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Original Research

Artaudian Writing, Imagery, and Sounds That Conjure the Sublime: Performances Nearing Philosophy

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Abstract: The fragmentary nature of the aesthetic in Artaud lies in its intensity and trauma. As found in his invented language, recorded utterances, drawings of portraits, hieroglyphic texts, and an irregular cadence of his recorded voice—most of which are exquisitely captured in the *Artaud Diptych*—this article not only seeks the connection to what is described as forms of "language" and the sublime but also informs the privation communicated in the embodied works of Artaud. As such, Artaud is approached within selected theories of the sublime, presented genealogically and interwoven with praxis, exemplified through the plays of two Greek playwrights, Ioli Andreadi and Aris Asproulis. The performances of *Artaud Diptych* give us that which embodies an Artaudian engagement with the sublime. The argument herein is that the sublime emanates from various aspects of the writing, imagery, and aural qualities immanent to the Artaudian oeuvre. While Artaud's venture into theater writing may be considered a failed experiment, this article shows how he achieved a singularity in the self-transformative process (and as an avenue of self-preservation), using language as word, imagery, and sound, as affective agents toward the sublime, ultimately operating within a mode of intersubjectivity. In the translation of his oeuvre toward theater and the audience, we discover the ultimate success of his intersubjective work as performative philosophy, as revealed by the *Artaud Diptych* by Ioli Andreadi and Aris Asproulis.

Keywords: *Artaud, Sublime, Performance, Theater*

The Backdrop

> I am constantly in pain since the age of four. Severe meningitis, comatose state, neuralgia, sleepwalking, hereditary syphilis, depression, split personality, delusional disorder of paranoid structure, addictions, confinements, nervous breakdowns, failed performances, failed diagnoses, failed loves…—"Bone" *Artaud Diptych* by Andreadi and Asproulis (2023a)

The all-consuming aesthetic of rhetoric, imagery, and sound encompasses a communicative language of and by Antonin Artaud that is seemingly manifested within modes of the complex and vague sublime. The French Surrealist actor, writer, and artist, who established an interwar aesthetic revolution marked by disruption and transformation, manifests the sublime within his own *mise en scène*, including elements such as drug addiction, scandalous theatrical projects, psychotic episodes, asylum incarceration, and experimental techno-neuro therapy, all interplaying as expressions of intensities. This article argues that the sublime emanates from

various aspects of the rhetorical, image, and aural qualities of Artaud's creative output, defying normative thoughts and heightening experiences of an aesthetic force as a gesture that situates him between modes of self-preservation and transformations of the self in society. These aesthetic pulsations in Artaud's oeuvre are integral to the revolutionary premises of his theater manifestos, existing within a realm of the intra- and intersubjective sublime. This subjectivity becomes not only what Cohn and Miles (1977, 297) would say is that of the "mental, aesthetic, psychological state" but also of the body-mind phenomenological lived-experience. As we look at Artaud in terms of words, imagery, and sound as spheres of his embodied utterances, we find, when extracting genealogically from seminal texts on the sublime, the revealing of agents effecting the sublime: poetry, incantations, morphological constructions akin to glossolalia (Holmqvist and Pluciennik 2002), and hyperbolic or fragmented elements that serve as an enigmatic unboundedness or as the abyss (Holmqvist and Pluciennik 2008). This, in turn, allows our argument of an Artaudian sublime to flourish as experienced manifestations of performative philosophy as found in the *Artaud Diptych*.

The *Artaud Diptych*, written by two Greek playwrights, Ioli Andreadi and Aris Asproulis, comprises two new theatrical plays, "Artaud/Van Gogh" and "Bone," inspired by the life and work of the groundbreaking artist and thinker of the twentieth century, Antonin Artaud (Andreadi 2023). As the fragmentary nature of the aesthetic in Artaud lies in intensity and trauma, found in his invented language, recorded utterances, self-portraits and hieroglyphic texts, as well as the irregular cadence of voice—most of which are exquisitely captured in the *Artaud Diptych*—we seek not only the connection to what is described as forms of "language" and the sublime, but also how it informs privation communicated in the embodied works of Artaud. This article approaches Artaud within selected theories of the sublime, presented genealogically, and it interweaves praxis, the *Artaud Diptych*, as that which embodies Artaudian engagement with the sublime. The argument herein is that the sublime emanates from various aspects of the writing, imagery, and aural qualities immanent to the Artaudian oeuvre.

Two actors, Gene Gillette and Gerasimos Gennatas, embody a presence not as Artaudian doubles but as an Artaudian écho monde (Glissant 1997). With Gennatas, the musician-performer George Palamiotis brings forth an intensely evocative sound in "Bone." The audience, the performers, and the playwrights of both plays of the *Artaud Diptych*, Andreadi and Asproulis, with Andreadi serving as the director, are all aligned with Artaud in the way that Roland Barthes heeds us to be (Murray 2014). With the *Artaud Diptych*, we experience an Artaudian 2023 reverberation at The Tank Theater in New York City, complete with the spirited, resonating beats and sounds of Palamiotis's performance accompanying Gennatas's vigorous presentation of "Bone." These performers proffer the theatrical living instruments of Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty" (*Théâter de la Cruauté*), enlivening the sublime in his oeuvre, where the shadows of psychological theater are ruptured to allow us to experience what is found in the oblique, between shadow and light, between thought and gesture, the place that transforms and prepares for a "new generation of shadows" (Artaud 1958, 12). As the gestural

bodies of Gillette and Gennatas undertake liminality, existing at the thresholds of bright light, darkness, and the musicality of dissonance, they produce the sublime.

In "Artaud/Van Gogh," with Gillette's gestural painting buffering the stage lights, we feel the colors of Van Gogh's impasto technique. In "Bone," it is Gennatas's plea to his lost love: "Don't do this, Genica. I feel it. When you do it—Like a knife—Don't. Every time I am signing my soul to you," spoken in Greek directly to an audience member, where the emotive response by the audience member is universally recognized. With these, we witness reverberations: two different actors, two different performances, two different Genicas—and two different responses. As Artaud (1958, 12) writes, "the actor does not make the same gestures twice…although he brutalizes forms, nevertheless, behind them and through their destruction, he rejoins that which outlives forms and produces their continuation." It is the response of the audience that is brutalized and mended, each time in a different way. This is what was experienced in the two April 2023 performances: the first Genica was notably moved to a state of confusion when Gennatas's Artaud approached her; she had frightened eyes, hesitance in her response to the deep emotional gestures that Gennatas delivered directly to her. The second Genica reacted in the opposite; not only did she engage Gennatas's sublime torment, but she was willing to, and nearly did, reach out with her body to offer a touch of warmth and comfort. With this intensity, the gestural bodies of Gennatas and Gillette deliver the Artaudian sublime. Gillette has us *feel* Van Gogh with an undertaking of movement against and with lighting, darkness, sounds, and reactions from audience members pulled into Artaud's world. Gennatas ruptures it with cries and screams. In both cases, the fourth wall is shattered, and the sacred space of sitting spectator bodies is ruptured, initiating a transformed theatrical audience of individual members who were once isolated from the experiences of the others sitting around them and are now unable to resist the combined pull of a direct engagement.

Genealogy of the Sublime

Various paradigms, theoretical approaches, and thoughts on what constitutes the sublime and its permutations have given the phenomenon a history of nearly 2000 years, rich with descriptives laden with "insinuations, ambiguities and sudden pauses" (Holmqvist and Pluciennik 2008, 4). The term derives from *sublimis* in Latin, which implies to be lifted or raised up to (sub) the top of the lintel (limen) of the door (Shaw 2009). Moreover, while the notion of the sublime has always been present in one form or another, it has not necessarily taken the name of the sublime (Nancy 1993). Nevertheless, the arché-texts of the sublime, notably beginning with the oldest documented treatise, *Peri Hypsous*, attributed to the first-century author Longinus are on the literary sublime.

The central thematic concern in the literature of poetry and rhetoric for Longinus was the experience of *hypsous* (sublimity) as *ek statsis*, meaning "out of statis." To Longinus, the sublimity of literary means was a mystical transport to ecstasy, where the subject is dislocated

and fundamental dualities are disrupted (Guerlac 1985). With such thinking of *hypsous* to transport and overcome, there is a presentation of the sublime of multi-dimensional meaning that is not of common experience (Guerlac 1985). The sublime in Longinus is accessed through the rhetoric in poetry and speech, where poetry and prose are not passages of loftiness or grandeur that layer "empty bombast." Rather, he states that:

> the true sublime naturally elevates us: uplifted with a sense of proud exaltation, we are filled with joy and pride, as if we had ourselves produced the very thing we heard [and if] the effect does not outlast the moment of utterance then it cannot really be the true sublime. (Longinus 1995, 180)

The impassioned presence of power behind that which is the sublime in the literature is attributed to figures of thought, speech, and elevated word arrangement. Citing passages from Homer and Sappho, for Longinus (1995, 163), "a well-timed flash of sublimity shatters everything like a bolt of lightning and reveals the full power of the speaker at a single stroke." Here was the aim of exaltation as excellence in language, where such an application consisted of an experience of the sublime offered by the effects of language "preceded by a disruption in normal consciousness" (Hirsch 2014, 618). What would follow from such disruptions was a balancing or equilibrating of consciousness as the restoration of the self in a pulling back from the sublime. This would take the form of a defense mechanism where the sublime is deflected as literary mimesis (Hirsch 2014).

While *Peri hypsous* is the first known of the three theoretical arché-texts of the sublime, the second is that of Edmund Burke and his eighteenth-century treatise (1757): *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (Enquiry)*. According to Paul Crowther, Burke's theory of the sublime is oriented toward the aesthetics of those situations where excessive elements are felt either as painful or as threatening (Crowther 1993, 115), that is, where "anything which can occasion pain or terror or some kindred passion is a potential source of the feeling of the sublime" (Crowther 1989, 8). The modalities delivering such feelings include two conditions: first, the overwhelming property of objects that stress perceptual faculties, causing a "weak state of pre-conscious pain" (8), and second, where dangerous objects encountered at a safe distance render a "weak or moderated state of terror" (8). This second condition of the sublime, where the feeling is in some way moderated, becoming synonymous with the instinct of self-preservation (Crowther 1989), is the sensation accepted by the audience of a theatrical performance. Burke's emphasis on the most powerful passions arising from "our sense of mortality and the instinct for self-preservation, and by showing that the sublime is intrinsically connected with them" (Crowther 1993, 117), invests intensity within sublime passion.

The last of the three arché-texts is Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, published in 1790, whose theory addresses aesthetics from a rational stance of overwhelming excess of greatness or power (Crowther 1993). Kant had originally articulated a theory of the sublime in a treatise

published in 1764, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, which was concerned with the relationship between feeling and morality (Crowther 1989). It is in this early treatise that he sets out the oppositions between the sublime and the beautiful in a way already familiar to his contemporaries. Yet, it was his "Analytic of the Sublime," in the third critique, where his work to reconcile the currency between rationalism and idealism gave rise to his philosophical edifice of "transcendental idealism," a system pushing the notion of the sublime away from the empiricism embodied in Burke's sublime. To Kant, the sublime was not contained in any sensuous form but rather with ideas of reason. He explains this as the experience of the "mathematical sublime," occasioned by vast, ungraspable, formless objects. However, it is the mathematical sublime, as the "mode which is embodied in our encounter with vast objects," that is distinguished from the aesthetic estimate of magnitude, which is intuitive and empirically generated (Crowther 1989, 146).

After Kant and the period where the tenets of the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism were subject to disillusionment by the Romanticists, poets seized upon the notion of the sublime with the idea of transcendence and the interlocking of the self and its relationship to boundless nature (Hirsch 2014). By usurping the sublime in Romantic literature, the idea of a vision of terror was invoked in both nature and art. It was a terror that was "uneasily allied with pleasurable sensations of augmented power, and even of narcissistic freedom" (Hirsch 2014, 619). When the sublime of Romanticism moved toward what is characterized as a positive valorization, inseparable from such agents as ecstasy, imagination, enthusiasm, and páthos (Holmqvist and Pluciennik 2008), a new milieu was reinforced under the nomenclature of the Gothic Sublime, drawing somewhat on Burke's theory and Gothic elements in literary works such as Mary Shelley's Frankenstein or Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (Hirsch 2014). When interest in the sublime waned, its modest presentation could only be found sporadically among later philosophers. However, the popularity of *Peri hypsous* as a text surged when, in 1674, it was translated into French and adapted by Nicolas Boileau, who took liberties in modifying its general ideological meaning and extending the main thoughts of Longinus (Holmqvist and Pluciennik 2008). After Boileau, the treatise was translated into the English language by Alexander Pope in 1711 (Hirsch 2014).

With some sporadic revivals, the sublime emerged in the work of Surrealists as it appeared in Freud under the rubric of sublimation and later as a critical discourse of the New York School abstract expressionists and the color field painters: Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman. Monumental canvases with heroic workings of materials evoked a nonrepresentational sublime of the moment, and a notable renaissance in philosophical circles came about with the post-structural writings of Jean-François Lyotard in the latter half of the twentieth century. Lyotard's "Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime" foregrounds the sublime in terms of abstraction and Avant-Garde art, where there are associations with Burkean ideas that "words…bear emotional associations…[evoking] what is spiritual without referring to what is visible, and…by using words, create

combinations impossible to make in another way" (Holmqvist and Pluciennik 2008, 8). Lyotard extends the aesthetics of the sublime in what Holmqvist and Pluciennik (2008, 17) label as representing the unimaginable, where the imitation of the beautiful form is negated and new art is conceived as "astonishing, unusual and shocking" (9). This is the sublime of the contemporary age: "it is not that which is merely pleasant, but that which alludes to the nondemonstrable" (Lyotard 1988, 68), where there is a call toward experimentation (69), and the modernist means of presenting the unpresentable. This clearly overlays the glossolalia of Artaud, his literary fragmentation, and the paradoxical positioning of text. Using James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake as an example of modernist means of presenting the unpresentable, Holmqvist and Pluciennik say, "[if] we agree with Lyotard…abstraction in literature could be made real by the stylization of gabbling" ("Short Guide" 724). Thus, abstraction and allusiveness as devices of the sublime broaden the field of rhetoric to include literature and "all kinds of mysterious words, glossolalia, and stylization" that draw on a strange, unfamiliar language, maintain Holmqvist and Pluciennik (2002, 725).

Extensions of the theoretical sublime have notably shaped the thinking of the arché-texts on the sublime. Initially conceived as a rhetorical device by Longinus, the concept of the sublime as advanced by Boileau and the work of the late-seventeenth to early-eighteenth-century English critic John Dennis was broadened to include an aesthetic experience within the presence of emotion in art and literature during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Despite the obscure theoretical study of the sublime, the work of Dennis is a reworking of the sublime prior to the treatises written by Burke and Kant. Dennis, who underscores the theories of Longinus within the milieu of the theoretical sublime, emphasized the role of emotion, establishing the pre-conditions under which the sublime transitions from rhetoric to aesthetics (Doran 2015). It was the break from neoclassical aesthetics that allowed Dennis to place an emphasis on violent emotion and sacred terror, thereby creating two paths: the pathetic, characterized by terror, the irrational, and the sensational; and the noetic, characterized by the mental, the intellectual, and the rational (Doran 2015). Robert Doran credits Dennis as a forerunner to the Burkean theory of sublimity as situated in terror and Kant's theory of the sublime as it associates itself with reason in an effort to reclaim the idea of transcendence from irrationalism (Doran 2015). Doran states that under Dennis, there is an extension to the exaltation toward aesthetics, where he places an "emphasis on strong emotion…as the essence of sublimity" (Doran 2015, 124), and it also suggests that it is "Dennis's example of the 'wrath of God' that reappears in both Burke and Kant" (124). Finally, as supported by the work of Neil Hertz and Thomas Weiskel, an eventual transport of the sublime moves within the folds of psychoanalytical tradition and subjectivity (Cohn and Miles 1977).

Reading rhetoric, imagery, and sound with Artaud for the sublime is grounded in the heightened psychic and emotional responses found in his embodied oeuvre. Here, notions of intersubjectivity, self-preservation, and society can readily be considered if we account for his lived

traumas. Born on September 4, 1896, in Marseille, France, the deeply religious Artaud, says Lotringer, was experiencing nervous disorders around the age of 17, causing him mental and physical despair. Lotringer, one of the last philosophical thinkers who interviewed Artaud in his later years, describes these disturbances as "a kind of moral spasm, violent anxiety, physical vertigo" (Lotringer 2015, 33), exacerbated by his precarious stays at neuropsychiatric clinics. Sporadic treatments amounted to a lifetime administration of arsenic, and beginning in 1919, medical prescriptions to laudanum created a continuing dependency on opiates that would later be believed to have re-activated physical symptoms of a meningitis condition he experienced in childhood (Lotringer 2015). While at a sanatorium in Switzerland, the clinic at Neuchatel, where Artaud became occupied with drawing and painting and the literary works of Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, and Edgar Allan Poe, he was prescribed opium. In the early 1920s, he began to formulate his artistic interests that would take him to Paris and engage him in a life of literature, film, and theater. By the age of 23, Artaud journeyed to Paris to pursue acting and, not long after, became engaged to the nascent Surrealists and their magazine *Littérature*. However, it was his early failed attempts to publish his poetry that allowed the cementing of his literary footprint when his 1923 to 1924 correspondences with the editor of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, Jacques Rivière, were channeled by Rivière and others for an Artaudian "madness" rather than for his poetry making.

Word: That Which Is Written by Artaud and to Artaud

> To force a genius like Van Gogh down onto a surgical table and to manically chop him up with their dirty scalpel—a rusty scalpel full of the dried blood of their suspicious theories—so that they can finally cut this genius according to their cloth, place him at a safe distance and judge him with the necessary arrogance—"Artaud/Van Gogh" by Andreadi and Asproulis (2023b)

In 1923, a series of correspondent letters between Rivière and Artaud regarding the publication of his poetry begins to tell the story of the man who would later be configured within the company of Nietzsche and Bataille (Goodall 1994). A particular letter written by Artaud on June 5, 1923, in response to Rivière, who, in a previous correspondence, rejected the poetry of Artaud but not the man behind it, opens with a self-diagnosis. Artaud writes:

> I suffer from a frightful illness of the mind. My thoughts abandon me at every level.…Words, forms of sentences, internal thought processes, simple reactions of the mind, I am in constant pursuit of my intellectual being.…I am beneath myself, I know it, I suffer from it, but I allow it for fear of not completely dying. (1976, 31)

Considering what Burke (2015, 137) writes about how the influence words have on passions and their capacity to make "deep and lively impressions," as that imparted by affect and sympathy more than by ways of description and particulars, it is from the first few lines of this letter that we learn how Artaud frames his intensity within a Burkean sublime.

In Burke's treatise, Enquiry, the "affection caused by a word, which nothing but a word could annex to the others, raises [the affection to] a very great degree of the sublime"; subsequently, raising the sublime even higher can be achieved by the order or addition of words that follow, intensifying the first of the words presented (Burke 2015, 139). Let us consider the example given by Burke. He cites a line from John Milton to reveal how an affection created by a word propels it to levels of the sublime: "Rocks, caves, lakes, dens, bogs, fens and shades" is overshadowed as the sublime when it is written as "Rocks, caves, lakes, dens, bogs, fens and shades—of Death" (138). When we consider Artaud's response to Rivière on June 5, 1923, the line: "I am beneath myself, I know it, I suffer from it," when written with "but I allow it for fear of not completely dying." It is the last phrase, the force of passion as opposed to only "I am beneath myself, I know it, I suffer," that propels it to a higher level of affectation as found in the Burkean sublime. Moreover, Burke writes that:

> words have all their possible extent of power, [and] three effects arise in the mind of the hearer. The first is, the sound; the second, the picture, or representation of the thing signified by the sound; the third is, the affection of the soul produced by one or by both of the foregoing. (2015, 132)

It is this third effect where Artaudian words retain their greatest power; again, not in the manner of providing the descriptive state or the particulars, as in the effective modality in the art of painting, but in the failed state where in poetry and rhetoric prompts of affect by sympathy are more effective than that of imitation (Burke 2015). Here is where the painterly gestures of Gillette's Artaudian van Gogh reside. Here, affect, in terms of passion, acts as the cognate of the sublime (Oxenhandler 1988). As literary emotion relates to páthos, the Greek meaning that implicates that which occurs to us within our bodies or souls (Oxenhandler 1988), the sublime is disclosed as the enigmatic nuance of emotion finding its most affecting place in language (Holmqvist and Pluciennik 2002), regardless of structure. Such is the case when Dennis adapts the noetic orientation in Longinus's view of the sublime into one that exhibits páthos. Hence, according to Dennis, there is a singular emphasis on emotion. This is not the sentiment that is oriented toward French neoclassic literature, but that which is associated with the violent, unrestrained passions encountered in moments of religious terror, for example. It is presumably a pre-Burkean terror that Doran links to the imagination of the theoretical sublime in Dennis (Doran 2015, 125), and something to consider in Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty" or his radiophonic play, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*. In Burke, when words deeply convey passions, they also fare weakness in other respects (Doran 2015). Here, we may offer this as passions of trauma lending toward Artaud's linguistic fragmentation as one of these weaknesses.

The idea of subjectivity and the sublime is an exchange between the poem and reader, found in what Neil Oxenhandler states are the traditions of the sublime as a representation of a "systematic attempt to correlate emotive effect with rhetorical structure" between subjects (Oxenhandler 1988, 110). In the poetic or literary transaction, it is the complexity of such an

exchange of subjectivity where the "sublime effect or turn occurs by means of a mimetic transfer in which the power of the referent (an historical or mythical event) is carried over into the text itself" (Oxenhandler 1988, 110). We also find this exchange between the actor's language and the audience member, or the letter exchange between Rivière and Artaud. From literary and visual exchanges during his life to those held posthumously, as in the compiling and reading of Artaudian anthologies and any configuration in between, there has been an exchange of subjectivity where the referent is the event of Artaud's singularity, the event as Artaud's creative output, and in the cases of the letters with Rivière, it is Artaud's *effroyable maladie de l'esprit*. If this is extended further, what may also apply to Neil Oxenhandler's correlation of the sublime are transient forms of alienation or depersonalization tending toward intersubjectivity. To this end, Rivière's March 1924 response to Artaud's January 29, 1924, correspondence is an intersubjective exchange of the sublime. Rivière writes:

> …in my letter of last year, to try to reassure you at all costs: I acted like those doctors who think they can cure their patients by refusing to believe them, by denying the strangeness of their case, by forcing them back into the normal. It is a bad method. I regret it. / Even if I had no other evidence, your handwriting—tormented, wavering, collapsing, as if sucked in here and there by secret whirlpools—would be sufficient guarantee of the reality of the phenomena of mental "erosion" of which you complain. (Artaud 1976, 38–39)

This form of empathy as an intersubjective connection foreshadows what happens years later when Artaud writes his essay, *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société*, the strength of which resides in the blurring of Artaud, the poet, and the words imparted toward Van Gogh, another tormented artist under the mis-care of psychiatrists. In both plays, "Artaud/Van Gogh" and "Bone," intersubjectivity is a pronounced theatrical endeavor.

Image: That Which Is Drawn by Artaud

> Van Gogh unleashed his crows like the black microbes of his suicide. Just a few centimeters from the top of the painting and they look as if they sprang up directly out of his guts—"Artaud/Van Gogh" by Andreadi and Asproulis (2023b)

The recording *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* was Artaud's last creative project and a reconstruction of a dialogue between himself and Dr. Gaston Ferdière, the head physician of the Rodez mental asylum in France, the place where Artaud underwent more than fifty electroshock therapy sessions. If one were to consider the correspondences written during and after his more than fifty electroshock treatments at Rodez, as well as his final creative recording, self-portrait drawings, and hieroglyphic text from this late period, we find an Artaudian world of the Burkean sublime, concerned with pain and self-preservation. This period coincides with the post-Rodez essay of the post-impressionist painter Vincent van Gogh.

Sometime in 1947, Artaud was asked by Paris gallery owner Pierre Loeb to renounce a scathing criticism about a major exhibition of paintings by Vincent van Gogh that had opened at the Orangerie Museum in Paris toward the end of January 1947. When approached by Loeb, Artaud was at Rodez, writing his final fragments of *Suppôts et suppliciations*. Loeb's motivation to involve Artaud was to have one "asylum inmate to write on another," writes Stephen Barber (1993, 139). It was the tenor of the newspaper clippings sent to Artaud by Loeb on the text *Du démon de Van Gogh* by François-Joachim Beer that enraged Artaud to take on the project. Beer's portrayal of Van Gogh as a mad degenerate framed the artist within a psychiatric lexicon that was so offensively familiar to Artaud that it intensely stirred him into a writing frenzy, resulting in his 1947 essay, *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société*. Writing such passages as "No, Van Gogh was not mad, but his paintings were bursts of Greek fire, atomic bombs, whose angle of vision, unlike all other paintings popular at the time, would have been capable of seriously upsetting the spectral conformity of the Second Empire bourgeoisie" (Artaud 1976, 484), spoke not only of his connection to Van Gogh within an intersubjective mode of the sublime, but it was also his ode to self-preservation.

For Artaud to consider imagery is to allow it to speak the unspeakable modes of written language. In "Ten Years That Language Has Been Gone," Artaud writes that he is using a new written language "to evoke the nullity of an entirely written language," hence experimenting and transforming it into an image. Barber (1999, 76) says that from this new manifestation, language acts with immediacy, not as a "like" but as an "as": "I say that the lost language is now a lightning which I make reappear through the human fact of breath: lightning which my pencil blows on paper." It is from such conviction and delivery that Artaud transforms language as imagery and imagery as an extension of the "immediacy and violence" held in the creative act. It is with such pencil blows that Artaud draws, as in the case where he writes about Van Gogh, as portraiture. Portrait drawings by Artaud and the portrait paintings by Van Gogh, as supported by Artaud's essays and letters, are considered imagery within the rhetorico-visual milieu of the sublime. It is here that the audience of the *Artaud Diptych*, "Artaud/Van Gogh," finds Gillette's bodily gestures with the pencil and hand gestures of the application of paint on the canvases of Van Gogh, where the intersubjective is delivered as action. Strikes and bursts of Gillette's hands and fingers transform as Artaudian cries and screams toward an exchange of spirits between the artists: Gene Gillette, Antonin Artaud, and Vincent van Gogh.

Two years before writing *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société*, Artaud began an exceptional period of drawing. The drawings were violently composed using pencils, colored chalks, and children's crayons on large sheets of paper. Testimony by one of the doctors at Rodez, Jean Dequeker, who recorded his observation of Artaud drawing a self-portrait, described the excruciating process of the physical agony Artaud underwent. Dequeker wrote:

> …without a reflecting mirror, I saw him create his double, as though in a crucible, at the cost of unspeakable torture and cruelty. He worked with rage, shattering pencil after pencil, suffering the internal throes of his own exorcism. At the heart of the most inflamed screams and poems…he seized reality, and his face appeared. This was the terrible lucidity of the creation of Antonin Artaud by himself. (Barber 1993, 114–115)

Drawings, possessing the strikes of raw marks found in his portraits, denoted the human body as expressions from "shattered powerlessness to controlled and intricate evocations of physical fragmentation and reconstitution" (Barber 1993, 113). Stephen Barber (1993, 114) describes the drawings as Artaud's "deep sense of his disrupted body and its disintegrated language," most likely stemming from his experiences of electroshock. In some cases, Artaud would insert text within the images, which Barber claims was an enactment of reuniting the body and consciousness torn apart by the psychiatric neuro-techno treatments experienced under Dr. Gaston Ferdière's care, the head physician at the Rodez psychiatric hospital. The text encircling or punctuating the imagery was Artaud's own phraseology, his invented language, working text, and image as his totalizing voice full of "enraged incantation" (Barber 1993, 114), thus foreshadowing his 1948 recorded screams in *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*. Moreover, Barber (1993, 114) characterizes these drawings as manifestations of "an instinctual articulation of the body in disunity, adrift in an oceanic space of abject negativity and deep desire." In time, the subject matter of the drawings would transform into the scream of the self (portrait), which Barber says is the "site for expressing his fear of attack and his determination to counterattack" (114). While Ferdière considered this prodigious artistic period of Artaud a testament to his authorized electroshock treatments, Artaud (1976, 493) consigned his methods to the barbaric practices of psychiatry, where a "repugnant and sordid atavism…[caused] them to see an enemy in each artist, in every genius before them." Artaud applied this experience to Van Gogh and all those poets where the psychiatrists were acting in their name.

At Rodez, Artaud would experience electroconvulsive sessions as the psychiatric solution to combat what was later his diagnosis: chronic hallucinatory psychosis with profuse polymorphous delusions (Lotringer 2015). It was Ferdière's assistant, Jacques Latrémolière, who would administer the treatments. Therefore, it was to him by letter that Artaud would fervently make his pleas:

> Electric shock, Mr. Latrémolière, reduces me to despair, it takes away my memory, it dulls my mind and my heart, it turns me into someone who is absent and who knows he is absent and sees himself for weeks in pursuit of his being, like dead man being present even though he can no longer enter into him. (1976, 438)

While electric discharges at the back of the skull, in and of themselves could be innocuous, says Lotringer, it is the reaction experienced by the patient that could be extremely violent, as some would experience fits comparable to small seizures falling into a coma followed by

"an organic erasure of consciousness" (Lotringer 2015, 49). When Artaud wrote his letters to Latrémolière, he was entrenched in a life of privation. While his last electroshock session was in December 1944, Artaud experienced the terror of memory loss after each session beginning in May 1944. After one of his series of electroshock treatments, Artaud (1976, 438) said that he "remained…absolutely incapable of working, thinking, and feeling" alive. His January 6, 1945, letter to Latrémolière on the matter, comparing the benign nature of his previous mental state, recounted the "horrible splittings of the personality" (Lotringer 2015, 51). Here, we may say, is the breakdown of his subjectivity. It was after the third session of electroshock that it was discovered that one of his vertebrae had been fractured (Lotringer 2015, 51), yet the "treatments" continued. Artaud's electroshock experience unfolds as trauma or terror.

In *The Inhuman*, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," Lyotard (1988, 99) contends that it is the spiritual tone in Burke where bodily pain affects the soul and vice versa, "as though it were experiencing some externally induced pain, by the sole means of representations that are unconsciously associated with painful situations." These terrors that are linked to privation, Lyotard says, come from an entirely spiritual passion. It can be the privation of life or the terror of death. For the terror to produce the feeling of the sublime, it is necessary that the "terror-causing threat be suspended, kept at bay, held back" (99). The suspense, the lessening of a threat or a danger while provoking a kind of pleasure (in relief), also a privation at one's removal, that is, the soul is deprived of the threat of being deprived. As a result, art serves to distance the menace of terror and return the soul to the "agitated zone between life and death, and this agitation is its health and life" (100). For Artaud, the psychiatric prescription of electroshock was a way the doctors attempted to manage symptoms of anxiety and the suffering associated with powerful fantasies and hallucinations, as noted in states of schizophrenia. This prescriptive cure by Ferdière caused Artaud an emotional totality of dispossession, a term that Lotringer (2015, 49) says German psychiatrists assign as schildge: the "anguish of the broken ego." Here, Lotringer himself refers to it as Artaud's "state of terror" (49). This amounted to a state of broken consciousness resulting in the suffocation of the self, a disorientation of place, the loss of memory, and, after regaining orientation and memory, a "profound depression" (49). It is after such a reprieve of sorts from such psychological assaults that Artaud endured when he would begin writing *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société*.

It can be said that the clarity with which Artaud writes *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société* is provoked by the modes of terror he experienced, an empathetic affect toward Van Gogh, and loathing projected toward psychiatric practices as it concerns the perceptions of the "mad" artist. This exhibited Artaudian intersubjectivity; we find in Andreadi's direction and in Andreadi's and Asproulis' monologues (2023) a madness that is synonymous with acute consciousness of matters of the mind. A theatrical practice given by an actor, naturally fragmented between self and embodied subject, then further fragmented by those in the audience whose physical place in the theater, their contextual lives, and their notions of Artaud and the performances render a multiplicity. Yet, here too, intersubjectivity gains

traction in the performative sense. As anticipated by Loeb and projected in the *Artaud Diptych*, the mode of intersubjectivity where Artaud would infuse his life's experiences with that of Van Gogh's was not only his empathy toward the artist but equally an accusation toward the derelictions of society. The moment when Artaud relegates the creative act as the operative method to escape pain and terror, he captures sublimity as self-preservation, and this is most clear in *Van Gogh's Le suicidé de la société*.

> What Van Gogh cared about most in the world was his idea of a painter, his terrible, fanatical, apocalyptical idea of a visionary. /…/ No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, build, or invented except literally to get out of hell. / And I prefer, to get out of hell…. (1976, 497)

This clause, in particular, from *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société* can be spirited as an extension of Burke's entries on self-preservation and society.

In consideration of Burke's aesthetic anthropology of the sublime, that is, sympathy, mimesis, and ambition, Doran defines the intensity of affect in Burke as a concept from a discourse on relative pleasure. This intensity, Doran says, is grounded in a more general philosophical and anthropological outlook on man and society. In *Enquiry*, of the passions that belong to self-preservation, Burke writes:

> Most of the ideas which are capable of making a powerful impression on the mind, whether simply of Pain or Pleasure, or of the modifications of those, may be reduced very nearly to these two heads, self-preservation and society; to the ends of one or the other of which all our passions are calculated to answer. The passions which concern self-preservation, turn mostly on pain or danger. The ideas of pain, sickness, and death, fill the mind with strong emotions of horror; but life and health, though they put us in a capacity of being affected with pleasure, they make no such impression by the simple enjoyment. The passions therefore which are conversant about the preservation of the individual, turn chiefly on pain and danger, and they are the most powerful of all the passions. (2015, 33)

Doran states that Burke (2015, 154) provides the groundwork for heroic subjectivity in association with the sublime by "placing the emphasis on the strength of the individual in contradistinction to the social." Doran summarizes Burke's argument as follows: "if the strongest passion a human being can feel is fear in the face of death (namely terror), then the instinct for self-preservation is the source of the most intense experiences a human being can have" (154). Perhaps more so with Artaud than with Van Gogh, drawing was an act of knowing and an unknowing defiance. In Artaud, casting the notion of art as an instrument of revolution (Sontag 2004) was in part an effort to transform the self (Sontag 2004) and redirect culture (Sontag 2004). While Van Gogh would care for his struggles by "working

one's way through an invisible wall of iron which seems to lie between what one feels and what one can do" (Artaud 1976, 498), Artaud, on the other hand, would work language viscerally into that of gesture and cries toward transformation of the self, of society, and of extensions far beyond the arts (Barber 1993, 55). Exemplifying this juxtaposition is a post-scriptum where Artaud (1976, 487) writes that Van Gogh had been the "battlefield of a problem around which the evil spirit of humanity has been struggling" and where society "absolved, / consecrated, / sanctified / and possessed, / erased in him the supernatural consciousness he had just achieved, and, like an inundation of black crows in the fibers of / his internal tree, / overwhelmed him with one final surge, / and, taking his place, / killed him." "No one," writes Artaud (1976, 511), "has ever been born by oneself. / No one dies by oneself either. / But, in the case of suicide, there must be an army of evil beings to cause the body to make the gesture against nature, that of taking its own life."

Protracted electroshock treatments serving the goals of the psychiatrics at Rodez, among them Latrémolière, justified the therapy given as a correction of Artaud's consciousness by re-engaging him with his artistry, life, and society. When Artaud fell into relapse and his gesticulations and hallucinations increased, he began to panic. Fearing more electroshock treatments, an intensity of terror grew (Lotringer 2015). In his April 2, 1944, letter to Ferdière, where Artaud pleaded that it took months for the delirium, confusion, and memory loss to lessen: "I won't recover again because my soul has had enough abuse and torture," he wrote (Lotringer 2015, 50), the psychiatrists consistently maintained that the sessions corrected disturbances and re-established stability in Artaud (50). After Artaud's last electroshock in January 1945, he began creating his large drawings, revealing a rupture in his religious convictions. With the drawing *Man and His Pain*, Artaud maintained that he was "casting a distance gaze upon his own suffering…[as] he was now loudly proclaiming ownership of his own suffering" (53). To this, Barber writes:

> …Artaud's creative capacities came back to him with great strength, and he never stopped working from them until his death three years later. The final work threw out images and writings with ferocious force. For Ferdière, this return to work was the result of the treatments he had applied, including electroshocks--without these treatments, the final phase of Artaud's work would simply not exist. (1993, 113)

Hence, his drawings became the language to illustrate the pain he suffered from the electroshock injury and its residual effects on his consciousness (Lotringer 2015). His drawings and his seminal work on Van Gogh accommodated Artaud on a mission intended in *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société*, to place Dr. Gachet in the position of Ferdière. Artaud writes:

> And there took place between Dr. Gachet and Theo, Van Gogh's brother, how many of those stinking confabulations that families have with the head physicians of insane asylums regarding the patient they have brought them. /…/ These are

> examples of those smooth conversations of good-natured psychiatrists which seem harmless enough, but which leave on the heart the trail of a little black tongue as it were, the harmless little black tongue of a poisonous salamander. / And sometimes it takes no more than this to drive a genius to suicide. /…/ For it was, in fact, after a conversation with Dr. Gachet that Van Gogh, as if nothing were the matter, went back to his room and killed himself. (1976, 496)

Toward this is Gillette's Artaudian pencil striking the stage, carrying forth a pain to which he himself accepts but not for Van Gogh. Here is the actor's response to Derrida, who speaks of the strokes of Artaud's pencil as his coups, his weapon to counter "its own losses and those of the body which drives it" (Barber 1993, 5), transformed imagery as voice, working to deny a place for representation in society that silences the creative genius.

When Artaud denounced God, his rage at society intensified, amplified by an aversion to psychiatry (Lotringer 2015). For Artaud, here is where the body to be cured extends as the social body. It was Artaud who understood Van Gogh in a mode of heroic subjectivity, elucidating a moral and cultural outlook. Artaud states:

> There is in every lunatic a misunderstood genius whose idea, shining in his head, frightened people, and for whom delirium was the only solution to the strangulation that life had prepared for him. / Dr. Gachet did not tell Van Gogh that he was there to straighten out his painting (as Dr. Gaston Ferdière, head physician of the asylum of Rodez, told me he was there to straighten out my poetry), but he sent him to paint from nature, to bury himself in a landscape to escape the pain of thinking. / Except that, as soon as Van Gogh had turned his back, Dr. Gachet turned off the switch to his mind. (1976, 492–493)

To Artaud (1976, 483), it is "a tainted society" that has invented psychiatry "to defend itself against the investigations of certain superior intellects whose faculties of divination would be troublesome." Allowed to function within this framework, according to Artaud (1976, 492–493), the asphyxiating society in the form of sanctioned asylums was established to get rid of or protect itself from the madman from whom society does not want to hear the utterances of intolerable truths, in particular, from the "misunderstood [artistic] genius."

Outlined by aspects of sympathy and the notion of empathy (Doran 2015, 155), it is intersubjectivity within the concept of sublimity that Artaud situates in Burke's "general society" (154). The basis of Artaud's (1976, 495) intersubjective response in *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société* is that he is Van Gogh: "I, too, am like poor Van Gogh, I no longer think, but I direct, every day at closer hand, formidable internal ebullitions." We see Artaud as one who could invoke Burke's condition of the sublime, where pain or fear is communicated in terms of intersubjectivity. Artaud (1976, 497) continues: "I myself spent nine years in an insane

asylum and…never had the obsession of suicide, but I know that each conversation with a psychiatrist, every morning at the time of his visit, made me want to hang myself, realizing that I would not be able to cut his throat." It is within the attitude of sympathy/empathy that sublimity precipitates itself in Artaud.

Sound: Screams and Drums of a New Language

> By my unguarded body. They are vampires. Vampires. I have seen them I'm telling you. They eat my thoughts during my sleep and get rich with life. With my life. You cannot even imagine what is going on at night, Genica. You cannot even imagine—"Bone" *Artaud Diptych* by Andreadi and Asproulis (2023c)

When we visit Artaud's last recording project, the censured radio broadcast of *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*, it is again with *Enquiry*, as Burke (2015) reminds us that sensation is not only visual but auditory toward the production of the sublime. Here Burke (2015, 68) refers to the "excessive loudness" of words to overpower the soul, to suspend action, and to fill it with terror. The broadcast that Artaud created was an interplay of utterances, glossolalia, profanities, screams and cries, and rhythmic drumbeats, working in the medium of radio, thereby moving beyond those immediately around him. Artaud could transmit his screams past a lecture hall or the theater setting. Barber (1993) calls this broadcast project, *Artaud's Screaming Body* where the intertwining of language and physicality as relation counters the absent body and enforces its materialization for a vast and seemingly unlimited audience. Such a physicality of cries was equally part of Artaud's presence during his lectures. It was Georges Bataille (2004, 17) who would later recall a talk that Artaud gave at the Sorbonne about theatrical art, where suddenly he "grasped his stomach and let out the most inhuman sound that has ever come from a man's throat," creating a disquiet one might associate with delirium (17). Perhaps akin to what Burke extends to sound, in his category of "The cries of ANIMALS," as the natural inarticulation of voices of men capable of conveying great ideas, modifications of sound become a production of the sublime (Burke 2015, 69), and for Artaud, it ruptures the aural limitations of language.

Confronting the limitations of language had its beginnings in Artaud's manifesto, "Theater of Cruelty," the artistic project aimed to uproot society (Barber 1993, 5). In "Approaching Artaud," Susan Sontag (2004, 84) assigns action to Artaud's poetics, art, and thought, an authentic dramatic performance, where the brutality of the experience is suffered and charged with extreme emotions. While theater allows for the interplay of diverse means of expression, including gesture, verbal language, static objects, and movement in three-dimensional space, it did not offer Artaud, prior to his theoretical interjections, a place to master the art of performance. Artaud looked to transform the theater and to "show the organic basis of emotions and the physicality of ideas in the bodies of the actors" (86). To this end, Sontag

assigns it the place where Artaud expressed his spectacle of sensory violence, and in this respect, he exhibited a precept of modernist sensibility, that of emotional violence and the aesthetics of shock (Sontag 2004). The transformative process of it all undertook the numinous language of alchemy, where Artaud's theatrical projects gave effect to the birth of new connections with an "infinite capacity for self-transformation" (Barber 1993, 7). Here the theater became "the place where the body would be reborn in thought and thought would be reborn in the body" (Sontag 2004, 89). It is in *The Theater and Its Double* (*Le Théâtre et son Double*) where Artaud's writings echo his creative struggle with society, where he states "that his consciousness is without boundaries and fixed position; bereft of or in a continual struggle with language" (89). In theater, Artaud took performance as exterior to the structure of the play, as he wanted actors to give birth to sounds, voices, languages, and gestures not rehearsed, but produced anew each time (Sontag 2004). And in the radio recording, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*, Artaud infused sound and language as assaults to be experienced by the "spectator's entire nervous system" (Barber 1999, 98). Here is where the reverberating sounds of Palamiotis's electric guitar disturb the listening body with a melodious brutalism fitting for Artaud.

The recording *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* was Artaud's project, where bruitages or noise effects were recorded separately and then edited into pre-recorded material (Barber 1999). It was an aural discord of "screams and language, of assonant and obtuse rhythms, of insurgent elements of chance, and of outbursts of a black, apocalyptic laughter…[mocking] religion," (Barber 1999, 97). Others have described it as "random cacophony of xylophonic sounds mixed with various percussive elements, [and] the noise of alarming human cries, screams, grunts, onomatopoeia, and glossolalia" (Nechvatal 2014, 5). The recording became a source for the philosophical concept of "body without organs" by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, where the phrase itself came directly from *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*: "when you will have made him a body without organs, / then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions / and restored him to his true freedom" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 571). Here the concept of "body without organs" is the imagined whole from perceptions of singular events; it is the image of a movement of constant desire, opposing systematic organization (Barber 1993, 6). It is from *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* where Deleuze (1997, 128) says that Artaud gives "sublime developments to the system of cruelty," where the Burkean sublime arises as discordant sounds and cries displaying violent aural affection. In the end, on February 2, 1948, Artaud's *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* was banned by the head of the radio station as being inflammatory and obscene.

Final Remarks

In the works of Longinus on the sublime, it is language that offers the possibility of the sublime in Artaud as the writer and the poet. If one were to consider Artaud's written prose and correspondence during his electroshock ordeal, where he writes about the trauma and his near-

death scenarios, then it is the work of Burke where Artaud enters a world of the sublime that concerns pain, society, and self-preservation. As aesthetic intensities are an interplay of Artaud's correspondence, invented language, written and recorded utterances and sounds, and the revolutionary premises of his theater manifestos in the realm of the intra- and intersubjective sublime, it becomes appealing to proffer notions of the sublime in terms of Artaud's oeuvre revisited within the fields of aesthetics, performance art, and psychoanalysis. Seemingly, a scenario may even be conceived where Artaud is the protagonist in a novel or a play (what Harold Bloom calls the Homeric Sublime) to whom the sublime is expressed. Furthermore, it is a matter of the sublime by Artaud, as the creator of the sublime experience in consideration of the reader, viewer, or listener, herein, as the recipient of the aesthetic transcribed as sensation.

It is with Artaud where the performances of the *Artaud Diptych* are an example of what Gilles Deleuze (1997, 128) would say is not the writing of the book but the writing of blood and life, inverting the "terrible signs that lacerate bodies and stain them, the incisions and pigments that reveal in the flesh of each person what they owe and are owed," to the extent that the Artaudian embodied aesthetic are intensities in his correspondence, invented language, written, drawn, and recorded utterances, and the revolutionary premises of his manifestos on theater. These are all folds within the realm of the intra- and intersubjective Artaudian sublime. Jean Baudrillard (2005, 230), who responded to Sylvère Lotringer in *The Conspiracy of Art* regarding Artaud and the theater, said that Artaud "ended up achieving his theater in himself, in his delirium." This shortsighted view neglects the potential insight offered by the Artaud's experiences. While Artaud's writing for the theater may have been his failed experiment, he achieved a singularity in the self-transformative process (and as an avenue of self-preservation), using language as word, imagery, and sound, as affecting agents toward the sublime, and ultimately within a mode of intersubjectivity. In the translation of his oeuvre toward theater and the audience, we discover the ultimate success of his intersubjective work as performative philosophy, as revealed by the *Artaud Diptych* by Ioli Andreadi and Aris Asproulis.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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