Antonin Artaud

Excerpt from Bernard Noël’s *Artaud et Paule*
trans. Paul Buck & Catherine Petit

... The mass of notebooks is carried through and raised by the eruptive return to poetry after years of psychiatric internments, electroshocks, imposed hebetude, physical deprivations and harrowing sufferings. This return is the expression of an unbounded revolt and the scouring of everything that regulates existence, channels it, socializes it. From now on Artaud is the great ignited who, far from escaping his ignition, makes it his tongue.

He is, he says, the one who speaks the tongue of his own incendiarism. He is on fire and he uses his burning to convey its state and, through that state, intensify its humanity. He is the spectator of his flesh prey to the flames, a spectator not really distant but distant enough to see himself from high above, dancing on his own flame while his hand traces in a single movement the act that burns and the vision that feeds the blazing.

His hand traces the verbal graph of this double occupation, it doesn’t write, it records the phenomenon at its speed. It doesn’t write something legible, but something alive, and in the moment, and in the state, and such that it bursts out, screaming.

The writing form of the notebooks is the imprint of Artaud’s haste, an incendiary living his fire. Thus they could only have been ‘written’ that way – in that writing that responds to impulses and not to calligraphy. The sense is in the movement before being in the articulations of the sentence.

Compare that to the edited volumes: the mass of writing has become texts clearly set, with a considerable body of notes. The illegible has become legible. Is it a betrayal?

The savagery has only changed appearance to meet the needs that require that a book is a book, with a format, pages assembled, lines stacked on each other. From the very first words, a scream rises, intact, brutal, gasping for air. Far from having been diminished, domesticated, normalised by the book, it is even more naked in our head because it lingers less in our eyes. It is no longer graphic, and consequently specific, it is textual and mental, in other words, accessible to all.

Artaud is there with a violence forever returning, a body forever imposthumous. Im-posthumable!

...
I am the one who fed it.

The Dead Daughter

Beaten, broken, annihilated, the skeleton has lost its powers.

Monsieur Antonin Artaud
23, rue de la Mairie
Ivy-sur-Seine
Seine

Tuesday.

Antonin Artaud. Antonin Artaud. What horrible torments as those of murdered love and living death. What horrible efforts as those of love creating while love creates is devoured. ALIVE

For indeed love doesn’t exist but myself?

(Note: Unsigned, undated, written on a Postal Service letter-card. Noticeably written in ink. It has been stamped to be sent by express delivery, but it has not been posted. There is no postmark.)

An absolute and unique love which is not expressed and yet continues to exist. A torture.

And not in dream. In reality truly. In reality absolute and unique.

You are not ill, you are inspired. And I will not look after you, I will love you. I love you, Antonin Artaud.

I ask you never to speak of me to anyone and not to tolerate if they speak to you of me, whoever it might be. For I am intact and this time I will die of it.

(Note: Draft of letter, undated, written in pencil.)

I left France out of despair.***

The human being is capable of supreme sacrilege on the human being – the one that is committed on unique love – for I am your unique love – and the sacrilege has been committed.

But you are stronger than love and that’s why I remain whole – intact – alive – although constantly trampled by death.

I loved you more than myself – I mean more than dead – and now I love you more than you love yourself – I mean more than ALIVE – and that, you alone know what it means and you alone will ever know.

from The Testament of the dead Daughter by René (Colette Thomas)

Excerpt from Cahier 323

selected by Samantha Marenzi

Ivy 13 juillet 1947
[after the date the text is dictated to Colette Thomas]

Colette Thomas va vous lire un des derniers textes sur le théâtre que j’ai écrits ici à Paris depuis ma sortie de l’Asile de Rodez
Et où j’ai tenté certains prolongements sonores particuliers, mais qui n’ont rien à voir avec un rituel.

Le Rituel c’est quand l’homme a déjà trouvé et fixé, anatomiquement, sa circulation sanguine;
Et qu’il a, dans l’air,
L’air de plusieurs compressions atmosphériques,
definitivement canalisé et situé ses cris de sang,
Avec le théâtre de la Cruauté
rien de pareil.
Il ne peut plus y avoir de rite,
parce qu’il n’y a pas encore l’idée.
L’acteur lance sa veine d’air,
de plus en plus profondément,
de plus en plus férocement.
Dans les convulsions anatomiques de l’atmosphère,
mais ce qui justement caractérise les syllabes lancées dans cet affreux élan,
c’est qu’elles ne peuvent prendre toute leur valeur de perforation [here the pen returns to Artaud’s hand] toute la jouissance de sarclage, de coagulation
de dissolution...

Ten years that the language is gone,
that there has entered in its place
this atmospheric thunder,
this lightning,
facing the aristocratic pressuration of beings,
of all the noble beings
of the butt,
cunt, of the prick,
of the lingouette,
of the plalouette
plaloulette
pactoulette,
of the tegumentary trance,
of the pellicle,
of the corporeal erotic,
racial nobles of the corporeal erotic,
against me, simple virgin of the body,
ten years that I once again blew up the Middle Ages,
with its priests, its judges, its lookout,
its priests above all,
its churches,
its cathedrals,
its vicars,
its white wafers.

How?
With an anti-logical
anti-philosophical,
anti-intellectual,
anti-dialectical
blow of the tongue
with my black pencil pressed down
and that’s it.

Which means that I the madman and theomo,
kept 9 years in a lunatic asylum for exorcistical and magical passes and
because I supposedly imagined that I’d found a magic and that it was crazy,
one must believe it was true,
since not a single day during my 3 year internment at Rodez, Aveyron, did
the Dr. Frédiere fail at 10:30 AM, the visiting hour, to come and tell me:
Mr. Artaud, as much as you may wish, Society cannot accept, and I am here
the representative of Society.
If I was mad in my magical passes, what did it matter to Society which could
not feel attacked or injured and had only to despise and neglect me,
but the Dr. Frédiere presenting himself as a defender of that Society and
entrusted to defend it must have recognized my so-called magical so-called
passes since he was opposing me with Society,
I therefore say that the dismissed language is a lightning bolt that I was
bringing forth now in the human act of breathing, which my pencil
strokes on paper sanction.
And since a certain day in October 1939 I have not written anymore without
drawing anymore either.
But what I draw
are no longer subjects from Art transposed from imagination to paper, they
are not affective figures,
they are gestures, a verb, a grammar, an arithmetic, a whole Kabala, and one
that shits to the other, one that shits on the other,
no drawing done on paper is a drawing, the reintegration of a strayed sensibility,
it is a machine which has breath,
it was first a machine which at the same time has breath.
It is a search for a lost world
and one that no human tongue integrates
and the image of which on paper is no more than a tracing,
a sort of diminished copy.
For the real work is in the clouds.
Words, no,
areid patches of breath which gives its full
but there where only the Last Judgement will be able to decide between
values,
the evidences,
as far as the text is concerned,
in the moulded blood of what tide
will I be able to make heard
the corrosive structure,
there where the drawing
point by point
is only the restitution of a drilling,
of the advance of a drill in the underworld of the sempiternal latent body.
But what a logomachy, no?
Couldn’t you light up your lantern a bit more, Mr. Artaud.
My lantern?
I say
that look ten years with my breath
I’ve been breathing hard forms,
compact,
opaque,
unbridled,
without archings
in the limbo of my body not made
and which finds itself hence made
and that I find every time the 10,000 beings to criticize me,
to obturate the attempt of the edge of a pierced infinite.

Such are in any case the drawings with which I constellate all my notebooks.

In any case
the whore,
If all other formats seemed doomed to failure, the one medium that Artaud never abandoned was paper itself. When he was at the Rodzé psychiatric hospital he wrote in a letter to Jacques Latrié-molé that ECT was no longer necessary, but takes on a much more specific meaning in relation to the work he was producing at the time; drawings and portraits that drew their figures right up against the surface of the page, covered in holes, rhythmically by dots, cigarette burns, and the grain or the grid of the paper, scribbled through and disrupted. These drawings might be seen as the continuation of the spells he had begun to send in the late 1930s, objects that would, in the absence of his own body, perform a physical, protective or destructive purpose, magical objects designed to act, rather than to represent. The forces put into action in these drawings that spill out of the body onto the page are present in his writing, gesturing and vocalisations, never reaching completion or becoming a finished form, but always remaining in process, or in note-form.

In the last few years of his life, Artaud filled 406 notebooks. Artaud’s notebooks serve as a reminder of the conditions in which he lived, and he writes about these conditions at the same time as they materialize on paper. Not only does he write about laudanum, but we also see his handwriting deteriorate as their effect kicks in. There are no punctuation marks or capital letters, no beginning or end to the writing, as Artaud slips in and out of consciousness, and we can see the shorthand of chaos in the chaos of the page. He writes of his lack of money, reminding us that the notebook is the cheapest magical object designed to act, rather than to represent. The forces that undo itself in a language that has already failed because it cannot signify; it cannot be reproduced, and can only bear witness to the fragility of the surface on which it is inscribed.

The power of Artaud’s work, which completely resists this designation as ‘work’, lies in the fact that it has ‘not yet’ occurred; it is always on the brink of realisation. Artaud’s note’s distinction between the product and the processes through which it comes into being, and they achieve this through their spectacular failure as ‘work’, expressed with immediate, visceral ferocity. The battle against the organ-filled body in a material sense becomes a battle against the outage and the impenetrability of its shiny, pristine presentation in print. Artaud’s body without organs is located in the holes, stains and scum stuck to, sprawling across and spilling out of the leaves of his fragile, anti-representative and anti-reproductive paper.

The notebook for Artaud is the domain of unlimited thought, escaping the ‘word’ that arrests the thinking process, and denying it a discernable form, activating its capacity as a force, or a powerful, effective sign. The very last words that Artaud wrote, scrawled onto the pages of his final notebook, most likely written under the influence of chloral hydrate are written in note form, without punctuation. They read: ‘etc etc’. These are neither last words nor first words, but the sketch for an illusionary ever that is never to be complete, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of completion, of failure, and of the present tense of writing. Notation always takes place in between the body and the work, having a direct relationship to both.

Artaud’s writing becomes a suspension of the present. Like the notebook, it is the blueprint for an apocalyptic form of expression that has yet to materialise, or, to use the expression that roccours throughout his work, is always ‘not yet’ (‘pas encore’). This movement of thought that undoes itself speaks in a language that has already failed because it cannot signify; it cannot be reproduced, and can only bear witness to the fragility of the surface on which it is inscribed.

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Excerpt from Old Food, 2017

Ed Atkins

Cauliflower flowers, soft red onions from a blue crate, sea salt, mustard oil, mixed seeds, currants, turmeric, white pepper, organic jarred garlic, cloves, cumin, nutmeg, coriander, black pepper, oregano, bay, chilli if we had it. Cauliflower were really great. Braised, crock broccoli, a ramp mashed corpus of three potatoes, a meringue rice, a marmalade of black truffle juice, victim? Sometimes a toddler’s pop the slowed cheddar bog meringue mostard meat. A haggis nest, or a pot of lightly curried beef simple was simple for us to make. We encouraged everyone to try making their own rice or soup, or something else to make! And though necessity was the mother of invention, we ate an easy, sluggish cauliflower cheese clog for a few years in the middle, when everything was especially difficult. Financially and so on. Profiterole mostly meant spaghettis and otherwise compressed veg. Compressed as in coal or oil. Megalamia and prostatic theophile and sacred such morsels as garlic, elm, bay, leaves, and a great deal of root beer. We had to drink the starkey fluid that used to grate from a wound in a rock above the trilobite. Black and amber, a profound neat. Weekends scavenging funneled meat brown bread and forces that could, in the absence of its knife, slouched in shallow graves where a company of potatoes’ eyes shot grey and the madly small soul gone, so great and put out with an iron fork. We would pause there, on a squat steep between pleasant pests, naked and rain-slick, nothing else for it, each bagging a dead flesh left floating there, then last while potatoes collected. We’d survey a dust prospect all over and feel that raw and sudden extraction of weakness squirms a little down there in our empty tums. Still, we’d remember, while founding back down the bank, wayland, that when chipped and fried and shredded fresh into tubal pastures, we were a plentiful Satanic’s middle, and an extravagance of table salt. Everyone really liked chips with plenty fancy forms of cuisine. A nicely going head on a beveled wall. Chips hot and golden and flashling with fat, all crispled and scaling out core, big ones; changes specified for with the creation of a ‘body without organs’, perhaps the only truly magical object designed to act, rather than to represent. The forces that undo itself in a language that has already failed because it cannot signify; it cannot be reproduced, and can only bear witness to the fragility of the surface on which it is inscribed.

The power of Artaud’s work, which completely resists this designation as ‘work’, lies in the fact that it has ‘not yet’ occurred; it is always on the brink of realisation. Artaud’s notes distinguish between the product and the processes through which it comes into being, and they achieve this through their spectacular failure as ‘work’, expressed with immediate, visceral ferocity. The battle against the organ-filled body in a material sense becomes a battle against the outage and the impenetrability of its shiny, pristine presentation in print. Artaud’s body without organs is located in the holes, stains and scum stuck to, sprawling across and spilling out of the leaves of his fragile, anti-representative and anti-reproductive paper.

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To Jacqueline Breton, 17 September 1937 (Magic Spell, sent from Dublin):

17 - 9 - 2

I will send a Magic Spell to the First One who dares to touch you. I am going to beat his little gob of a fake proud cock to a pulp. I am going to flay his arse in front of 100,000 people! HIS PAINTING WHICH WAS NEVER VERY STRIKING HAS NOW BECOME DEFINITELY BAD

IT'S THE ANTICHRIST

[Notes: This protective ‘Magic Spell’ was sent directly to Jacqueline Breton, as opposed to Artaud’s hostile spell from Ireland sent indirectly to Lise Deharme, via André Breton (who kept it). The spell’s date is given in a form partly devised from kabbalistic calculations. The phrase ‘IT’S THE ANTICHRIST’ is underlined five times. It’s not known which painter Artaud had in mind as the Antichrist.]

trans. Stephen Barber

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To Anne Manson, around 17 September 1937 (Letter, partly lost, sent from Dublin):

Get going to the Deux Magots, Woman, betray me. Tell them there that I’m in Dublin so that they can come and capture me. But warn them too that they are going to get what is coming to them. And it will be unstoppable and WITHOUT Mercy.

They need to know that I will not be coming back alone, but will have an army with me. If they believe me to be mad, megalomaniacal or maniacal, so much the worse for them. And if they believe that I am boasting, then they are imbeciles. Just tell them that for years now I’ve hated them, all of them and their political, social, moral, amoral and immoral ideas. Tell them that I consider them to be scoundrels and a set of cunts.

Just tell them that I shit on the republic, on democracy, on socialism, on communism, on Marxism, on idealism, on materialism – whether it’s dialectical materialism or not, because I shit on dialectics too, and I’m going to give you further proof of that.

I shit on the Popular Front and I shit on the Government of the Popular Alliance, I shit on the International Workingmen’s Association, in its 1st, 2nd and 3rd variants, but I also shit on the idea of a National Homeland, I shit on France and on every last one of the French – with the exception of those to whom I’ve personally issued warnings from here in Ireland and those with whom I’m in correspondence.

The French – whether they believe themselves to be on the Right or on the Left – are all a bunch of cunts who want to own things, and in that stinking café to which I’m now sending you – where they all exhausted and exasperated me with their quarrels and their little self-interests – I never saw anyone except people who wanted to own things, people stuck in one place, stuck, petrified to the point of blindness by existence, and every one of them has spread their darkness over existence. To the point of being driven crazy, I have had ENOUGH of them. Just tell them that, for me, there are no men of the left, but…

[Note: The end of the letter is lost.]

trans. Stephen Barber

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‘The body is a multitude driven wild, a kind of travelling-trunk with many compartments which can never have finished revealing what it conceals.’

trans. Stephen Barber

Histoire Vécue d’Artaud - Momo
antoin artaud
scum of the soul
ros murray

from chapter 2, pp. 46 - 49
through the digestive system

In a letter that Artaud wrote to Henri Parisot in 1945, in response to Parisot’s request to publish Artaud’s version of Carroll’s poem ‘Jabberwocky’ in his journal Les Quatre Vents, Artaud claims:

‘Je n’ai pas fait de traduction de Jabberwocky. J’ai essayé d’en traduire un fragment mais cela m’a ennuyé. Je n’ai jamais aimé ce poème qui m’a toujours paraîtu trop d’un enfantilisme affecté; j’aime les poèmes jaillis et non les langages cherchés. […] Je n’aime pas les poèmes ou les langages de surface et qui resplendissent d’heureux loisirs et des résistances de l’intellect, celui-ci s’appuyant sur l’anus mais sans y mettre de l’âme ou du cœur. L’anus est toujours terreur, et je n’admet pas qu’on perde un excrément sans se déchirer de perdre aussi son âme, et il n’y a pas d’âme dans Jabberwocky.

(I haven’t done a translation of “Jabberwocky.” I tried to translate a piece of it, but it bored me. I’ve never liked this poem, which has always seemed to me affectedly childish; I like spontaneous poems, not artificial languages. […] I don’t like surface poems or surface languages, works which speak of happy leisure hours and felicities of the intellect, the intellect in question was based on the anus, but without putting any soul into it. The anus is always terror, and I cannot accept the idea of someone losing a bit of excrement without coming painfully close to losing his soul, and there is no soul in “Jabberwocky.”)

If Artaud’s texts bear witness to the practice of deliberately disrupting the surface, tearing it, poking holes, scraping, scratching and scribbling, Carroll’s writing is of the surface in the sense that it does not penetrate the page or render it fragile, simply remaining according to Artaud, passively within the boundaries of intellectual language, without any sense of real corporeal suffering. Artaud understands Carroll’s writing practice as a form of defence, but where expulsion is not a painful process, Artaud complains that ‘Jabberwocky’ does not smell, and if all writing is shit, then it must stink, otherwise, he claims, it is the writing of a bourgeois man who can afford to eat well: ‘c’est l’œuvre d’un homme qui mangeait bien, et cela se sent dans son écrit […]’ I aime les poèmes qui puissent le marquer et non les repas bien préparés (‘it is the work of a man who ate well, and this comes through his writing. […] I like poems that reek of hunger and not of well-cooked meals’).

Delauze, in his interpretation of Artaud’s adaptations of Lewis Carroll, makes a clear distinction between the two: he reads Carroll as ‘le maître ou l’arpenteur des surfaces’ (‘master and the surveyor of surfaces’), whilst Artaud is ‘le seul à avoir été profondément absolument dans la littérature’ (‘the only one to have reached absolute depth in literature’). Delaeuze argues that it is on the surface where the entire logic of sense is to be located, disrupted only by plunging into the depths of a text. As a surface language, Artaud saw Carroll’s made-up words as a light-hearted game rather than the violent disruption of processes of articulation that he sought to express through his own glossolalia, and indeed these adaptations coincide with the very first instances of glossolalia within Artaud’s written text and letters. Rather than translating Carroll’s portmanteau words faithfully, as words containing combinations of ideas, Artaud substituted them with entirely different verbal forms.

The most radical departure from Carroll’s text occurs in the poem that Alice recites to Humpty Dumpty. In Carroll’s version this reads:

All the frumを超える
And the mome raths outgrabe.

In Artaud’s version it becomes:

Il était Roparant, et les vîqueux tarand
Allaient en gilroyant et en brimbulkdriquant
Jusque-là où la roughe a un roughe a un ragughe et
Ragughe a a ragughe:

Tous les falominaires étaient les chuts-bauts
Et les Ghôrê Ulî hâthins dans le GRÂBÜG-EÜMENT.

Here we can see an example, particularly in the third line which is added in by Artaud and bears no resemblance to the original, of how the body becomes integrated into the translation process through guttural expulsions and sounds that mobilise the mouth, as if the words were being chewed; the articulation of these sounds requires the throat (/r/), the nasal (/m/), the lips (/b/) and the teeth (/d/), but the sounds produced recall an intestinal rumbling as well as a throaty gurgling or a moan. Again, when Alice asks Dodu Mafli in a letter that Artaud wrote to Henri Parisot in 1945, in response to Parisot’s request to publish Artaud’s version of Carroll’s poem ‘Jabberwocky’ in his journal Les Quatre Vents, Artaud claims:

‘Il y a dans ce poème-ci un stade déterminatif des états par où passe le mot-matière avant de fleurir dans la pensée, et des opérations d’alchimie si l’on peut dire salutaire que tout poète au fond de sa gorge fait subir à la parole, musique, phrase, variation du temps intérieur, avant de les régurgiter en matière pour le lecteur.

(There is in this poem a stage that determines the states through which the matter-word passes before flourishing in thought, and what one might call the salvatory alchemical operations that every poet subjects his speech, music, phrases and interior tempo variations to in the bottom of his throat, before regurgitating these into matter for the reader.)

Again, poetry becomes a digestive, regurgitative process, and this is where glossolalia comes in. Kristeva reads Artaud’s glossolalia as a process of disarticulation, dissolving symbolic meaning and with it destroying the unitary subject in favour of an a-subjective process: la glossolalie ou les ‘éructions’ d’Artaud rejettent la fonction symbolique et dégagent les pulsions que cette fonction refoule pour se constituer (‘Artaud’s glossolalia and ‘eructions’ reject the symbolic function and mobilise the drives which this
Antonin Artaud, “never real and always true / not art but the ra-tée of Soudan and Dahomey” (1946)

Richard Hawkins

The “Ra-tée” of the inscription indicates something lost, as in “une occasion ratée” - a missed opportunity. But its meaning also extends to failures, worthless or hopeless endeavors and anything abandoned or aborted. I’ll leave it to the reader to decide if something “never real and always true”, when combined with “hopeless endeavors”, is connected to Artaud’s continual struggles with Catholicism and faith. Though “jamais reel…” is quite dense with figures, some of the most compelling are the set of objects in the upper right corner. There one finds four objects (the numbering is mine), relatively similar to one another and which might best be described as sharpened sticks, rods, daggers or shivs partially hidden beneath roughly rectangular coverings.

The furthest right of the assemblages seem to clearly indicate the blades and handles of two anthropomorphic knives resting beneath a blanket or cloth which, to my mind, is the closest this drawing comes to portraying artefacts – specifically bocio - from the Dahomey-Benin of the inscription.

None of the current literature in English on Artaud contain reference to the author’s interest in Benin and no mention of voudon other than his experience in Cuba with a “sorcerer”. And while there’s no evidence that the objects portrayed in “jamais reel…” have any basis in reality, that Artaud either saw, possessed or produced anything like the objects portrayed, it is widely known that tribal arts were important inspirations to art of the pre-war period and to Artaud’s friend Andre Breton in particular.

There are many aspects to our understanding of fetishes from Benin that Artaud might have found interesting enough to graft into his personal iconography. One translation of bocio from the Fon language is “empowered (bh) cadaver (cio)”, connecting them quite firmly to the concept behind Artaud’s own “Daughters of the Heart, Unborn”. The French term for objects such as these is gris-gris, the term Artaud himself used for the posted curses sent from Ireland. The intended purpose of the bocio within voudon culture is to protect their owners from danger and to exact revenge on those who have harmed the owners, purposes to which Artaud’s gris-gris were exactly charged with and the ends to which his summoned daughters were adjured.

Within Dahomey mythology, Mawu (alternately: Maha) is a creator goddess, associated with the sun and moon and in some myths, she is the twin sister-wife of the male god Lisa, in others, both deities are aspects of the same hermaphrodite or two-spirited deity, Mawu-Lisa. Though there is nothing in the Artaud corpus that suggests a concrete connection to African artefacts, many aspects of the hermaphroditic symbolism similar to that of Mawu-Lisa occur in more than a few Artaud’s writings (quite frequently in “Helio-gabalus”, for example) but also used to describe the god located within the peyote plant in “Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara”). Incorporating these ideas I propose an interpretation of bocio #4: that is composed of 2 anthropomorphized daggers colored pink and blue, cultural codes for boy and girl. Somewhere between the rustic handles and the malicious blades though, underneath the presumably conjugal covers, the daggers have switched their gendered color attributions to make what seems to be the pairing of two contrasting/complimentary duo-sexed objects.

It also seems that the knives are to be understood as whole objects rather than collections of parts that have been/are being rearranged under their coverings. I believe the brown and blue spikes of figures #1 and #2 can be understood in the same way: as whole objects which, in passing underneath their covering layers, have switched positions from right to left and left to right.

Within the depicted scale of handheld knives, the covering layer can be seen as a piece of fabric no bigger than a washcloth but possibly thicker than a handkerchief: dough, felt, skin or hide. There is an indication that the layer is malleable since it somewhat conforms to the shapes underneath and casts potential powers within these medicine kits. The magic, in other words, is not in what you can see but in what you are not allowed to see. You can think a magician’s assistant here, sawn in half and smiling at one end while wriggling her toes out the other.

In keeping within Artaud’s interests, one might also think of how tribes of North America (Taramara included) carried around the tools for their ritual magic in medicine bags: literally decorated pouches of animal hide containing feathers, bones, tobacco and herbs; anything needed or that would be necessary for rituals of blessing, healing, protection or tribute. The medicine bag or roll is not only the handy carrying case for magical objects but is also an integral and equally sacred binder, magical in itself and holding together ritual objects which might otherwise lose their power if separated. The potential powers within these medicine kits was also understood to bring serious consequences if seen by an enemy or handled by a non-initiate.

In a similar manner, the bocio of Benin are combinations of discrete objects – usually carved wooden figures or figurally-handled knives – and it is this binding together of whole objects that harnesses and compels their supernatural powers (see Timothy Insoll, “Material Explorations in African Archaeology, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015). The act of being magically bound makes it seem rather conspicuous that the four objects in Artaud’s drawing are meant to serve as the ra-tée of the inscription. And certainly the author’s search in Mexico for an alternate and “unpolluted” form of monotheism as well as his journey to Ireland in possession of a sacred Christian object (only to find himself firing off un holy curses to distant friends) all reveal urgent needs and desires to believe.

But for Artaud, belief simultaneously exposes and condemns the magically trans-formative effects of divine workings – whether by peyote shamans, African voudon priests or Christian church relics – on the souls of modern men.
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Writing of any genre, form or length—(non-)fiction, poetry, play, letter, novel, story, manifesto etc.—will be accepted as long as its author (or authors if collectively written) remains nameless and individuality collectively produced. As a state of being or identity, anonymity differs from pseudo-anonymity, in that the latter employs a particular signature, while the former does not, as anonymity is always anonymous, always the same decontextualisation. This suggests different modes of dissemblance in relation to time and circumstance where an author/author collectively reveals themselves or are revealed by others for a future readership as opposed to those who don’t and to those who are not.

Publication No 1 - January 2016
Pierre Guyotat
Pierre Guyotat: Revolutions d’Abravations
Published by Vauxhall&Company, 2016
Softback, 74pp, 210 x 165 cm
Numbered edition of 500
ISBN 978-0-9928355-2-1
£12.00 GBP
From his first books of the 1960s — such as Temps for Five Hundred Thousand Soldiers and Eden, Eden, Eden — to his recent books such as Crome (2006), Pierre Guyotat’s seminal work has deeply marked and transformed that of innumerable artists and writers in many countries beyond France itself. With its focus extending from his novels to his work in film, art and performance, this illuminating collection of seven texts — drawn from encounters and conversations with Pierre Guyotat over a period of close to thirty years — explores his driving preoccupations and experiments, with corporeality and vision, conflict and warfare, sex and the entity of language, activism and revolution, hallucination and abruption.

Publication No 2 - December 2014
René (Colette Thomas)
The Testament of the dead Daughter
Translated by Paul Buck and Catherine Pett
Published by Vauxhall&Company 2014
174pp, 190 x 125 mm
Numbered edition of 250
ISBN 978-0-9928355-1-4
£19.50 GBP
An implicit poetry that is sometimes replaced by an explicit poetry: those moments when, above the magna only disturbed by the quest for fulfillment led by each protagonist, human words appear, all the more moving for their very essence to emerge — as if by miracle — from a layer of existence in which all words have been abolished.

I am not sure that the world might not be threatened by his death. When he was alive there remained still some... he used to say, I defy you to glimpse it again in the fog. When solitude increases there are only ruins left all around.

About the Contributors