond morality.

According to the treatment Kierkegaard gives to human life there are two modes of being; eternity, and temporality. Temporality precisely through its continual negation is a metaphor of eternity. But if no human being can fully inhabit either mode alone, not to mention both modes at once, where is the human being? Potentiality, in Works of Love, is made of nothingness and a life imbuing element which encourages a healthy beyond in both temporal directions. Nothingness is integral to potentiality and therefore a natural element in the return to action. Matisse intentionally redirects the viewer's contact with the painting - the insistence of his removal from the object in order to show the object and produce a purgation. In a similar use of non-existence Artaud says that, "though a theatrical gesture is violent, it is disinterested: and that the theatre teaches precisely the uselessness of the action which, once done, is not to be done, and the superior state unused by the action and which, restored, produces a purification." The "superior state" is some sort of raw potentiality. The basic idea is to allow the potential to be there. Not to assume that what can use the potential all the time in the best way, but that in a sense you cannot do better than the potential. The best is pure, magnified potential and detachment from lesser action. Artaud believes in a highly rigorous, ascetic training in order to become truly useless, truly detached; it does not come naturally to be so free of personal interest that one can continuously display potential. However the theatre depends on, and illustrates its own

uselessness through its transparent fictiveness, its use of empty space, and a high velocity termination of its own temporality.

The human, unable to remain in either the eternal or the temporal modes continuously, crosses these poles as though, remembering that life theatre is an imitation, they were two parts of a metaphor. The human is an invitation, or a metaphor for something, something eternal the human participates in, well then, where is the substance of the human metaphor? Metaphor as explained by Elderfield is an association of similarity that is essentially non-temporal, and the non-temporal, or the eternal, acts through being unrealized empty space. This connection of metaphor is in contrast with the temporal causal connection of experience of memory based knowledge. The dynamic quality of a Matisse is explained by Elderfield as an interconnection of metaphor and memory in a way similar to the action of a verbal paradox in sentence form. Because the metaphorical link between two objects in a Matisse, for example a pear and a woman's face, must interact temporally with a thoroughly temporal instrument, the human mind, switch is thrown; the eyes seek an absolute visual unity, and a unity of spectator with spectacle, by rumbling through all the contrasting metaphorical color schemas which must be assembled in an instant - by combating that which can have no instant. The mind, recognizing sameness, darts to see what perhaps cannot be seen without a small gap in time and property. Thinking of the famous nontouch of the Sistine Chapel, the life breath of potentiality can be powerfully expressed in the form of potentiality. The contact of temporality and eternity, their instinctive erging with one another, is a form of paradox which preserves specifiable parts possessing meaning, as in a verbal paradox in sentence form. Elderfield claims for a Matisse, something even more significant because the eternal visual harmony is fixed, it is incarnated within a frame. In other words, in a sense it is not only remarkable that a picture of eternity exists (in time, made of paint, etc.,) but it is also convenient for the viewer since without such incarnations perhaps we would have no contact with eternity. This may account for the religiosity with which some devotees of art treat museums. At any rate, the relaxed openness that is easy to feel with certain paintings may be a glimpse at what Kierkegaard intends by an attitude of

seeing similarity. This release from self-preservation and dissimilarity, even only in a perceptual form, can be a powerfully affective experience. "Matisse insisted that his aim was to achieve unity by stressing the 'affinity between things,' their 'rapport,' which he compared to that of love."

Though Kierkegaard seeks equality which is preserved, in perception or upbuilding, through obedience to the eternal law, whereas avant-garde theatre, particularly Artaud and Genet seek a destructive revel within the True Spectacle - an utterly basic and lawless equality, perhaps the two philosophies are brought together by the fact that neither one of these ideas can be perfectly accomplished. One could criticize Christian morality, as espoused by Kierkegaard, on the grounds that the Christian law of love permits no interpretation, it wrestles the individual until he has no choice. It may seem a defect that to please God fully, one must not vary from God's will one iota. However, perhaps the impossibility of living based on perfect will, perfect recognition of similarity, a perfect involvement in universal humanity is part of the design. When one becomes detached from his dissimilar role one is still incapable of becoming completely "similar." This impossibility necessitates a path which Kierkegaard praises; a liberation of the roles in life, alongside an increasing devotion to the single foundation of life: love, i.e., a festive revelation of life within roles. "Rebellion and order are merely two roles in the same masquerade." It would seem then that Artaud's Theater of Cruelty takes the most rigorous path available. They reject any formal status of salvation: a salvation won and then possessed. The law they follow is the pursuit of salvation by the power of true spectacle. To seek salvation by doing good actions seems as hollow to them as any superficial conformity to a role. In the end, the power of salvation must be persuasive on the basis of its *quale* to whomever seeks it on an absolute level. Jean Genet would like to, "let the profiles reflect profiles back and forth ... and let the image you offer the rebels be of such great beauty that the image of themselves cannot resist." If we could all maintain a state of pure reverie we would have no need for art. Those who can experience reveries in producing spectacle usually accept the opportunity, even when rigorous imitation is necessary. In forming the "ultimate sign" of unity one makes a daring

gesture, an almost indiscreet, familiar gesture to the spectators. But the spectator who is engrossed, perhaps in a state of perfect viewing, is himself the ultimate sign. The communality of the theatre spectacle is, far from being a coincidental phenomenon, essential for the manifestation of that which is illusory and permanent in revelation through participatory sight.

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