Broken Speech and Corporeal (Re)soundings: Repudiations of Conventional Language and the 20th Century Avant-garde

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Abstract

This thesis examines the work of six artists – Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Antonin Artaud, Isidore Isou, Marina Abramović, John Cage, and Åke Hodell – to explore how the non-syntactical language used in their art operates in relation to the turmoil of the wartime and post-war time contexts in which they lived. Through close readings of their work, this thesis situates the six artists' responses to their experiences of wartime and post-war time conflict and devastation as innovative, nonacquiescent, and most importantly as repudiations of conventional language. I argue that the alternative language used by these artists should not be dismissed as nonsensical but rather understood as an expansion of their critical ability to reflect and destabilise established yet defective ways of being in post-war societies. Despite the diversity of the artworks and the range of non-syntactical writings and vocal emissions from corporeal emotive cries to repetitious machine-like utterances, I argue that they are unified by a recurring motivation: an attempt to disrupt a conventional language that both facilitated and was subsequently imbued with the false logic and phoney reason of war. Inspired by the disruptive force of the works explored, this thesis challenges the rationalism of traditional art histories to offer an alternative to the calcifying nature of genealogies: an explication of corresponding yet distinct moments of syntactical disruption that are imbued with a radical potential and are still up for revision.

Introduction

> The association of war, and perhaps particularly World War I, with patriotic reactionism has made it anathema for scholars of avant-gardism to acknowledge the obvious links between the particular critical language of the avantgardes of this period and the pressures and tensions stemming from the war.[1]

Despite the two most noteworthy historical periods of self-evident, wilful endeavour by artists and poets to derange and disrupt conventional language being after the World Wars of the twentieth century – most notably by the Dadaists of the 1910s and 1920s who 'dispensed altogether with semantic units' and the avant-garde artists and sound poets of the 1950s who 'abandoned the word altogether' – there has been very little scholarly work done on the relationship between art and poetry that disrupts convention language and war.[2] Amelia Jones's statement raises a further question: what form should the 'critical language of the avantgardes' working in the aftermath of earth-shattering conflicts and, therefore, feeling the 'pressures and tensions' of war take if a defining objective of their art was an effort to 'shatter traditional schemes of grammar, form, and meaning'?[3]

This thesis is not an attempt to homogenise the range of reasons that the six artists who are the subjects of the chapters – Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Antonin Artaud, Isidore Isou, Marina Abramović, John Cage, Åke Hodell – had for turning to a non-syntactical language, but to explore how their vocal utterances, sounds and emissions operate in relation to both the art-historical and social-historical moments in which they made their art. Through a series of close readings I argue that the non-syntactical language used by the artists of this thesis should not be dismissed as nonsensical but rather understood as an expansion of their critical ability to reflect and destabilise conventional and defective ways of being in post-war societies. I have chosen to write about the six primary artists not because I believe their experiences of wartime and post-war time to be more traumatising than the countless artists who had firsthand experience of the earth-

[1] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004, p. 39

[2] Nancy Perloff. 'Sound Poetry and the Musical Avant-Garde: A Musicologist's Perspective'. *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound.* Ed. Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009, pp. 3, 8

[3] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism.* p. 39; Linda Lappin. 'Dada Queen in the Bad Boys' Club: Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven'. *Southwest Review*. 89:2, 2004, pp. 307-319 (313)

shattering conflicts, many of whom are not mentioned here, but because their response to the devastation was innovative and non-compliant, and most importantly manifested, at least in part, as a repudiation of conventional language. Despite the diversity of the artworks, and the range of non-syntactical vocal emissions from corporeal emotive cries to repetitious machine-like utterances, they are unified by a recurring motivation: an attempt to disrupt a language that both facilitated and was subsequently imbued with the false logic and flawed reason of war. This is not to suggest that the artists' relative positions on war were analogous, for example Artaud's equivocal and complicated relationship to war contrasts markedly to Hodell's explicit pacificism and anti-militarism; however, there is between the artists a notable shared disdain for prevailing nationalistic mainstream politics and the language which maintains it. This thesis shows that, much like the stammer of Virginia Woolf's character Septimus Smith which 'interrupts the tanklike momentum of the heroic social script', the six artists' disruption of conventional language not only conveys the difficulty in communication when signification – once thought to be so stable – had been shaken from the words that previously carried it by the shocking violence of the world wars, but also short circuits the language used by the military industrial complex in order to 'trip the marching feet of the syntactical army'.[4] In a conversation with Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze claimed that in order to overcome dominant controlling forces people 'must hijack speech' by creating 'vacuoles of noncommunication' which act as 'circuit breakers'.[5] This idea informs the close readings of the thesis, particularly Cage and Hodell's acts of non-syntactical 'demilitarisation'.[6]

Although the thesis is comprised of five discrete chapters of which the close reading of the works of six primary artists is the foundation (unlike the other chapters of this thesis, the fourth chapter explores the work of two artists in relation to each other), the artist who is the focus of the first chapter, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (who will be called The Baroness hereafter) can be considered as the central figure of the project. Her sound poem 'Klink—Hratzvenga (Deathwail)', which she wrote in response to her husband

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[4] Cristine Froula. '*Mrs. Dalloway's* Postwar Elegy: Women, War, and the Art of Mourning'. *Modernism/Modernity*. 9:1, 2002, pp. 125-163 (153-154); Raymond Blake Stricklin. '"I Have Nothing to Say": John Cage, Biopower, and the Demilitarization of Language'. *Journal of Modern Literature*. 43:3, 2020, pp. 98-115 (102

[5] Gilles Deleuze. 'Control and Becoming' *Negotiations:1972-1990. 1990*. trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 175

[6] John Cage. 'Empty Words'. *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvère Lotringer. 3:2, 1978, pp.165-175 (165)

Leopold's war-related suicide, has been described by biographer Irene Gammel as 'a mourning cry for a generation that survived World War I'.[7] Written in a confrontational corporeal language that points to the deficiencies of conventional communication, it proffers a new way to give voice to the incomprehensible or unspeakable to those 'predisposed to listen in a certain way'.[8] The complex relationship between the shocking language of her art and poetry and the shocking violence of World War I demands analysis that functions as a foundation from which later disruptive artworks can be explored.

As Linda Lappin remarks upon looking at a rare photograph of The Baroness (Fig. 1), 'this grotesque woman warrior, whose costume is intended as a protest against the First World War, is Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven. Poet, painter, sculptor, and above all, performance artist, The Baroness flits (and at times streaks naked) through the memoirs, correspondence, and iconography of many artists and writers of the period.'[9] I argue that the life-as-art practice of the Baroness – who fittingly haunts the subsequent chapters of the thesis – resonates in the work of many artists and writers that proceeded her.[10] As Benjamin observes, '[d]oesn't a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent ones?'[11] The idea that the echo of The Baroness's voice pervades later similar works of is perhaps most clearly given expression by the visual artist Carolee Schneemann. During a performance where she reads some of The Baroness's writing more than forty years after her tragic death, Schneeman introduced herself to the audience *as* The Baroness, indicating a literal embodiment of her artistic forebearer.[12]

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[7] Irene Gammel, and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl—': The Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven's Sound Poetry.' Modernism/Modernity. 18.2. 2011, pp. 255–271 (257)

[8] Ella Finer. 'Feminism and Sound'. *Sound and Literature.* ed. Anna Snaith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 317-318

[9] Linda Lappin. 'Dada Queen'. p. 308

[10] 'Life-as-art' is a term I will use to describe The Baroness's practice, which confronted and traversed such rationalising and restricting boundaries as those between the spaces for performance and the realm of the everyday, art objects and detritus, and poetic and quotidian language, as I will explore later. It is also a term that was prompted by James Harding argument that 'it is only when her performative transformation of everyday experience is taken into account that the full scope of von Freytag-Loringhoven's work emerges and that the radical social challenge that that work poses begins to take shape'.
James M. Harding. Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012, p. 65

[11] Walter Benjamin. 'On the Concept of History'. p. 391

[12] James M. Harding. *Cutting Performances*. p. 22

Yet there is another dimension to the striking ways in which The Baroness's disruptive 'nonacquiescence', to use a wonderfully appropriate term of Lappin's, echoed and resonated in both similar artworks of the twentieth century and moments of political feminist resistance such as the keening anti-nuclear war protesters of Greenham Common fifty years after her death. As Julia Kristeva argues, for 'those who came to feminism after May 1968', who would be many of the Greenham Common protesters, the logic of 'linear temporality has been almost totally refused', in order to rejoin, 'on the one hand, the archaic (mythical) memory and, on the other, the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements'.[13] Anna Feigenbaum has argued that one notable way this refusal has manifested is in the 'patchworked narratives' that 'rose out of women's lost histories and resonated throughout Greenham's broad support network.' [14] Unlike Schneeman, the Greenham Common protesters did not namecheck The Baroness, yet it is not an act of wilful revisionism to hear echoes of The Baroness's 'Deathwail' in the sounds of their keening, nor to hear other historical 'lamentations for the dead' in 'Deathwail'.[15] As Ella Finer observes, 'many sounds characterised as female overlap and repeat again through time: for example, the keening women in Celtic Irish folklore resounding again in the bodies of the Greenham Common women, who walked and wailed in protest through Parliament Square in 1984'.[16]

Francesca Chiappini has argued that The Baroness disrupted 'traditional verbal language' after coming to the realisation that it 'cannot voice the deeply sensorial and performative dimension of reality'.[17] Chiappini disagrees, however, with Gammel's assertion that The Baroness's wilful rupture of both written and verbal communication resulted in a 'language of trauma', arguing instead that she ruptured conventional 'American language' in order to 'fiercely' protest 'against consumerism and commodities, against the exploitation involved in such dynamics and against the deriving impoverishment of art and aesthetics.'[18] These divergent positions on the function of The Baroness's innovative corporeal language

[13] Julia Kristeva. 'Women's Time'. *Signs*. 7:1 1981, pp. 13-35 (19-20)
[14] Anna Feigenbaum, '"Now I'm a Happy Dyke!": Creating Collective Identity and Queer Community in Greenham Women's Songs'. *Journal of Popular Music Studies*. 22:4, 2010, pp. 367–88 (p. 374).
[15] Oxford English Dictionary, 'keen (v.2)'. *OED.* https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5852446318. [accessed 2nd April 2025]
[16] Ella Finer. 'Feminism and Sound'. p. 316
[17] Francesca Chiappini. 'Spelling Errors as a Cry of Protest: The Idiosyncratic Language of The Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven'. *Altre Modernità*. 1:1, 2017, pp. 190-203 (201)
[18] Francesca Chiappini. 'Spelling Errors as a Cry of Protest'. pp. 200-201; Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, p. 359

point towards why she is the central figure of this work: her open-ended, radical and at times baffling, life-as-art practice points not only to the complexities and contradictions of the historical context in which she was making art, but also towards future moments of turmoil and upheaval. The Baroness remarked that her idiosyncratic form of verbal and written communication was an attempt to 'seek as best I may to give artistic expression, to show fourth something of the thoughts within me […] always that raging protest within me against the conventional'.[19] The myriad incitements for The Baroness's 'raging protest' is explored in the chapter.[20]

Chapter 2 focuses on the work of French dramatist, actor, writer and artist Antonin Artaud. It explores his non-syntactical utterances, primarily the guttural screams of his 1947 masterpiece, the radio play *To Have Done with The Judgement of god* [Pour en Finir avec le Jugement de dieu], a work which Gilles Deleuze claimed 'elevated scream-breaths to the state of language', in relation to Artaud's legacy, his body, and his experience of war-related trauma. [21] Much like The Baroness, Artaud cultivated an idiosyncratic and often shocking writing style that enacted a derangement of conventional language while contending with being dismissed as irrational and subsequently marginalised during his lifetime. Unlike The Baroness, Artaud has been retrospectively canonised and, furthermore, he has been championed as one of the most important and influential avant-garde figures of the twentieth century. In addition to inspiring a generation of disaffected and rebellious post-war North American artists who understood his writing as a means to 'a fuller understanding of the ways in which they engaged in social and philosophical protest by means of material experimentation', his work and his life have been the focus of intellectual studies for some of the most influential thinkers of the last hundred years, such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Julia Kristeva, Susan Sontag, Maurice Blanchot and Michel Foucault.[22] As Ros Murray makes clear, for Artaud there 'was not a straightforward

[19] Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven quoted in 'Refugee Baroness Poses as a Model: Woman Who Puzzled New York Art School Students Reveals Her Identity'. *New York Times.* December 5, 1915, p. 13
[20] Ibid
[21] Gilles Deleuze. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. trans Daniel W. Smith. London: Continuum, 2008, p. 79
[22] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces: Modern Art After Artaud.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020 p. 103
Some artists who have explicitly declared Artaud to have been an inspiration are Nancy Spiro, Allen Ginsberg, Wallace Berman, Bruce Connor and, in a further link to The Baroness, Carolee Schneeman.
For a detailed exploration of how his work galvanised a generation of radical artists see: *Lucy Bradnock. No More Masterpieces: Modern Art After Artaud. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020*

distinction between language and sensation', a position that influenced his 'creation of a corporeal language which emphasises the materiality of the body'.[23] The scream was not only Artaud's 'supreme weapon in disabling and splintering language and fixed representations of any kind', but also, as Jay Murphy argues, 'it is the scream that captures all the body's sensation at a precise moment.'[24]

Artaud's relationship to his body and the physical sensations he felt was complex and partly shaped by his experience of being confined in asylums.[25] He would spend three years institutionalised (albeit with a break of two to three months when he was enlisted into the army only to be diagnosed with war neurosis) during World War I and was confined in asylums for the entirety of World War II (1937 to 1946), including three years at Rodez under the watch of Dr Gaston Fredière, who administered him fifty two rounds of electro-shock. Artaud would describe his treatment in the asylums he was confined in as 'the war that is being waged on me' ['la guerre qu'on me fait à moi'].[26] He was, therefore, a sufferer and survivor of war neurosis who the vast majority of the two world wars in 'horrific psychiatric confinement', both in asylums in Vichy France and Rodez, which he left in 1946 to write his masterpiece, which, at least initially, is an attack on American militarism and the atomic war threatened by America and Russia.[27] He also, however, used the language of war favourably to describe the radical potential of his theatre and even wrote a letter of ambiguous intentions to Adolf Hitler.[28] The complexity of Artaud's relationship to war informs the close readings of his non-syntactical vocal sounds in the chapter, particularly in relation to why, as Michel Piersson argues, Artaud's writing during his stay at the 'Rodez asylum and after, was [undertaken] precisely to deny the fate of linguistic determinacy and

[23] Ros Murray. *Antonin Artaud: The Scum of the Soul.* New York: Palgrave Macmillon, 2014, p. 18, 25
[24] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. *Deleuze Studies.* 10:2, 2016, pp. 140-161 (153)
[25] While some attempts to read Artaud's creative output against the biographical detail of his life are over simplistic, to ignore the correlation would be misleading, as Artaud himself declared, his stay at Rodez was experienced as 'the prolongation and extension of my idea of the Theatre of Cruelty in reality'.
Antonin Artaud quoted in Jean-Paul Jacot. 'Jonction, disjonction: les fragments glossolaliques d'Artaud'. Littérature. trans. Laura Wetherington. 103:1, 1996, pp. 61-72 (64)
[26] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres*. ed. by Evelyn Grossman, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004, p. 595
[27] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. p. 141
[28] The letter reads: 'To Adolf Hitler, in memory of the Romanische café in Berlin one afternoon in May of '32, and because I pray God give you the grace to remember all the wonders by which HE has GRATIFIED (RESUSCITATED) YOUR HEART, this very day, Kudar dayro Zarish Ankkara Thabi. Antonin Artaud, 3 December 1943'.
Antonin Artaud. Selected Writings. p. 644

to try and justify the cry, the rhythm, the glossolalia, and to present them as another way of making sense.'[29]

Chapter 3 explores the work of poet, filmmaker, playwright and proponent of Jewish mysticism Isidore Isou, and primarily, although not exclusively, the self-styled 'cinematic anti-grammar' of his film *Venom and Eternity* [*Traité de bave et d'éternité*] (1951).[30] Somewhat remarkably, much like Artaud, Isou experienced being confined at Rodez under Fredière, which forged a connection between the two that was not lost on Isou; in 1969, he distributed leaflets that condemned the doctor as a 'Nazi' and the 'persecutor of the poets Antonin Artaud and Isidore Isou'.[31] As Sylvere Lotringer reveals, the leaflet 'accused the Rodez psychiatrist of having tortured Isou, thereby making him a reincarnated Saint-Artaud, and restoring Artaud's ghost to the revolutionary stage.'[32]

Isou was born in the Romanian city Botoșani in 1925 and spent the first twenty years of his life in the country of his birth, enduring but ultimately surviving the violent anti-Jewish riots that plagued Romania throughout World War II – an estimated three hundred thousand Romanian Jewish People would be murdered during the conflict – and the pogrom of January 1941. Despite attempting to flee for Paris a number of times during the War, Isou did not settle in the city until August 1945. Once in France Isou established the avant-garde movement Lettrism, and as the sole Lettrist developed an iconoclastic and radical art practice, and 'not only opposed the rationalism of Western thought, which had culminated in the Jewish apocalypse of the Second World War, but also aimed to shatter the rational discourse imbedded in the Enlightenment project.'[33] Isou was soon joined by other members, including Maurice Lemaître whose paint marks and scratches on the celluloid of *Venom and Eternity* are explored in this chapter in relation to Isou's Lettrist sound poetry that soundtracks the film. The Lettrists 'were driven by the idea of separating language from its semantic, communicative, and social value', not only to cause a rupture in a language imbued with what they considered to be the phoney rationalism of the Enlightenment but

[29] Michel Pierssens. 'Écrire en Langues: La Linguistique d'Artaud'. *Languages*. 91:1, 1988, pp. 95-117 (112)
[30] Isidore Isou. *Oeuvres de spectacle.* p. 29
[31] Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. trans. Joanna Spinks. Minneapolis: Univocal, 2015, pp. 143
[32] Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. pp. 141-142
[33] Andrew Hussey. 'From Bucharest to the Beat Hotel: Isidore Isou and the Lettrist Revolution on the Left Bank'. *Esprit Créateur*. 58:4, 2018, pp. 76-88 (85)

also to give rise to a myriad new phonetic associations.[34] The chapter explores the Lettrist poetry of proliferating associations– almost imposable to parse and unpronounceable in places – in relation to the dialectical knot between the rational and irrational which pervaded French post-war politics. It also explores Isou's understanding that his new language was not devoid of meaning but rather that meaning was deferred, awaiting the right context in order to manifest.[35]

The fourth chapter focuses on the work of two artists – avant-garde composer and music theorist John Cage and Serbian conceptual artist Marina Abramović – in relation to ideas presented at the conference *Schizo-Culture: A Revolution in Desire* which was organised by Lotringer and held at Columbia University, New York in 1975. Cage performed his composition *Empty Words* (1973-1974) at the conference with Deleuze accompanying him on stage. Three years prior to the conference the French philosopher had heralded Cage as a schizorevolutionary in the influential book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), which he co-authored with collaborator and fellow conference participant, Guattari.[36] Cage also saw revolutionary potential in his work, claiming that *Empty Words* was his 'most sustained and elaborate move toward the demilitarization of language'.[37] Cage's concept of demilitarisation is founded on a fairly straightforward formulation: if, as he believed, the main purpose of syntactical structure is to manage and administrate information, then syntax is responsible for, amongst other things, the 'arrangement of the army', therefore a 'language free of syntax' equates to an act of demilitarisation.[38] The chapter enacts a close reading of *Empty Words* and argues that despite the sustained and striking syntactical breakdown, too many preestablished codes remain, even once conventional language has been fully degraded, in order for it to be a

[34] Jeff Barda. ''Poetics of 'Ums and Ahs' in France from Lettrism to the Present'**.** *French Studies*. 78: 2, 2024, pp. 266–283 (271)
[35] Isidore Isou. *Oeuvres de Spectacle*. p. 129
[36] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. trans.* Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 p. 371
Deleuze and Guattari's 'schizorevolutionary' is an artist that works from an 'unfixed position' […] knowing nothing of meanings and aims', until they have reached 'the land of the unknown, where [they] no longer belong to any time, any milieu, any school.'
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Anti-Oedipus. p. 88, 270
[37] John Cage on *Empty Words* and the demilitarization of language, in a radio interview, August 8, 1974'. https://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/cage-radio.html [accessed 24th November 2023]
[38] John Cage. 'Empty Words'. p. 165

truly radical artwork, and points to another that better enacts the arguments, contradictions, and intentions of the conference: Abramović's *Freeing the Voice* (1975).

Abramović first performed the piece, which consisted of her lying on her back screaming until she loses the capacity to do so, in Belgrade the same year of the Schizo-culture conference. *Freeing the Voice* is not as explicitly antimilitaristic as Cage's work, or some of her own later works for that matter, however this chapter argues that by challenging and, to use a term that Deleuze uses for the first time at the conference, deterritorialising established codes, it performs a more profound act of demilitarisation. Despite only being three years into her art practice, Abramović had already performed an impressive number of artworks that, as Maureen Tucker argues, offered 'new dimensions in ongoing inquiries into the dynamics of the gaze, the body, and the psyche'. [39] Her principal tool for making these inquiries was striking moments of transgression, which resulted in unsettling challenges to the rational. Close reading *Freeing the Voice* against the ideas of the Schizo-culture participants reveals that the work challenges rationality twofold: through being a vocal performance that disrupts conventional verbal communication and by complicating and resisting the categories inherent in the established discursive frameworks used to perceive and conceptualise works of art and the bodies that make it.

The fifth and final chapter focuses on Swedish artist and poet and 'fervent antimilitarist' Åke Hodell.[40] Of all of the artists that feature in this thesis it is Hodell whose art is most explicitly anti-war. This is partly down to Hodell's traumatic experience of being a soldier in the Swedish military during World War II – he would crash his plane and sustain injuries that it took almost two years recover from, two years in which he not only became an anti-militarist but also a 'radical pacifist' – but also the choice of language that he would break down: the primary material for his text-sound experiments would be the language of the military.[41] The chapter argues that it was not only Hodell's literal take on demilitarisation that takes the project further than Cage, but also the incorporation of critiques of nationalism, masculine subjectivity and the technological warfare – which could

[39] Maureen Turim. 'The Violence of Desire in Avant-garde Films'. *Women and Experimental Filmmaking.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005, p. 70
[40] Fred Anderson. 'Åke Hodell's Kerberos – A Case Study'. A *Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975.* ed. Geert Buelens. Leiden: BRILL, 2016, p. 142
[41] Åke Hodell. *Marathon Poet*. trans. Fia Backström. New York: Ugly Duckling Press, 2020, *The Marathon Poet*. p. 56

veer from humorous to devastating – into his non-syntactical sound pieces. In order to make this argument there are close readings of four of Hodell's artworks: *Lågsniff* (1963), *CA 36715 (J)* (1966), *igevär* (1963), *and General Bussig* (1964). In addition to these close readings the chapter makes an extended comparison between the work of one of the twentieth century's most infamous practitioner of sound poetry and founder of the bellicose avant-garde movement Futurism in 1909, Filippo Marinetti. Through his staunch Italian nationalism, unqualified optimism concerning technological developments and unabashed championing of militarism, Marinetti can be seen as a counterpoint to the anti-militaristic and anti-nationalistic Hodell. The chapter explores why Hodell's political position – which is ultimately compassionate and humane – manifests in art that, on initial viewing, appears to be devoid of humanity, especially when compared to the dynamic and expressive works of Marinetti's that showcase his new style 'words in freedom' [parole in libertà].[42]

Interdisciplinarity is a key guiding approach to the thesis: video art, sound art, poetry, painting, the sounds of protest, sculpture and performance art all feature. The initial research conducted was into the lives and work of the two lesser-known artists of the thesis, Hodell and The Baroness; indeed, the thesis was originally only going to examine the work of artists who had not yet been canonised or at least had been subjected to a considerable amount of theorisation. This decision was made in order to attempt to avoid proliferating or propagating a distorted history of the twentieth century avant-garde which moves from one canonised 'genius' to the next. Yet, analysing the art of Hodell and the Baroness encouraged comparisons with better known artists such as Artaud, Marinetti, Schwitters and Cage: many aspects of the works of these artists that had been championed – both during their lifetime and retrospectively – were present in the works of The Baroness and Hodell, and furthermore they predated the canonised artists. This observation posed a question that informed both the multidisciplinary form and content of the thesis: why are some artists canonised while others – who on close inspection appear to be as innovative and adept as their better-known peers – are largely forgotten? In order to attempt to consider this question I not only conducted a series of critical close readings but also analysed a wide range of secondary sources: art historical texts, critical theory, philosophy,

[42] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *Critical Writings*. ed. G. Berghaus, trans. D. Thompson. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006, pp. 113

journalism, audience responses, reviews and fiction, crucially both from the historical moment that the art was produced and from the twenty first century.

Although the primary focus of the first chapter, *Deathwail*, is one of the oldest works of art studied in this thesis, the artworks do not appear chronologically, rather the sequencing of close readings is arranged in terms of theme. This choice was made in order to demonstrate that while each individual artist studied in the thesis was, of course, historically specific, they grappled with analogous war-related concerns that suddenly surfaced, or resurfaced, as vitally pressing. Two examples of instances where the thematic supersedes a strict chronology: the striking similarity in contemporaneous responses to The Baroness's *Deathwail* of 1918 and the keening of the Greenham Common protesters in the first half of the 1980s, and that it became painstakingly clear to the mid-twentieth century avant-gardists that many of the questions that their artistic forbearers identified in the aftermath of World War I remained unanswered. This thesis attempts to highlight, rather than resolve, the complexities inherent in the relationship artists have with one another and to the historical context in which they were working, in order to avoid producing unproductive and superficial arguments and lineages. It therefore offers an alternative way of appraising art history to the chronology of calcified historical events, which is fitting given that the subject matter is non-syntactical language in relation to war trauma. As Walter Benjamin observes, it is at moments of upheaval that challenges to the dominant empirical method of registering time – or what Benjamin terms 'homogenous, empty time' – emerge:[43]

> calendars do not measure time the way clocks do; they are monuments of a historical consciousness of which not the slightest trace has been apparent in Europe, it would seem, for the past hundred years. In the July Revolution an incident occurred in which this consciousness came into its own. On the first evening of fighting, it so happened that the dials on clocktowers were being fired at simultaneously and independently from several locations in Paris.[44]

[43] Walter Benjamin. 'On the Concept of History'. Selected Writings Volume 4, Part 2 1931-1934. ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 395
It was not just Benjamin that theorised about alternative ways of understanding and registering time. As Esther Leslie reveals, two of the most influential thinkers of the 19th and 20th Centuries had similar concerns: 'Both Marx and Freud deny strict linearity or dull chronology. Their thought is about how thinking is not present inertly with itself. Both set in motion an understanding of the ways in which the action of the past works on the present and the present works on the past'.
Ester Leslie. Derelicts: Thought Worms from The Wreckage. London: Unkant Publishers, 2013, p. iv
[44] Walter Benjamin. 'On the Concept of History'. p. 395

While the artists who are the subjects of this thesis do not make such explicit denunciations of the concept of a strictly linear time as the clock-shooting revolutionaries of 1830, there are indications that they wished to challenge it. Examples include Isou's understanding that his Lettrist poetry 'stuttered towards a future language' that would only reveal its obscured meanings in a 'messianic moment', Abramović's comparable assertion that her works had layers of meaning that slowly reveal themselves only as they are considered from different future historical vantage points, and Artaud's claim that he in fact invented the language that Lewis Carroll 'plagiarised' for his poem *Jabberwocky*, some twenty five years before the French dramatist's birth.[45]

Amelia Jones identified The Baroness as an artist through which new ways of thinking about the history of art can arise. As she makes clear in her influential book *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (2004), in which she gives a history of New York Dada reinterpreted through the lens of The Baroness, she turned to the artist with the intention of:

> challenging the very rationalism of art history itself (its tendency to reduce complexity to simple genealogies of radicalism founded by male artists) by using The Baroness's disruptive, irrational example as a way of looking at the canonical works from a different, resolutely feminist point of view.[46]

This thesis also uses The Baroness's disruptive force to challenge the 'rationalism of art history' but spans a much wider time frame to that of Jones's study.[47] This is not done in an attempt to posit a diverging art history to the conventionally male-centric, critically undeveloped one that Jones takes aim at, but rather an explication of corresponding yet distinct moments of syntactical disruption that are imbued with a radical potential and are still up for revision. In this sense the thesis is influenced by the work of art historians and theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Peter Bürger, Renato Poggioli and Rosalind E. Krauss, especially her book *Formless: A User's Guide* (1997), co-authored with Yve-Alain Bois in

[45] Isidore Isou. *Oeuvres de Spectacle*. *Traité de Baveet d'Eternité, 1951; La Marche des Jongleurs, 1954; Apologie d'Isidore Isou, 1954*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 129; Marina Abramović. *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*. New York: Crown Archetype, 2016, pp. 79-80; Linda Lappin. 'Dada Queen'. p. 317
[46] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism*. pp. 12-13. New York Dada is a retrospectively named art movement, however for the purpose of this thesis it is one that I will use.
[47] Ibid

which they chart the persistence of formless artworks that have repeatedly been suppressed by conventional histories of art. It is also hard to overestimate the influence that Lucy Bradnock's text *No More Masterpieces: Modern Art After Artaud* (2020) had on the shaping of this project, particularly her inspiring assertion that when 'attempting to read radical literature from a critical position' the art historian must aim for a 'mode of history writing that avoids a teleological historical narrative of origin, lineage, influence, and progress.'[48]

[48] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces.* p. 21

The Baroness

Shortly after President Woodrow Wilson declared that the U.S.A. was at war with Germany in April 1917, German-born artist and poet Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven was arrested on suspicion of being a spy and imprisoned for three weeks in Connecticut, where she had travelled to from New York.[49] This was not the first war-related trauma that The Baroness had endured. Three years before her experience of being a prisoner of war, The Baroness's husband Leopold Karl Friedrich Baron von Freytag-Loringhoven, who had fled to America after a dishonourable discharge from the Prussian military where he had served as an officer, saw the start of World War I as opportunity to redeem himself, and so, after stealing the Broness's meagre savings, enlisted as a volunteer in the German army and travelled to Europe.[50] He would never see his wife again and would ultimately die of suicide after four years of being a prisoner of war and one year after her own period of incarceration; a tragedy that would inspire her most remarkable work that uses non-linguistic vocal sounds, 'Klink—Hratzvenga (Deathwail)', of which there will be an in depth close-reading later in this chapter.[51] The circumstances of Leopold's sudden departure has caused Irene Gammel, to label her as 'one of the earliest war brides'.[52]

Perhaps surprisingly, being abandoned in a new city (she had moved to New York with Leopold in the summer of 1913, less than a year before his desertion) would be a major catalyst for a shocking and radical artistic life-as-art practice that, despite often resulting in works and performances that were mocking and critical of her peers, would be a constant inspiration for a generation of New York-based artists. One of the most striking aspects of The Baroness's life-as-art practice was what art historian Linda Lappin has termed her 'nonacquiescence', which manifests most markedly in her unwaveringly savage, yet often humorous criticality.[53] The Baroness cast her critical eye over many things, most notably, the bourgeois existence of her peers, Fordism, the patriarchy and, pertinently, World War I, the conflict that had taken her husband from her. As Gammel asserts:

[49] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa.* p. 212
[50] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa.* pp. 162-164
[51] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa.* p. 163
[52] Ibid
[53] Linda Lappin. 'Dada Queen.' p. 317

> The Baroness wasted no time mourning but plunged into her natural sphere—the metropolis. Already she was using costuming to make artistic statements that connected with her everyday context, including the war. In February 1915, German zeppelins had begun bombing Britain, focusing mostly on London; in March, Britain began to bomb German trains carrying soldiers to the front. The Baroness echoed these events on her body, parading in an aviator hat in 1915. When the young French American painter Louis Bouché (1896–1969) first met her at a Broadway subway station, she was 'wearing a French Poilu's blue trench helmet,' which was 'only one of her odd 'get-ups'.[54]

It was not only the military garments that The Baroness used for 'costuming' that evoked the battleground, but also the body which she adorned them with. Gammel has argued that her physical form – because it was foreign, because she has married Leopold (whose father, Hugo Freiherr von Freytag-Loringhoven, was a Prussian General of Infantry during WORLD WAR I and a respected war historian) and because she carried the memory of the 'trauma' and 'perpetual conflict' of her past – was seen by her peers and subsequent art historians as the 'unsettling body of Europe at war'.[55] The historical interest in the catharses of trauma appears to have influenced Gammel's biographical writings on The Baroness. The biographer claims that the artist's flamboyant artistic assault on decency was a response to the traumatic historical context in which she lived:

> The grotesqueness of Freytag-Loringhoven's self-images, as well as the intensity of her style, appropriately reflected the trauma created by the Great War, a trauma that for many artists could be countered only by retraumatizing assaults on post-Victorian belief systems, middle-class stability, and bourgeois family values.[56]

The trauma that Gammel locates in The Baroness's self-image is not straightforward: it is configured by both a collective experience and her very personal set of circumstances. The academic study of trauma (or using the term to denote a 'psychic wound'), was a relatively new phenomenon when The Baroness was making art in New York, largely pioneered by the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (specifically in the text

[54] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa.* pp. 163-165
[55] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa.* pp. 163-165, 207
[56] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa.* p. 8

he co-authored with Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895)).[57] The word trauma had different connotations before the end of the nineteenth century; as Paula A. Michaels and Christina Twomey assert, it had previously 'referred solely to physical injury.'[58] Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for the word trauma shows the first usage for it to denote a 'psychic injury' rather than a 'wound, or external bodily injury' as being from 1894, the year before Freud and Breuer's study.[59] Cathy Caruth, a leading voice in the field of contemporary trauma studies, gives her 'general definition' of trauma as the delayed 'repetitive and uncontrolled' response to an 'overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events'.[60] It is unsurprising therefore that World War I not only proliferated the number of traumatised subjects but also precipitated cultural and academic interest in the study of trauma, and how traumatic experiences were experienced and communicated. The sheer scale of death and violence of the conflict reconfigured the limits of how people conceptualised the potential magnitude of catastrophic events, and the advancements in industrial capitalism during the early twentieth century resulted in unprecedented advancements of, to use Susan Gubar's expression, the 'dehumanizing technology of death', which would cause the nature of the violence of the conflict to seem shocking and sudden in its unfamiliarity.[61] However, conceptualising the development of trauma by mapping it against the history of modern warfare produces a problematic gendered construction of the traumatic subject, as Michaels and Twomey observe:

> The story of our modern conceptualisation of trauma is typically told as a straight line from shell shock in the First World War, through combat neurosis in the Second World War, to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which psychiatrists formulated as a diagnostic category in the wake of the Vietnam War. Women are often erased

[57] In the text Freud and Breuer explore the relationship between their understanding of hysteria and trauma, both physical and psychic, through their case studies that 'seem to us to establish an analogy between the pathogenesis of common hysteria and that of the traumatic neuroses, and […] justify an extension of the concept of traumatic hysteria. In traumatic neuroses the operative cause of the illness is not the trifling physical injury but the affect of fright.' See: *Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer. 'Studies on Hysteria'. Vol. 2 of Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works. trans. J. Strachey et al. London: Hogarth, 1955, p. 4* Other pioneers of the study of hysteria and trauma are Paul Julius Möbius and Adolf Strümpell.

[58] Paula A. Michaels and Christina Twomey. 'Introduction'. *Gender and Trauma Since 1900*. ed. Paula A. Michaels and Christina Twomey. London: Bloomsbury, 2021, pp. 3-4

[59] Oxford English Dictionary. 'Trauma, n'. *OED*. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/trauma_n?tab=meaning_and_use&tl=true [accessed 21st March 2025]

[60] Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*: Twentieth Anniversary Edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016, pp. 11, 59

[61] Susan Gubar. 'This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun": World War II and the Blitz on Women'. *Behind The Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p.247

> entirely from this master narrative. Although scholars repeatedly point to the essential role feminist activists against domestic violence and sexual assault played in the formulation and acceptance of PTSD, women's place in this history is occluded in the collective consciousness by an overwhelming focus on combat veterans, almost all of whom are men.[62]

Michaels and Twomey's understanding of how a militarised account of the history of the traumatised subject silences women points to one of the myriad ways in which The Baroness's voice was occluded (other ways in which she was silenced, underappreciated and ignored will be explored in this chapter): despite being deserted at the outset of World War I, a prisoner of war and having a husband who died of suicide after being a prisoner of war himself, she does not fit the 'master narrative's' construction of somebody suffering from war trauma because she is a woman.

The gendered construction of a body traumatised by war also has repercussions in relation to the abreaction of the traumatic event, which has been understood as an important process since the inception of academic and medical inquiries into trauma. For example, in *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer posit that 'hysteria' is the result of a traumatic experience that has remained unresolved and unuttered and, therefore, advocate for the necessity of a cathartic effect that loosens the hold that the experience maintains on the subject. One such act of catharsis that the psychiatrists specify is revenge, but they also maintain that 'language serves as a substitute for action', and therefore, for the traumatised subject, 'speaking is itself the adequate reflex'.[63] Yet, they also identify issues in the ability to successfully represent the trauma through language by highlighting the differences they have experienced between communicating with somebody afflicted by physical wounds, who would 'unless he is neurotic in addition, describe them definitely and calmly' and somebody affected by psychic wounds, who, when trying to describe them:

> gives an impression of being engaged on a difficult intellectual task to which his strength is quite unequal. His features are strained and distorted as though under the influence of a distressing affect. His voice grows more shrill and he struggles to find a means of expression. He rejects any description of his pains proposed by the physician, even though it may turn out afterwards to have been unquestionably apt. He is clearly of opinion that language is too

[62] Paula A. Michaels and Christina Twomey. 'Introduction'. p. 6
[63] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer. *'Studies on Hysteria'.* p. 6

> poor to find words for his sensations and that those sensations are something unique and previously unknown.[64]

In addition to the preexisting difficulties of giving voice to trauma that Freud and Breuer locate above, World War I added further issues, such as how to use language to accurately represent the sheer magnitude of the unprecedented violence of the conflict at a time of collective trauma. Adam B. Lerner observes: 'As large numbers of individuals undergo related psychic shocks and bear witness to their experiences of mass violence, the crisis in representation facing them reverberates outward, shaping politics at multiple levels of aggregation.'[65] When read against Michaels and Twomey's argument that women's voices in the study of trauma are occluded, Lerner's point highlights a key concern facing The Baroness: trauma is not only potentially unspeakable due to a crisis of representation, but, for women who live in a social-political context where war trauma has been conceptualised as a problem that afflicts men, it is also unhearable.

Gammnel argues that The Baroness responded confrontationally to the social-political complexities of post-war USA by ultimately 'terroriz[ing] a young generation of artists' through her life-as-art corporeal practice that enacted the shock of war during a time of collective trauma', which would have intensified the construction of her by her peers as an embodiment of Europe at war.[66] However, even before the earth-shattering conflict sent shockwaves across the ocean and The Baroness had married into a family that experienced both military eminence and war-related tragedy, her American friends had come to associate her with the 'belle époque', particularly the extravagant grandeur of pre-war Europe.[67] One reason for this is perhaps The Baroness's age; when she arrived in New York in 1913 she was 39 and had already been an active member of avant-garde circles in both Berlin and Munich. The art practices of these avant-garde circles, particularly in Munich, had been characterized by an erotically-charged merging of life and art, a characteristic that The Baroness would not only carry with her in order to shape her art during her time in New York but, as Gammel has argued, one that she would transmit to other Dada artists in New

[64] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer. *'Studies on Hysteria'.* p. 78-79
[65] Adam B. Lerner. 'Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics: An Introduction'. *From the Ashes of History: Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 9
[66] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p. 207
[67] Robert Reiss. ''My Baroness': Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven'. Dada/Surrealism. 14:1. 1985, pp. 88-101 (92)

York, thus radically changing the avant-garde landscape of the city.[68] This is an example of one aspect of The Baroness's artistic practice that she had been honing long before her arrival in New York, which suddenly found a context in which it flourished as a vital force for the re-examination of art and the body in times of war and flux. Despite both the manifestly influential and radical aspects of The Baroness's art-as-life practice however, she was, until the relatively recent important work of Jones and Gammel, critically neglected, an idea that I will explore in this chapter.[69]

Amelia Jones has argued that the shocking violence of World War I shattered the 19th-century construction of normative masculinity, which was inextricably linked to the bellicose nationalism that had contributed to the start of the war in the first place.[70] What took the place of this suddenly outdated masculinity, Jones argues, was an equivocal masculinity that was compromised by its metaphorical and geographical distance from 'European ideals of proper, patriotic, heroic male behaviour', ideals that were at first inflated, and then undermined, by WORLD WAR I and its aftermath.[71] Whilst most New York-based practitioners of Dada responded to the war and the subsequent deconstruction of traditional masculinity with ambivalence – most noticeably Marcel Duchamp who was both critical of the war and the ideals that led to it, whilst simultaneously taking a 9-to-5 job in downtown New York as a secretary to a French military captain – The Baroness saw it as an opportunity to reflect and exacerbate the crumbling of widespread conventional ideals that had been both restrictive and reactionary.[72] Her approach of reflecting rather than attempting to ignore the war and its consequences is one of the major differences between The Baroness and her coterie; even one of her most devoted supporters, the influential editor and champion of Dada, Jane Heap, claimed that 'none of us consider this war a legitimate or an interesting subject for Art'.[73]

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[68] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p.174

[69] In addition to the diligent work on The Baroness by art historians such as Gammel, Lappin and Jones, there has also been Ruth Hemus's retelling of the history of Dada through the lens of women Dada artists. Photos of The Baroness also appeared at the 2022 Venice Biennale in a show titled *Seduction of the Cyborg*.
Ruth Hemus. Dada's Women. New Haven: Yale, 2009

[70] Amelia Jones. "Equivocal Masculinity: New York Dada in the Context of World War I." Art History. 25.2 (2004) pp. 162–205 (168-169)

[71] Amelia Jones. 'Equivocal Masculinity'. p. 164

[72] Amelia Jones. 'Equivocal Masculinity'. p.174

[73] Jane Heap. 'War Art'. *The Little Review*. 4:4, 1917, p. 25
The 'us' of Jane Heap's sentence appears to be either the editors of *The Little Review* or the New York avant-garde of which she was an influential member. The reason she cites for not finding World War I 'a legitimate or

On arriving in New York, The Baroness saw the contrast between American and European performance most clearly in the divergent use (or disuse, in the case of her New-York-based peers) of the body, which for her was her primary 'artistic canvas'.[74] The Baroness perceived the divergent use of the body as indicative of the – to her mind unacceptable – resistance amongst New York-based artists towards artistic performances that radically challenged conventional aesthetic expectations by blurring the boundaries of life and art.[75] The Baroness had matured as an artist as part of a coterie that wilfully transgressed preconceived notions of the gendered body, practicing what Gammel has termed 'gender-bending male feminism'.[76] While in New York, The Baroness reconvened this transgressive corporeal practice but now within a context of world war and the consequential instability it had engendered. The instability that was shocking and distressing for many also allowed for an artistic practice that critically re-examined previously accepted standards, which Gammel has argued meant that The Baroness's radical performances that were written 'of and through the body' not only allowed her to constantly recreate her artistic persona but also recreated 'modernist America'.[77]

Despite the association with progressivist modes of living, reductive preconceptions about what a woman's body that is doing art signifies still loomed large amongst New York-based Dada artists, and depressingly yet unsurprisingly, The Baroness endured both physical violence and the violence of silencing marginalisation. I will argue that this violence was and is a reactionary response to The Baroness's innovative corporeal performances, which were no longer simply one creative aspect of the output of an avant-garde circle like when she was an artist in Munich, but a radical tool used to try to recreate modernist America by reflecting and challenging the damage that pre-war masculinity had caused, the limitations it had imposed on the body of a woman making art, and to confront those resistant to change.

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an interesting subject for Art' is that there was a lack of emotional attachment to the conflict amongst her peers. Of course there were many artists, editors and writers working when Heap made this declaration for whom the war was of great interest, even a foundational influence, such was the case for Marinetti and his fellow Futurists for example. See *Selena Daly. Italian Futurism and the First World War. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016.*

[74] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Suzanne Zelazo and Irene Gammel. *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011, p.12

[75] Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick. 'Reconsidering The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Kay Boyle: Feminist Aesthetics and Modernism'. *Feminist Formations*. 28:2, 2016, pp. 51–72 (56)

[76] Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p.174

[77] Freytag-Loringhoven in Zelazo and Gammel. *Body Sweats.* p.16

Gaps, Absences, and Apparitions

Tirza True Latimer has argued that a crucial role of the contemporary art historian – particularly one working on queer and or feminist subjects – is making visible those that have been rendered invisible by the traditional reactionary documenting of history by 'the mobilisation of techniques frowned on by "proper historians" […] they must view gaps, absences, and apparitions as historically consequential'.[78] Such an approach is necessary, according to Latimer, because '[h]istorically invisible majorities (women) and invisible minorities (sexual dissidents)' – The Baroness being both – have been written out of history by those who seek to explain 'what happens in the past by providing a precise and accurate reconstruction of the events reported in the documents''.[79] As Latimer points out, '[w]hat if there are no documents, or the documents have been expurgated, sealed, or destroyed?'[80] This is certainly a conundrum that an art historian exploring The Baroness's body-as-canvas performances faces, as there are no known photographs of The Baroness fully adorned in her art, meaning that contemporary understanding of this specific aspect of The Baroness's performance is largely informed by recollections of her peers, such as the following description by painter George Biddle:

> 'Having asked me, in her harsh, high-pitched German stridency, whether I required a model, I told her that I should like to see her in the nude. With a royal gesture she swept apart the folds of a scarlet raincoat. She stood before me quite naked – or nearly so. Over the nipples of her breasts were two tin tomato cans, fastened with a green string behind her back. Between the tomato cans hung a very small bird-cage and within it a crestfallen canary. One arm was covered from wrist to shoulder with celluloid curtain rings, which she later admitted to having pilfered from a furniture display in Wanamaker's. She removed her hat, which had been tastefully but inconspicuously trimmed with gilded carrots, beets and other vegetables. Her hair was close cropped and dyed vermillion.'[81]

Although Biddle's recollection was given some twenty years after his encounter with The Baroness, the shock effect is still palpable in his description. The power dynamics of the

[78] Tirza True Latimer including a quote from Hayden White. 'Improper Objects: performing queer/feminist art/history'. *Otherwise: Imagining queer feminist art histories*. Ed. Amelia Jones and Erin Silver. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016, pp. 93-95

[79] Tirza True Latimer. 'Improper Objects'. P.93, 95

[80] Tirza True Latimer. 'Improper Objects'. P. 93

[81] George Biddle. *An American Artist's Story*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1939, p. 137

situation described are instantaneously reconfigured as The Baroness's scarlet raincoat is opened and the repurposed objects are revealed: rather than occupying the role of passive subject that the male artists gazes upon, Biddle must, to quote Gammel, suddenly and unexpectedly see 'his model as an artist'.[82]

Despite attempts to reduce The Baroness's body-as-canvas art performances to chaotic impulses through frequent labelling of her practice as an 'art of madness', The Baroness was aware of how radically transformative her adorned body was in the context of female nude: 'I am not merely the model who poses. I seek as best I may to give [the role] artistic expression'.[83] This clear-sighted admission from The Baroness identifies the fundamental issue with the inherent power dynamic of the woman model: that they are to be a thoughtless conduit for the genius of the (typically) male artist. It also reveals that this aspect of The Baroness's artistic output, often regarded as an eccentric frivolity, was actually a considered response to sexist conventions, and should therefore, be recontextualised as an 'extreme form of 'nonacquiescence', which, despite regretfully posing a threat to the well-being of the artist also directly threatens the 'self-assuredness of American men'.[84] The erosion of Biddle's self-assuredness was something that he himself documented after being pursued and kissed by The Baroness, who, to use his words, slowly wrapped her 'filthy body' around the painter 'as a snake would its prey', an encounter that left Biddle 'shaking all over'.[85] If this was the effect that The Baroness had on her male peers both through her radical art practice and an implacable pursuit of her sexual desires then there is little surprise that there is precious little documentation of The Baroness's performances or that she was rendered historically invisible for the majority of the twentieth century. At a time when the construction of normative masculinity was being shattered by world war and rapid technological and mechanical advancement, it is unsurprising that her male peers did little to help her thrive as an artist if they perceived her acerbic denunciation of the status quo as yet another threat – Biddle even tried to lower the fee he paid her for modelling for him.[86] Latimer argues that 'histories of improper objects queer/feminist artists create have the potential to radically reshape the representational

[82] Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p. 201
[83] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven quoted in 'Refugee Baroness Poses as a Model'. p. 18
[84] Linda Lappin. 'Dada Queen'. p. 317
[85] George Biddle. *An American Artist's Story*. p. 140
[86] Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p. 202

programs that regulate our relationships, cultures, and futures.'[87] The Baroness adorned her body with improper objects to perform radical and brilliant performances that challenged preconceptions of the boundaries of art as well as calling into question traditional reactionary gender conventions, as I will explore at length in this chapter. And yet, despite her revolutionary potential, she was not and is yet to be 'appropriately appreciated', as Djuna Barnes mournfully recognised in the obituary she wrote for her friend after she had died alone in her Berlin flat aged fifty three.[88] Indeed, as Duchamp points out, 'the history of art is what remains of an epoch in a museum, but it's not necessarily the best of that epoch, and fundamentally it's probably even the expression of the mediocrity of the epoch, because the beautiful things have disappeared'.[89]

Shocks, Heels, Cans and Stamps

'Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars' – Walter Benjamin 1928[90]

'When she is Dada she is the only one living anywhere who dresses Dada, loves Dada, lives Dada.'[91] – Jane Heap, 1922

During her time in New York, The Baroness established a radical and confrontational artistic practice that reflected and enacted the destruction and disconnect caused by the war, often to an audience made up of the very people who were trying their best to ignore it. At the heart of her artistic practice was a fragmentary language that often consisted of non-linguistic verbal sounds. Much like her erotically-charged corporeal performance art, The Baroness's use of non-linguistic verbal sounds was rooted in her experience of being an artist in Germany years before arriving in New York. While people quite rightly associate German artist, poet and one of the originators of Dada, Hugo Ball's declaration that Dada artists must 'give up the word' by writing phonetic poetry that 'totally renounce[s] the language that journalism has abused and corrupted' with the horrors of World War I, for

[87] Latimer. 'Improper Objects'. P. 107
[88] Djuna Barnes. 'Elsa Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, Obituary', *Transition*. 11:1, 1928, p. 19
[89] Marcel Duchamp quoted in Pierre Cabanne. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. trans. Ron Padgett. New York: Da Capo, 1971, p. 67
[90] Walter Benjamin. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. London: Verso, 1998, p. 34
[91] Jane Heap. 'Dada'. *Little Review.* 8:2, 1922, p.46

The Baroness it wasn't a new idea; she would have encountered poetry that used a fragmented language that was devoid of traditional meaning by German poets such as Paul Scheebart and Christian Morgenstern at the turn of the century.[92] Despite Ball's clear political assertion above, or other assertions of his such as that the rise of the machinery had 'swallowed the individual utterance', his writing that employed non-linguistic language was, and still is, often labelled as nonsense poetry.[93] That charge was also aimed at The Baroness, both at the time that she was developing her fragmented poetry and by scholars in the twenty first century.[94] However, some scholars, most notably Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo, have argued that The Baroness's use of fragmented language was a direct result of the fragmentation of reality ushered in by the damaging effects of the war.[95] Such language should, therefore, not be dismissed as nonsensical but rather understood as an expansion of the artist's verbal ability to reflect the horrors of the time. I will argue that The Baroness's use of fragmented, non-linguistic language was not only used to reflect the unstable times that they were born out of, but also used as a revolutionary disruptive tool that caused fissures in war-time existence so that glimpses of a more desirable reality could surface.

Jane Heap was one of a handful of figures active in the New York Dada scene to enthusiastically eulogize The Baroness during her life: when Kenneth Rexroth asked Marcel Duchamp if he viewed The Baroness as a Futurist or a Dadaist, Duchamp relied, 'She is not a Futurist. She is the future'.[96] In this sense it is hard to think of a figure that has been more neglected by the dominant rationalising patrilineal genealogy of the avant-garde than Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Viewed as both the future and the only person living a true Dada existence by her peers, she was largely forgotten until the recent critical revival of her work at the beginning of the twenty first century. This neglect is even more regrettable when you consider that the defining features of her largely forgotten art

[92] Hugo Ball, quoted in Steve McCaffery. In The Darkness of the Present: Poetics, Anachronism, and the Anomaly. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012, p. 16

[93] Elza Adamowicz. Dada Bodies: Between Battlefield and Fairground. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019, pp. 27-28

[94] In 1922 Jane Heap claimed that The Baroness was 'making a contribution to nonsense': Jane Heap. `Dada'. p. 46. In 2007 Anita Helle argued that The Baroness's poem 'Deathwail' contained 'nonsense syllables': Anita Helle. 'Blasé Sorrow: Ultramodernity's Mourning at the Little Review'. *Mourning and Modernism*. ed. Patricia Rae. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007, p.127

[95] Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl''. pp. 257, 259

[96] Kenneth Rexroth. *American Poetry in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1971, p. 77

practice have been celebrated as innovative acts of genius when put into practice by other Dada artists. For example, by bringing in detritus and discarded scraps from the street, repurposing them as art objects and placing them in the space of her apartment, The Baroness not only refused to play along with the domestic role that for many her gender predetermined – including her love interest turned violent assaulter, Williams Carlos Williams – but also troubled the boundary between the conventional domestic space and the street.[97] This is one of many examples of The Baroness blurring life and art and pushing the limits of acceptability amongst the American avant-garde, which, no doubt, is why this practice led her being labelled dirty - most notably by Williams who, after visiting The Baroness's apartment, wrote that it was 'unspeakably filthy' and full of 'junk and rubbish found in the streets.'[98] This is very different to the response Kurt Schwitters received for bringing in detritus from the street to adorn his inhabitable sculpture *Merzbau* (1920-1937), which he began work on in 1920, only a short time after Baroness started to fill her New York apartment: he was a genius, destined to be canonized.[99] Despite Schwitters's dismissive comment that the items he brought in from the street were simply 'crap', he would have been fully aware that, as Esther Leslie has pointed out, the detritus utilised in his art practice 'comes from a particular place in the world with its own particular story – from a bus ticket to a wrapper for Camembert cheese, all litter speaks.'[100] However, as The Baroness found out when the disorder of her apartment led her to be branded a lousy housekeeper, litter says different things for different people.

The Baroness and Schwitters's decision to bring refuse into the spaces where they made art poses two pertinent questions: why did these artists choose to work with rubbish, and why did this practice take off in the aftermath of the most violently shocking moment in history? Leslie argues that Schwitters's act of salvaging detritus that would otherwise be kicked aside or taken to the scrap heap is an attempt to 'hold onto a world of

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[97] Williams didn't only describe The Baroness's flat as dirty, in a misogynistic tirade he labelled her a 'dirty old bitch' and described the 'stench' of her naked body.
William Carlos Williams. 'Sample Prose Piece: The Three Letters.' Contact. 4:1, 1921, pp. 10-13 (10)
For a detailed and convincing exploration of how such descriptions were related to the threat Williams perceived in The Baroness's voracious sexual appetite, see Amelia Jones, 'Equivocal Masculinity'. *Irrational Modernism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004,

[98] William Carlos Williams. 'Sample Prose Piece'. pp. 10-12

[99] Hans Richter. *Dada: Art and Anti-Art. London*: Thames and Hudson, 1965, p. 152

[100] Richard Hueslsenbeck. *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p.66; Ester Leslie. *Derelicts: Thought Worms from The Wreckage*. p.23

experience, that threatened to disappear': a life-affirming act that 'insures against becoming ghostly'.[101] The Baroness's use of detritus from the street certainly corresponds with Leslie's understanding of such acts being life-affirming, as her friend and supporter Margaret Anderson's description of her street performances, where she would wear risqué makeshift clothing items made from repurposed discarded items confirms:

> Tired of conventional dressing, she began creating costumes which resulted in her arrest whenever she appeared upon the streets. Tired of official restraint, she leaped from patrol wagons with such agility that policemen let her go in admiration.[102]

There are certainly joyous images emanating from this description: The Baroness, in a spirited act of defiance in the face of restrictive societal expectations, repurposed the waste of her fellow New Yorkers and attached it to her body to become a walking art exhibition that evades the confines of the police station with agility and grace. There are also darker images, however, and they result from a key difference between Schwitters' and The Baroness's use of detritus. While Schwitters erected *Merzbau* – which, despite pushing the boundaries of what sculpture could be, was still conceptualised as sculpture – within his home before filling it with detritus, The Baroness used her body as her canvas, an act that, like so many of The Baroness's, radically challenged the boundaries of art and life.[103] The result was predictable: like so many radical acts of art making, especially those conceived by women, the artist was deemed a danger to the established mode of living. The same police force that picked up The Baroness from the pavement to arrest her after Williams had punched her in the mouth, decided that her art practice had rendered her unfit to move freely through the New York streets, showing that, much like today, they wielded an unconscionable monopoly on violence.[104]

Much like The Baroness and Schwitters, the German critical theorist Walter Benjamin positioned the scrap and fragment at the centre of his work, most notably in his monumental unfinished undertaking *The Arcades Project*. Benjamin, responding in part to

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[101] Ester Leslie. *Derelicts: Thought Worms from The Wreckage*. p. 24
[102] Margaret Anderson. *My Thirty Years' War*. New York: Horizon Press, 1969, p. 177
[103] Kurt Schwitters. '*Merz'. Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. ed. By Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 283
[104] William Carlos Williams. *Autobiography*. New York: Random House, 1948, p. 169

Freud's concept of shock defence in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, argued that the traumatic shocks of modernity, and more importantly, an individual's drive to cushion and screen such shocks, were a central aspect of modern city life.[105] This, however, posed an essential problem, one that was all the more pressing against the backdrop of the rise of fascism that Benjamin witnessed with horror when writing in the 1930s: people were so consumed by the need to parry the shocks of modernity that they existed in a state of stupefaction and were, therefore, ripe for manipulation.[106] For Benjamin, one possible tool to combat this troubling consequence of modernity was art, especially art that appropriated and enacted the sudden shocks that had ultimately led to the stupefaction of the masses in the first place. This, however, was only possible if art engaged with the pressing political issues of the moment in which it was created with urgency and abruptness.[107] In his influential essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935), Benjamin proposes that Dadaists produced such art because at the heart of their work was a shocking immediacy that 'hit the spectator like a bullet'.[108] One cause of this shocking immediacy was that Dada artworks were often 'put together from tickets, spools of cotton, and cigarette butts'; it repurposed detritus (the traces of daily life) and framed it as components of artworks that were gleefully nonauratic.[109] The 'relentless destruction' of the aura

[105] Walter Benjamin. 'Some Motifs on Baudelaire', *Selected Writings Volume 4, Part 2: 1931-1934*. ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 317-318

[106] Tamar Avishai. 'Shock and Aura: Benjamin on Dada'. *Benjamin-Studien*. 3:1, 2014, pp. 107-132 (108)
Benjamin saw the politicised aesthetics of the Dada artists as the inverse of the aestheticized politics of Nazi propaganda films.

[107] Tamar Avishai. 'Shock and Aura', p. 108
For Benjamin political art did not necessarily have to have overt political themes, he was more interested the way in which the work was produced, and crucially, how it was received.

[108] Walter Benjamin. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*. ed. Hannah Arendt. London: Random House, 1999, pp. 211-244 (231)

[109] Walter Benjamin. 'The Author as Producer'. *Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 2 1931-1934*. ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 774
Benjamin's concept of an artwork's aura is poetically evocative and somewhat open to interpretation. Fundamentally, the aura emanates from the perceived uniqueness of a work of art, specifically the uniqueness of its presence relating to time and space, and the distance between the artwork and the viewer: 'What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be.' The uniqueness of a work of art relies on its wholeness and originality. Hence why Benjamin understood fragments and traces to be nonauratic, even defined in opposition to the aura, as he explained in a letter to Frankfurt School philosopher re Adorno penned in 1938: 'The concept of the trace finds its philosophical determination in opposition to the concept of the aura.'
Walter Benjamin. 'Little History of Photography'. Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 2 1931-1934. Ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 518;

completely changed the experience that the viewer had when beholding a work of art; no longer did the beholder have to unearth the aura through a contemplation of the artwork's historicity or authenticity, which give the work the 'appearance of distance, no matter how near it may be', because in the aura's place is a distracting and arresting immediacy.[110] It is this immediacy that Benjamin believed produced the disruptive, radical potential of the artwork. This is because nonauratic art is authentic to the moment that it is beheld and is therefore invested with what Benjamin called *jetztzeit*, which loosely translates as now-time and is a disruptive force that ruptures the continuum of its antipode, 'homogeneous empty time', which is a construction of the ruling class intended to pacify the revolutionary potential of the masses through giving the impression of historical progress.[111]

While Benjamin's focus when exploring the radical potential of Dada was on the Zurich and Berlin branches of the artistic movement, the spectre of the New York-based Baroness haunts his work. Shocking and combative, The Baroness's life-as-art practice, parading the streets, her body adorned with carefully selected detritus from the street, made it 'impossible to take time for contemplation and evaluation'.[112] Indeed if, as Leslie has argued, Schwitters utilised scraps and detritus as a life-affirming way of insuring against the shocks of the tumultuous post-war landscape, then it is The Baroness's use – enacting the shocks of contemporary life – that more was disruptive in the Benjaminian sense.[113] By privileging defective or fragmented detritus, The Baroness took the art practice of wrenching daily objects from their intended context and purpose further than her peers: hers was an act of radical transformation from unsalvageable trash to ritualistic object. For example, Williams recalls that the heel from the shoe of a bride that came off as she travelled on the metro was picked up by The Baroness and became a 'jewel' in her collection of found objects.[114] The vital detail here is that it was the heel – a component of the shoe that had broken off – that The Baroness found and treasured. The heel has been abstracted

Walter Benjamin. 'Exchange with Adorno on 'Paris of the Second Empire''. Selected Writings Volume 4, Part 2 1931-1934. Ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006 p. 106

[110] Walter Benjamin. 'The Work of Art'. p. 231; Walter Benjamin quoted in Peter Fenves. 'Is There an Answer to the Aestheticizing of the Political?' *Walter Benjamin and Art*. ed. Andrew Benjamin. London: Continuum, 2005, p. 64.

[111] Walter Benjamin. 'On the Concept of History'. *Selected Writings Volume 4, Part 2 1931-1934*. Ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 395

[112] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art'. P. 231

[113] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', p. 231

[114] William Carlos Williams. *Three Letters*. p. 11

from the other constituent parts of the shoe and has been imbued with a value that wasn't predetermined: it is at the moment of dislocation that the potential of a new radical meaning is set in motion.

The radical potentiality of the fragment was rooted in the unprecedented historical context of the period in which The Baroness was living in New York. In addition to the myriad dislocations caused by the war – a subject I will go on to explore at length in relation to The Baroness's fragmentary language – there was also the rise of Taylorism and Fordism, which fundamentally changed the conditions of the workplace. The main objective of Fordism, which is generally accepted to have come into being in 1913 with the opening of Highland Park auto assembly plant in Dearborn, Michigan, was to improve economic efficiency by streamlining workflow and labour productivity.[115] Ford became so determined to synchronise the flow of production, not just within the plant but also in terms of material arriving and parts leaving, that in the end this became the essence of his universal philosophy: 'all other relationships became subordinate to maintaining flow'.[116] Therefore, 'energy is focused toward the channelling of human labour into the most efficient, mechanic production of parts', the full value of which will be fulfilled once combined with other parts to make a whole.[117] Interestingly, Ford took inspiration from a visit to an abattoir, where, of course, the objective was directly opposed to his own, as Nicole Shukin observes:

> 'rarely recalled or interrogated is the fact that Ford modelled Highland Park's auto assembly line on moving lines that had been operating at least since the 1850s in the vertical abattoirs of Cincinnati and Chicago, with deadly efficiency and to deadly effect. Ford, deeply impressed by a tour he took of a Chicago slaughterhouse, particularly with the speed of the moving overhead chains and hooks that kept animal 'material' flowing continuously past labourers consigned to stationary and hyper-repetitive piecework, devised a similar system of moving lines for Dearborn but with a crucial mimetic twist: his automated lines sped the assembly of a machine body rather than the disassembly of an animal body.'[118]

[115] Nicole Shukin. *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 207
[116] Terry Smith. *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.35
[117] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism.* p. 14
[118] Nicole Shukin. *Animal Capital.* p. 207
Ford taking inspiration from a visit to an abattoir has a broad relation to the upswing in usage of fragmentation in art and literature after WORLD WAR I: in the aftermath of war, fragmentation has a mortified resonance.

Against the backdrop of Taylorism, and especially Fordism, it is clear to see why The Baroness's use of fragments, detritus and scraps had a disruptive radical potential: the scrap is removed from the dominant value system for which it was intended. Rather than losing value, the heel of the bride is abstracted from the capitalist realm and enters a new alternative system of value, one that, at least temporarily, is not governed by money: it is no longer a commodity, it is art. In this sense, the work of The Baroness fits into Benjamin's argument that '[t]he Dadaists attached much less importance to the sales value of their work than to its uselessness for contemplative immersion.'[119] Nevertheless, even the most uncritical art historian will know that the commodification of the work of art is almost inescapable: one only needs to see how much Duchamp's readymades (which were also created by repurposing manufactured objects and giving them arts privileges) have sold for at auction to attest that.

There are, however, key differences between how The Baroness and Duchamp utilized detritus, and these differences account for their contrasting radical potential.[120] Duchamp removed the objects he used from their original context to place them within the confines of the art gallery, whereas The Baroness used them to fill her home or attached them to her body and paraded the streets as a part of a performance that blurred the boundaries of art and life. As James Harding has observed, '[a]t a time when Duchamp's readymades were pressing the question "What is art?" von Freytag-Loringhoven was clothing herself in found objects and marching off into social spaces where her performances pressed not just the question 'Where is art permissible?' but also 'Where is art by women permissible?''[121] While Duchamp's readymades originally had a disruptive energy, this energy has been subsumed by the rationalising patrilineal history that has positioned Duchamp as a genius. The gallery is a safe space for artistic experimentation, and it is also where the aura of a work manifests.[122]

See Darcy Grimaldo Grisby. 'Cannibalism'. *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002

[119] Walter Benjamin. 'The Work of Art'. p. 231

[120] It is widely acknowledged (although perhaps not widely enough) that The Baroness had some part to play in the conception of perhaps the most famous readymade associated with Duchamp, The Fountain. For an in-depth study on this topic, see Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*. pp. 223-238

[121] James M. Harding. *Cutting Performances.* p. 65

[122] This is one reason why Duchamp has been canonised as a genius: even though his work critiqued art as an institution – the radically disruptive aspect of his work - the institution rationalised his radical potential and

If we return to the bride's lost heel that The Baroness found on the subway, it is not hard to see why it became a treasured item in The Baroness's collection of street detritus because it is charged with a disruptive energy. Once removed from the shoe, The Baroness's prized heel figures as an emblem of resistance to the Fordist system in which parts only attain value in relation to the other parts with which they make a whole. Although we don't know whether the heel featured as part of one of The Baroness's elaborate costumes as this aspect of her artistic practice is largely undocumented, it is highly conceivable that this was one of its uses, like many other of the treasures in The Baroness's collection of detritus. This is another way in which in which it could feature as an emblem of resistance against the forces of Fordism, which 'functioned to rationalise bodies, which are virtually made into machines through repetitive labour': the conscious shaping of her body as her canvas was a resolute rejection of the pressures to mechanise and rationalise her body.[123] There is, of course, also an immediate disruption engendered by the heel breaking off from the body of the shoe: the bride's ability to walk would have been hampered. That the destination of the bride would likely have been the venue in which she was getting married would have added to The Baroness's attachment to the object. The Baroness frequently lambasted the institution of marriage, most notably in her critique of William's poem 'Kora in Hell' (1917), published in *The Little Review* in early 1921 entitled, 'Thee I call 'Hamlet of Wedding-Ring': Criticism of William Carlos William's 'Kora in Hell'' (1921), in which she launched a particularly scathing attack on his commitment to conventional bourgeois married life: that the heel represented a disruption of the flow of the bride from subway to domesticated married life would have added to its allure.

While the heel breaking away from the bride's shoe was literally disruptive, the other discarded, lost, or defunct items that The Baroness collected where this was not necessarily the case were nonetheless imbued with disruptive power. This is because The Baroness removes the items that she collects from their original function and in doing so, to use Theodor Adorno's term, she frees them 'from the curse of being useful'.[124] The

positioned him as the originator of a post-modern experimentation in a lineage that projected forward in a streamlined flow to the contemporary day, via other such post-modern male geniuses as Warhol and Hirst. Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism*. pp. 19-21

[123] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism*. p. 14

[124] Theodor Adorno. 'Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on the Essay 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century'. *Selected Writings Volume 3 1935-1938*. ed. M.W. Jennings and H. Eiland. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 56

Baroness's percipient gathering of items to incorporate into her collection initiates a transfiguration of the essence of the object at hand: it 'is detached from all its original functions' and placed alongside and understood through its relation to other items that she has collected (the realm of things, which Benjamin describes as 'a magic circle'), a relation that is the 'diametric opposite of any utility'.[125] Benjamin believed that this transfiguration is facilitated by the object being taken from the streets and placed in the interior domestic space – the 'asylum' of art – because it is the interior space where the value of the object is determined by the collector and beholder not by its usefulness.[126] For Benjamin, the interior space also allows the object to be imbued with a magical quality. He argued that the 19th-Century division of public and private space was not simply a spatial demarcation but also a psychic one.[127] The public space was where a person rubbed up against reality, it was the space of work, trade, and commerce; the private interior space was a place of refuge (although one not without problems) from these things.[128] If the public space was where reality was encountered, the private space of the interior was where illusions manifested; illusions that Benjamin believed served the vital function of allowing the inhabitant of the interior – especially the collector that fills their home with carefully chosen objects – to dream their way into not just 'a distant or bygone world but also into a better one'.[129] However, as The Baroness's motley private collection was deemed dirty and unfeminine, the shelter of her apartment did not necessarily prevent her from encountering reality, particularly restrictive expectations about how women are expected to act within domestic spaces. The objects The Baroness incorporated in her magic circle, therefore, served a different function to the Benjaminian object: the same pieces of street detritus or fragment that she used to fill her apartment could also be used to adorn her body as part of her street performances that redefined preconceived notions of where art is to be encountered. Therefore, if the value of an object once it has been liberated from its original function is determined by the collector in their domestic space, then The Baroness, by adorning herself

[125] Walter Benjamin. 'The Collector'. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 204-205
[126] Walter Benjamin. 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire'. *Selected Writings Volume 4, Part 2 1931-1934*. Ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 39
[127] Walter Benjamin. 'Paris of the Second Empire'. p. 38
[128] Johanna Malt. 'Impossible Contact: The Thing in Lacan and Rachel Whiteread'. *L'Esprit Créateur.* 47:3, 2007, pp. 56-67 (57)
[129] Walter Benjamin. 'Paris of the Second Empire'. p. 39

with the objects that had also adorned her flat, brought the privilege the collector is afforded in their home out onto the streets whilst transgressing gendered norms.

Harding has argued that nobody redefined performance to the same extent as The Baroness in the early twentieth century, and that at the heart of this redefinition was a 'shared aesthetic space' where collage and found objects overlap.[130] Although many of The Baroness's peers experimented with found objects and collage, Harding believed that it was her 'concomitant radical rethinking of conventional notions of masculinity and femininity' that charged her usage with revolutionary potential.[131] The Baroness was able to use her found objects as a foundation for such profound acts of rethinking only once she had shattered the illusion that such objects inherently poses 'neutrality or immediacy', an idea that the array of dismissive and even violent responses to The Baroness's costumes and home reveal to be deeply flawed.[132] As Harding makes clear, it was only once this illusion was 'exposed as a guise for regulating gender and sexuality at the most basic levels of quotidian experience' that found objects could truly be an element of an radical innovative artwork.[133] By showing that the finder is as important as the found object, The Baroness was able to use scraps, fragments and collage to radically redefine conventional notions of gender and combatively challenge the social power structures of both public and private spaces, and how these structures are used to regulate the behaviour of women. By doing so The Baroness did not just use the objects she collected for her street performances to dream herself into a better world, but also to actively demonstrate what that world may look like.

Benjamin's argument that the surrealists were the first to be open to the revolutionary energies of material objects suggests that he was unfamiliar with The Baroness and her collection of items.[134] For example, on reading the narrator in André

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[130] James M. Harding. *Cutting Performances*. p. 38-39
[131] James M. Harding. *Cutting Performances*. p. 39
[132] James M. Harding. *Cutting Performances*. p. 31-32
[133] Ibid
[134] For Benjamin there is a mystical relationship between collected items and the space they inhabit, where 'the traces of the most ordinary objects of use are imprinted.' The traces that the objects leave have a 'profane illumination', which Benjamin defines as a 'materialistic, anthropological inspiration' and were most keenly felt in recently outmoded objects, so much so that they were invested with revolutionary potential, emanating from the unfulfilled utopic promises of the time that they were produced
Walter Benjamin. 'Paris of the Second Empire'. P. 39; Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia' Selected Writings Volume 2.1, 1927 - 1930. ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 109-111

Breton's semi-autobiographical *Nadja* (1928) say that he visits flea markets in order to search 'for objects that can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible' Benjamin writes of the author '[h]e was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded', and that nobody had a 'more exact concept' of the relation between outmoded objects and revolution than Breton and his Surrealist peers.[135] Yet The Baroness had positioned outmoded objects at the centre of her disruptive art practice more than a decade before *Nadja* was published, and in doing so took Ball's claim, that the goal of Dada was to retrieve everyday life 'from its modern state of colonialization by the commodity form and other modes of reification', further than any other Dada artist.[136]Unlike Ball, The Baroness appeared to refrain from theorising about her use of fragments, traces and detritus; the few times she does mention her collection – and of course, given the appropriately fragmented nature of her archive, it is possible that she theorised at length on documents that are no longer with us – she does so with humorous absurdity, for example when writing to her friend the artist Sarah McPherson she made the demand: 'Sarah, if you find a tin can on the street stand by it until a truck runs over it. Then bring it to me.'[137] The tin can, already discarded and now, thanks to the truck, unusable in regard to its intended function, becomes ready to be added to The Baroness's collection of found objects only once it has been fully freed from its commodity form.

The revolutionary potential of an item such as the can, or any other outmoded object, lies in its transformation from a commodity charged with the illusions of industrial capitalism into a critical tool of the artist, which is used to reveal the lies inherent in the capitalist system. The reason The Baroness was able to harness the potential of outmoded objects so successfully was that she was working at the time of considerable advancements in the productivity of factories; new commodities were being produced at a significantly faster rate, and therefore the speed and extent of which existing commodities became outmoded and therefore discarded was also increasing.[138] Industrial capitalism gives rise to

[135] André Breton. *Nadja*. New York: Grove Press. 1960 (originally published in 1928), p. 52; Walter Benjamin. 'Surrealism'. p. 110

[136] Hugo Ball quoted in Rob Shields. *Lefebvre*, *Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialects*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 78

[137] Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven in Robert Reiss. ''My Baroness': Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven'. *New York Dada*. ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli. New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986, p. 82

[138] The Italian Marxist philosopher and politician, Antonio Gramsci has claimed that Fordism had such an impact on contemporary American life that it constituted as a fundamental aspect of the 'passive revolution' that he termed 'Americanism', by helping shape the new national ideology (namely constant technological

the illusion of plenty by increasing the choice of commodities for those that can afford them. It is not hard to imagine why shattering such an illusion – and the more general but concomitant illusion of human progression – would be a target for an artist like The Baroness who was living in gruelling poverty and making art in a time of the barbaric destruction of world war. In his exploration of nineteenth-century poet Charles Baudelaire's work, Benjamin stated that 'poets find the refuse of society on their streets and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse.'[139] Benjamin is perhaps using 'refuse' metaphorically here, likening Baudelaire, and more generally the figure of the flâneur, as somebody 'who roams the city in search of rhyme-booty' with the ragpicker, who has the same gait as the flâneur poet because he 'is obliged to come to a halt every few moments to gather up the refuse he encounters'.[140] The Baroness, however, merges the metaphoric with the literal: for her 'rhyme-booty' and street refuse are one and the same thing. This is one aspect of what Jones calls The Baroness's 'violently feminine' revision of the flâneur into something more akin with Dianne Chisholm's figure of the détraqué, which roughly translates as broken-down and is related to the verb détraquér, which means to disrupt.[141] Chisholm's détraqué is concerned with waste and degradation; like the flâneur the détraqué is both a product and an observer of the modern city space, however whilst observing and interpreting the urban sprawl and the city-dwelling masses 'the flâneur gets drunk on commodity, the détraqué on refuse'.[142]

The Baroness's use of refuse, street detritus and defunct objects confronted the viewer with the material waste of industrial capitalism, yet it also showed the beauty in such waste, beauty that radiated thanks to the object being disenthralled from the homogeneity

development in order to deliver the capitalistic imperative for 'progress') of the early twentieth century. Gramsci laid out his understanding of how the inherent rationalism of Fordism forged a commodity culture thus: 'Recall here the experiments conducted by Ford and to the economies made by his firm through direct management of transport and distribution of the product. These economies affected production costs and permitted higher wages and lower selling prices. Since these preliminary conditions existed, already rendered rational by historical evolution, it was relatively easy to rationalise production and labour by a skilful combination of force (destruction of working-class trade unionism on a territorial basis) and persuasion (high wages, various social benefits, extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda) and thus succeed in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production.'
Antonio Gramsci. 'Americanism and Fordism'. Selections from the Prison Notebooks. New York: International Publishers, 1992, p. 285

[139] Benjamin. 'Paris of the Second Empire'. p. 48

[140] Ibid

[141] Jones. *Irrational Modernism*. p. 188-189

[142] Dianne Chisholm. 'Obscene Modernism: Eros Noir and the Profane Illumination of Djuna Barnes'. *American Literature*. 69:1, 1997, p. 189

of industrially produced commodities. In a letter to Peggy Guggenheim The Baroness sardonically claimed that God 'better fordize – learn from America – start expert machineshop […] hotfoot it towards progress – modernize'.[143] The Baroness's use of objects from her collection critiques rather than heeds the rational mechanical 'progress' of her humorous advice to God. For example, her constantly changing costumes were made up of, amongst other things: a cancelled postage stamp on her cheek; ice-cream spoons as earrings; toy soldiers as swaying ornaments; gilded carrots and beets festooning hems of clothing; mishappened tin cans as a makeshift bra, from which hung a wooden birdcage that homed a canary; an electric battery taillight that swished between her legs as she walked.[144] The objects she used were not ensembled with any evident rational ordering but functioned instead as a constellation of discrepant fragments which combined to create a disquieting yet mesmerising whole.

The Baroness's incomparable and extravagant ensemble-as-costume would have disrupted any passer-by's flow through the metropolis, enacting a corporeal performance of the frequently used caesura of her writing. The disruption would have been all the more pronounced precisely because she was making art in New York; her round the clock street performance where waste materials combined with organic and perishable matter would have created a stark contrast against the backdrop of sleek new skyscrapers. While her costumes did incorporate some burgeoning technology – the electric battery taillight designed to be used on bicycles and cars being an example – it was used as a constituent part of a corporeal performance that both celebrated and advanced the potential of beauty in the human body in motion. The poignancy of this aspect of The Baroness's art would have resounded loudly in relation to the mechanical warfare raging in Europe where rapid technological advancement in weaponry had called attention to the frailness of the human body suddenly and shockingly, as Benjamin highlighted in his essay Storyteller:

> A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged

[143] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. 'Letter to Peggy Guggenheim'. *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity*. Ed. Gammel. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, p.229

[144] Caroline Knighton. 'Modernist Waste: Recovery, Re-use and the Autobiographic'. *Elsa von-Freytag-Loringhoven and Djuna Barnes*. Bloomsbury: London, 2020, p. 33-34

> but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.[145]

Mechanical warfare rendered bodies on the battlefield fragile and tiny, while Taylorism and Fordism rationalised and mechanised bodies at work by demanding from them repetitive labour as part of a streamlined system of workers. In this sense The Baroness's celebration and revivification of the outmoded and the ordinary wasn't just to be found in the scavenged objects she fastened to her body but also to the body to which they were fastened.

A Retching Assault on Art

Before moving to America, one of the first jobs The Baroness had was a model at the age of 20 shortly after moving to Berlin in 1893 when she was hired as a 'marble figure' in the Wintergarden theatre.[146] The role required The Baroness to strike a pose and to keep it for as long as the show lasted. She was naked when she performed the role in order to replicate the look of an Ancient Greek statue. Even though, as Eliza Jane Reilly has argued, the role led to the literal commodification of her body, it was one that The Baroness described as both '[m]arvellous' and 'great fun'.[147] Despite her enjoyment of being a marble figure, it cast her in a role that she would later radically dismantle as an artist in New York: a/the passive object. Even though many artists associated with Dada proclaimed to despise bourgeoise morality, the numerous incarnations of the art movement were noteworthy for their lack of women artists and for generally conforming to the confining sexist conventions of the time, rendering women within artistic coteries as passive, whether their role be muse, model or sexual object.[148] An exploration of the machinic works of artist Marcel Duchamp, French painter and writer Francis Picabia, and The Baroness's collaborator and peer, the American painter and photographer Man Ray highlights the gender inequalities of the time.

After moving to New York The Baroness was, as Rudolf Kuenzli makes clear, faced with a dilemma as she found herself rubbing shoulders with the city's avant-garde: 'was she

[145] Walter Benjamin. The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov. *Selected Writings Volume 3 1935-1938.* Ed. M.W. Jennings and H. Eiland. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 144
[146] Eliza Jane Reilly. 'Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven'. *Woman's Art Journal*. 18:1, 1997 pp. 26-33 (27)
[147] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven quoted in Reilly. 'Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven'. p. 27
[148] Linda Lappin. 'Dada Queen'. p.307

to accept and imitate male fantasies about women and their roles, or was she to respond to and critique these male libidinal constructions and thus situate herself at the margins of these movements?'[149] Jones has argued that in response to this dilemma The Baroness opted for the latter, but in the irrational life-as-art practice she used to critique male fantasies about women she 'took a risk' by blurring the boundaries of subject and object: she was a subject in the sense that she was an artist creating, yet her primary canvas was her body, her physical form was a walking artwork.[150] However, in using found objects The Baroness largely avoided self-commodification as her street performances weren't instantly recognisable as art – in fact one critic of The Baroness claimed she was a 'retching assault on Art', an opinion that was echoed by critics of The Baroness throughout her time in New York.[151] Her boundary pushing performances disturbed and reconstructed the role of a viewer of works of art by actively engaging and confronting them, disrupting and denying the deep-rooted corollary between the male gaze and the objectification of the gazed upon.

Confronted with the 'increasingly threatening realm' of technology, art historian Barbara Zabel argues that Duchamp, Man Ray and Picabia, who had frequently visited New York to exhibit before settling there for safety during World War I, attempted to counter the threat by producing works that attempted to imbue machines with humanistic, mostly feminine, qualities.[152] This approach was, Zabel argues, regressive because it 'fell back on traditional gender constructs' that positioned woman – symbolised by the feminine machine prevalent in Dada artworks – as passive objects which were in need of a controlling hand.[153]

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[149] Rudolf Kuenzli. 'Elsa von Freyag-Loringhoven and New York Dada'. p. 448

[150] Amelia Jones. "Women" in Dada: Elsa, Rrose, and Charlie'. *Women in Dada: Essays in Sex Gender and Identity*. ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998, pp. 156-157

[151] Helen Rowland. 'Concerning Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven'. *Little Review*. 5:5, 1919, p. 56

[152] Barbara Zabel. 'Man Ray and the Machine'. *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*. 3:4, 1989, pp. 66-83 (66, 69); Barbara Zabel. 'The Constructed Self: Machine Age and Portraiture in Machine Age America'. *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex Gender and Identity*. Ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse. MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1998, p. 25-26

Duchamp would also flee New York, once the United States officially entered the war in 1917 for fear that he would be conscripted into the army: 'Yes, I left for a neutral country. You know, since 1917 America had been in the war, and I had left France basically for lack of militarism. For lack of patriotism, if you wish […] I had fallen into American patriotism, which certainly was worse.'

Duchamp quoted in Pierre Cabanne. Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp. p. 59

For more on Duchamp leaving New York see: T. J. Demos. *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007, in which it is argued that, 'more than anything else it was the increasingly claustrophobic atmosphere of the patriotic environment— with military conscription, ordered in 1917, delving ever deeper into the population, even to the point of drafting noncitizens— which forced Duchamp to flee the States'.

T. J. Demos. *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp.* p. 73

[153] Zabel. 'The Constructed Self', p. 25-26

Zabel claims that in the machine works of Picabia in particular, there is a barely concealed misogyny that reveals a fear of the rise of the 'liberated female' alongside a fear of the 'threat of control by the machine'.[154] It is unsurprising then that if a comparison is made between the response to the rise of the machine of The Baroness and her New York-based peers, there are marked differences in both the aesthetic and ideological qualities of their art that deal with the matter.

In Man Ray's portrait of Duchamp, *Duchamp with Diagram of Large Glass* (1923), Man Ray borrows a mechanical image from Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915-1923). The detail used is taken from the lower half of Duchamp's piece, the realm of the bachelors, rather than the bride who occupies the top of the work, housed between a separate piece of double-paned glass. The repurposed detail shows what appears to be a water-powered wheel attached to gliders, although the oblique positioning of the machinery makes it hard for the viewer to decipher the exact nature of constituent parts and their relation to each other. The obliqueness renders any functional quality of the machine hard to decipher too; in the Duchamp work where the detail is taken from, one side of it is attached to the bachelors, which take the shape of anthropomorphic clothes hanging from a washing line, and on the other to a chocolate grinder.[155] The relationship between the machinery, bachelors and chocolate grinder are not clear however, at least not immediately, to the viewer. This is one of the only points of similarity between Duchamp's – and later Man Ray's – use of machinery and the use of objects of The Baroness: for the viewer encountering The Baroness on the street, the relationship between the constituent parts of her costume would not be immediately clear either: what

[154] Barbara Zabel. 'The Constructed Self', p. 27
Despite the fact that forces she attempted to liberate herself from ultimately proved to be crushing, The Baroness's radical art practice and approach to sexual politics meant that she could certainly be understood as a liberated woman.

[155] Duchamp's artwork reveals another potential reason why his legacy contrasts so markedly with that of The Baroness. Unlike the German artist, Duchamp wrote extensively about his work and continued to do so throughout his life. These writings were often created with the purpose of directing how his artworks are viewed, as Linda Dalrymple Henderson reveals: '*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* of 1915-1923 is a unique image-text system in which the physical object is complemented by hundreds of preparatory notes the artist considered to be as important as the object itself.'
Linda Dalrymple Henderson. 'The 'Large Glass' Seen Anew: Reflections of Contemporary Science and Technology in Marcel Duchamp's 'Hilarious Picture''. Leonardo. 32:2, 1999, pp. 113-126 (113)
While The Baroness certainly wrote extensively as she made her art, her archive at The University of Maryland, which I visited in Spring 2022, mostly reveals humorous observations, rants, lamentations, incomplete poems and letters to friends, almost exclusively penned with her idiosyncratic, and somewhat erratic, charm and style. I did not discover any documents that explicitly revealed her artistic intentions.

relationship does a partly crushed tin can have to a cancelled postage stamp have to an electric taillight? Unlike the whole made by the constituent parts of Baroness's costume, however, the Duchampian machine appears to be rationally constructed despite the equivocal nature of its functionality. In contrast to the crushed tin can of The Baroness, Duchamp's machine looks like it has come straight from the factory unscathed, all straight lines and fluid curves that fit together seamlessly. When Man Ray took the machine detail to use in his portrait however, seamlessly fitting it with the with the image of its creator was not a prime concern, rather the machine detail is layered over Duchamp in a way that, despite partially obscuring him, highlights a disconnection between artist and machine through making the layering of the two distinct images manifestly evident. The unmistakable layering suggests Duchamp's autonomy from machine, and due to the scaling – the water wheel and grinders being no bigger than his head – the dimensions of Man Ray's artwork hints at his mastery of machinery too, a connotation reinforced by the machine detail's aesthetic preciseness yet unclear utilitarian efficacy, which combined to position the machine detail as art, more specifically an artwork that Duchamp created. In this sense, Man Ray positions Duchamp as the controlling hand, posing indifferently alongside an image of a machine that he conceived.

Because the detail that Man Ray borrows from *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* has both aesthetic precision and equivocal functionality it can be read as the antipode of The Baroness's tin can. Despite being damaged to the extent that it no longer looks as intended, it has a utilitarian purpose that remains untroubled: it is a commodity that can contain other commodities. Furthermore, unlike Duchamp's machine detail, The Baroness's tin can signifies the opposite of the uniqueness of a traditional work produced by an artist: cans are exemplary quotidian objects, which tend to look the same regardless of what they contain, an idea that Andy Warhol would run with forty years later.[156] What significance the utilitarian purpose of the tin can had in The Baroness's decision to incorporate it into her collection of found objects is open to interpretation seeing as she gave little clue – or at least there remain very few clues – to what informed

[156] Of course, the motivation behind Warhol's decision to use tin cans in his art was divergent from that of The Baroness. While The Baroness's use blurred the distinction between trash and art, Warhol was more interested in blurring the distinction between commercial and fine art.
Arthur C. Danto. Andy Warhol. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, pp.36-37

such choices. Using the can as a makeshift bra and therefore casting a part of her body in the role of canned commodity could, of course, be seen as a commentary on the commodification of the capitalist subject or the commodification of women in general. It is important to remember however that the tin can was one constituent part of a constellation of repurposed found objects that The Baroness used to call into question binary distinctions between valuable art objects and worthless street trash, designated spaces for performance and the street, and acts that men are permitted to perform and acts that women are permitted to perform. The primary effect of her corporeal performance would have been, therefore, shock, meaning that, as Caroline Knighton has pointed out, the spectator would have not been granted the time or space for 'passive, specular models of detached contemplation.'[157] To an extent, art historians have also been denied detached contemplation, a result of The Baroness working with perishable, organic and discarded objects beyond the confines of the art gallery.[158] Although both Duchamp and The Baroness challenged the inveterate commodification of art through removing objects from their original context and presenting them as artworks, The Baroness's approach was more radical than the approach of her French peer. For Benjamin, the commodification of art ensures that the artwork is defined by its 'exhibition value' rather than its cult value, the inverse of 'cult objects' which are defined by their 'existence, not their being on view'; The Baroness didn't just redefine the boundaries of what art is but, by not confining her art objects within the gallery, also radically reconfigured preconceived notions of how art might be exhibited, thus complicating the process of assigning her artworks an 'exhibition value'.[159]

Dada artworks from The Baroness's tin cans to the readymade sculpture that she made with Morton Schamberg *God* (1917) (Fig. 2) and Duchamp's glassworks to his readymade *Fountain*, call into question the premise that artworks should be both conceived and judged according to the visual quality of the work, as Duchamp's answer to the question of what determines his choice of readymades highlights:[160]

[157] Caroline Knighton. 'Modernist Waste'. p. 34
[158] There are very few remaining artworks of The Baroness, and the unclear origins of some of the works that do remain have also complicated retrospective evaluations of her life and work.
[159] Walter Benjamin. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. p. 224-225
[160] James M. Harding. *Cutting Performances*. p. 54

> It's very difficult to choose an object, because, at the end of fifteen days, you begin to like it or to hate it. You have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymade is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste.[161]

Repurposing everyday objects with an absence of good or bad taste could also apply to The Baroness, however this answer from Duchamp suggests some key differences between the two artists. Duchamp claimed to approach his object-based works with an indifference that effaced intentionality; as Reilly has argued, the one discernible intention a viewer could conceive in front of one of his readymades was his desire to conceal any trace of the artist's touch from the finished work to the extent that they had the appearance of being made by a machine.[162] This was certainly not the case with the objects The Baroness used for her street performances, not least because they were often fastened to her body. The perishable, fragmented, discarded, broken and animate coalesced in a performance that shockingly confronted viewers with the immediacy, absurdity, and fragility of life. Rather than confront viewers, the Duchamp readymade – which was often presented as a single object – replaced the 'look' of the spectator with conceptual considerations, which arose from the artwork being an 'intellectual form of expression produced by their engagement with the ideas and institutions that define art'.[163] This fundamental difference between how the two used objects – his being used to replace the look of the spectator with conceptual consideration, hers with confrontational shock – hints at long-lasting source of contention that The Baroness harboured toward Duchamp: she believed that his position on the dominant American culture was inconsistent. Sometimes he made art that challenged the status quo, while other times she found him to be frustratingly uncritical, and worse still,

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God consists of a plumbing trap housed in a miter box originally attributed to Morton Schamberg who photographed it shortly after Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) was rejected from the Independents exhibition of 1917.

[161] Marcel Duchamp quoted in Pierre Cabanne. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. p. 48

The idea that Fountain was conceived solely by Duchamp is up for debate, but it seems highly likely that The Baroness was involved at some level in the making of the infamous sculpture.

See: Sofia Schartner and Fran Bidwell. 'THE MAMA OF DADA: Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven the True Mastermind Behind Fountain'. *The Journal of Student Research*. 10: 1, 2021

[162] Eliza Jane Reilly. 'Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven'. p. 31

[163] Dalia Judovitz. *Drawing on Art: Duchamp and Company*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. xvii-xviii

when he wasn't making art he retreated to the comforts of a New York bourgeois existence.[164] For The Baroness this was unacceptable, every aspect of her life from the way she dressed, to how she filled her apartment, how she moved through the streets, the objects she collected and the language that she used were all part of a life-as-art practice that challenged convention.[165]

Scraps of Sound

While the ways in which waste materials and fragments were used varied from one Dada practitioner to the next, the reason that they were utilised can mostly be explained as an attempt to challenge the bourgeois values and prevailing logic that led to the barbarity of the First World War.[166] As Tristan Tzara points out in his *Dada Manifesto* (1918), such assumptions and values were ingrained and embodied in all aspects of bourgeois life, particularly in everyday language: 'Logic is always false. It draws the superficial threads of concepts and words towards illusory conclusions and centres.'[167] If the conclusion reached is the bloodiest moment in history, then it is understandable that Dadaists would feel uneasy about using the 'concepts and words' that were embedded in and formulated using the everyday language of the time. It is unsurprising, therefore, that artists associated with Dada largely rejected everyday language in favour of fragmented, estranged and refracted written and verbal expression: rather than being complicit in the violence inherent in conventional bourgeois language, they enacted a violence upon the established language of the status quo. Of the many Dada practitioners that assail the corrupted language of the everyday, it is perhaps Ball, who unlike The Baroness took lengths to foreground the thoughts behind his approach, that best serves as a counterpoint to The Baroness.

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[164] Rudolf Kuenzli. 'Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and New York Dada'. P. 450

[165] Duchamp did not share The Baroness's critical opinions on the way he lived his life in New York. In fact he understood himself, at least initially, as able to offer advice on how Americans could live theirs, as Carolin Cros (who quotes a Vanity Fair article on Duchamp from September 1915 here), observes: when he arrived in New York Duchamp played the role of a passeur; he 'brought modern art to New York', for which the Americans were eternally grateful. When questioned by the press, he unfailingly offered his individual opinions on subjects as diverse as the emancipation of American women, Cubism and the promising future of American art.'
Caroline Cros. *Marcel Duchamp*. London: Reaktion Books, 2006, p. 40

[166] Andrew Rothwell. 'Translating 'Pure Nonsense': Walter Benjamin Meets Systran on the Dissecting Table of Dada. Romance Studies. 27:4, 2009, 259–272 (259-260)

[167] Tristian Tzara. 'Dada Manifesto'. *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Ed. By Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 279

If the violence inherent in everyday language is renounced, as Ball demanded it to be, then the logic of bourgeois existence – that which had previously seemed untroubled and stable – can, in theory at least, fall away and make space for new conventions of language and modes of living.[168] This was a process that Ball termed '[d]isintegration right in the innermost process of creation'.[169] While Ball's decision to produce written works that challenged conventional language was firmly rooted in his critical engagement with the violent political climate of the early twentieth century, his approach was shaped by his awareness of contemporary developments in visual art, particularly the movement towards fragmentation:

> The image of the human form is gradually disappearing from the painting of these times and all objects appear only in fragments. This is one more proof of how ugly and worn the human countenance has become, and of how all the objects of our environment have become repulsive to us. The next step is for poetry to decide to do away with language for similar reasons.[170]

Ball first publicly expressed a desire to 'do away with language' in 1915, a time when he would have felt a pressing need for drastic change. He believed that the culture, religion, law and other bourgeois capitalist institutions of the time had produced a 'grammar of war', which had, in turn, led to unprecedented bloodshed.[171] Ball came to this conclusion after first-hand experience of the horrors of war: in 1914, after returning from the frontline in Belgium, he stated, '[i]t is the total mass of machinery and the devil himself that has broken loose now. Ideals are only labels that have been stuck on. Everything has been shaken to its very foundations.'[172] While Ball was clearly horrified by the spectre of violence, he also saw an opportunity for a shift in cultural and societal ideals now that the structures that were assumed to be stable at the beginning of the century had been 'shaken' to their 'foundations', culminating in the chaos and incomprehensible tumult of world war.

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[168] Hugo Ball. *Time: A Dada Diary*. Berkely: University of California Press. 1996, pp. 55, 71; Dafyyd W. Jones. *Dada 1916 in Theory: Practices of Critical Resistance*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014, p. 35
[169] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary.* Berkely: University of California Press, 1996, p. 25
[170] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 55
[171] Steve McCaffery. 'Cacophony, Abstraction, and Potentiality: The Fate of the Dada Sound Poem'. *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound.* ed. Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009, p. 121
[172] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 22

Ball expressed his shift away from dominant bourgeois with poems and sound pieces that were comprised of sounds that were reminiscent of familiar words, or parts or words. By 'touching lightly on a hundred ideas without naming them', his poems were purposefully imbued with an enigmatic quality, which led to Ball's peers describing his language as having magical properties, a theme which also arises in art historical scholarship on his poems.[173] In the aftermath of World War I, Ball saw a world that was 'falling into nothingness all around, was crying out for magic to fill its void', and conceived his sound poems as 'magic formulas' where 'the magically inspired vocables conceived and gave birth to a new sentence that was not limited and confined by any conventional meaning.'[174] While Ball's claim that his sound poems that eschewed conventional language were composed of 'magical vocables' may seem like an instance of aggrandization, it is, at least, in dialogue with contemporary thought on magic and magical acts.[175] The influential French philosopher Henri Bergson believed that the positing of a world other than that which is being experienced relies on magic, because it is magical acts that mediate between the world as it is and the world that is desired.[176] Whether the magical act is performed by somebody filled with a rageful desire to harm somebody out of reach that 'goes through the motions of pouncing on the absent man' in a mock attack, or a 'child who knocks his head against the table and hits back', there is a desire for the material world to 'give back […] what it receives', through its temporarily assumed 'faculty of fulfilling desires and obeying orders'.[177] Despite believing that magical acts are always predicated on error, Bergson argued that, at least initially, they are a understandable – even rational – response to a world that is perceived to be unjust and can

[173] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. xxvii, 5
Hans Arp claimed that Ball's language was a 'magic treasure' that connected him with the language of 'light and darkness', and Steve McCaffery argues that Ball 'offers an alchemical poetics of alembication' that 'encapsulate the very spiritualization of politics'
Jean Arp. 'Notes on a Dada Diary. The Dada Painters and Poets. ed. Robert Motherwell. New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1951, p. 224-225
Steve McCaffery. 'Cacophony, Abstraction, and Potentiality'. p. 123-124
[174] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. pp. xl, 68
[175] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 25
[176] Leigh Wilson. *Modernism and Magic: Experiments with Spiritualism, Theosophy and the Occult*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 27-28
[177] Henri Bergson. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (1932/5)*. Translated by R. Ashley Audro and Cloudesley Brereton with the assistance of W. Horsfall Carter. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, p. 166-169

give a 'quasi-hallucinatory impression of […] efficacy when performed in a moment of excitement'.[178]

Ball's first (and last) performance of his 'Lautgedicht' (sound poem) in 1916 was certainly performed in a moment of excitement.[179] Ball recalled that after entering a trance and chanting 'vowel sequences in a church style like a recitative' – the sequences having come to him mysteriously from an unknown place – he was 'bathed in sweat, [and] carried off the stage like a magical bishop.'[180] Ball had a mystical understanding of the potency of words, believing that the principal meanings attached and attributed to them often concealed hidden meanings that could be released through magical exercises.[181] He hoped his sound poems could trigger intellectual shocks that made listeners and/or readers not

[178] Henri Bergson*. Morality and Religio. p.166-168*
Bergson's relationship to magic is far from straightforward, which is evident in how his writing on the topic was, and has been, understood by fellow writers and thinkers. For example, the renowned writer on magic and spirituality and author of *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911) Evelyn Underhill took great inspiration from his philosophy, and after attending his London lectures of 1913, even claimed to be 'drunk with Bergson'. On reading *Creative Evolution* (1907), Henri James, philosopher and author of *Varieties of religious Experiences* (1902), wrote the famous note to the French philosopher 'O my Bergson, you are a magician and your book is a marvel'. However, his engagement with magic is idiosyncratic to the point that how his relationship with the topic is retrospectively appraised relies heavily on the appraiser's own definition of magic. For example, Bergson scholar Helen Green has stated that, 'there is no indication that Bergson showed any interest in magic, but he was nonetheless involved with psychical research and deeply concerned with matters relating to spirit and consciousness'. While there is some voracity to this claim – Perhaps Bergson's principal philosophical undertaking (and why he introduced his concept of the durée) was to try to erode the bridge between the spiritual and the material – It would appear that Bergson was interested in magic, but on his own terms. For example, while he considered magic a legitimate field of academic study, he admitted that he believed it became baseless when, for example, it extended to dealing with evil spirits through the mechanical repetition of incantations. Yet as Marina Christodoulou observes, and pertinently for this chapter, 'Bergson clearly states that magic is rational, as much as reason, the intellect, or intelligence are. They are all pragmatic inventions with a reasonable function: more specifically, a creative function'.
Henri Bergson. Morality and Religion. p.169-170
William James. The Letters of William James, Vol. II. Scotts Valley, California: Createspace, 2015, p. 181
Alex Owen. The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 136
Marina Christodoulou. 'Philosophical Askesis as an Esoteric-Mystical Exercise'. Philosophical Perspectives on Esotericism: From the nineteenth century to the Present. Ed. Olli Pitkänen. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2024 p. 78
[179] *Steve McCaffery. 'Cacophony, Abstraction, and Potentiality'. p. 120*
[180] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 75
[181] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 210
It appears that this idea was inspired by Wassily Kandinsky's concept of the 'inner sound' (innerer klang), where 'objects have both an outer, worldly and an inner, spiritual meaning and that the Klang is the resonating expression of the inner archetype which the artist seeks to release'.
Hugo Ball. Flight Out of Time. p. 250

just experience these concealed meanings but also make new connections and, therefore, interrogate how meaning is established in the first place.[182]

Much like the magical acts defined by Bergson, Ball used 'Laugedicht' to mediate between the world as it is and world that he desires, because, as Steve McCaffery has argued, by breaking language down into fragments, Ball created a haptic mode of verbal expression that removed 'the very possibility for the propositional constructions and narratives on which any national language can be constructed', and, therefore, has the potential to disrupt and negate the established 'grammar of war'.' [183] A disruption of the language that leads to war is what Ball hopes – and it must surely be a faint hope at best – the material world gives back in return for his magical act of sound poetry, an idea supported by his belief that 'if language really makes us kings of our nation, then without doubt it is we, the poets and thinkers, who are to blame for this blood bath and who have to atone for it.'[184] While Ball is often credited as being the originator of politicised sound poems, 'Lautgedicht', like all works of art, didn't arrive ex nihilo. In 1915, Ball's friend and future Dadaist Walter Serner had joined the staff of Zurich newspaper *Der Mistral*, whose anti-war agenda manifested in spirited polemics against dominant bourgeois linguistic structures rather than an explicit criticism of violence.[185] To support their argument, *Der Minstral* published poetry 'chosen on the basis of their deliberate undermining of grammatical and syntactic norms', such as Apollinaire's calligrammes and F. T. Marinetti's poems using his parole in libertà.[186]

Rooted in mysticism, Ball was more hostile towards the mechanical world than The Baroness. In 1913 he argued that by giving 'sham life to dead matter' machines deceived the public, 'counterfeiting life' in a way that insidiously 'destroys human rhythm'.[187] Nevertheless, their positions aligned in regard to the war that raged in Europe. Much like

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[182]Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time.* p. xx-xxi

[183] Steve McCaffery. *'Cacophony, Abstraction, and Potentiality'.* p. 123

[184] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 29
Ball also wanted the material world to radically change, worried as he was about rapid mechanisation.

[185] Steve McCaffery. *'Cacophony, Abstraction, and Potentiality'.* p. 121
Ball had hoped to join *Der Mistral* on arriving in Zurich from Berlin as their ideological position chimed with his own, but this never happened. *Ibid*

[186] Ibid; Matthew S. Witkovsky, 'Chronology'. *Dada*. Washington, DC: Distributed Art Publishers, 2005, p. 421
Despite using a language that, because it disrupted conventional communication, was favoured by *Der Mistral*, Marinetti's personal position on World War I was markedly different, even contrasting, to the anti-militarism of the newspaper, a topic that will be explored in the later chapter concerning Åke Hodell.

[187] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 4

The Baroness's fragmented physical object, Ball's use of fragmented language was also a reaction against the mechanisation of the world, something that he saw as inseparable from the mechanical warfare of World War I: 'The war is based on a crass error. Men have been mistaken for machines. Machines, not men, should be decimated.'[188] One particularly striking similarity in their understanding of the mechanisation of the world was how they both abhorred how it engendered, to their minds, a phony rationalism that led to the matter of the material world – all people and things – being judged on their usefulness:

> What is necessary is a league of all men who want to escape from the mechanical world, a way of life opposed to mere utility. Orgiastic devotion to the opposite of everything that is serviceable and useful.[189]

In 1920, Ball stated that he was interested in the possibility of a 'great, universal blow to rationalism', and the quote above can certainly be understood as one step towards delivering that blow.[190] However, it also reveals another key difference in his attempt to use his art to grapple with the rise of mechanical world and The Baroness's. Artistic attempts to comprehend the rise of the liberated woman – often termed The New Woman – were often entangled with an attempt to comprehend the rise of the machine. Jones has even argued that 'The Americanized New Woman, mapped onto the feminized machine image, figured the threat of industrial capitalism and the bourgeoisification of culture to Western masculinity.'[191] It is unlikely, therefore, that in 1920 a hypothesized group of people that hoped to 'escape from the mechanical world' would encompass women like The Baroness: liberated women that are deemed a corollary of the modernisation and mechanisation of society.[192] Even if this mode of thought was less evident in Ball's work than it was in that of other Dadaists, there are still signs that, despite the subversive qualities of Ball's

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[188] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 22
[189] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 25
[190] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p 192
[191] Amelia Jones, 'Elsa, Rrose, and Charlie'. p. 147
[192] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 25
The Baroness's status as a liberated woman is up for debate. Irene Gammel argues that 'Neither a 'traditional woman' nor a 'successfully liberated' one, Elsa locates herself, appropriately, in a third transitional category of women, those who become inevitably victimized by society's misogynistic norms even as they try to challenge them.' I would argue, however, that the misogynistic victimisation that she encountered was precisely because she liberated herself from the confines placed upon her by the patriarchal societies in which she lived. *Irene Gammel. 'Breaking the Bonds of Discretion: Baroness Elsa and the Female Sexual Confession'. Studies in Women's Literature. 14:1, 1995, pp. 149-166 (63)*

'Lautgedicht', it was still rooted in an artistic genealogy that placed the male genius at the centre. His poem, 'Elefanten Karawane', an example of a 'Lautgedicht', begins with the epitaph 'No sound is dissonant that tells of Life', a line taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This line is particularly interesting when considered alongside Paul Hegarty's argument that in certain performance spaces, women are deemed noisy simply by inhabiting the space: not only does it forge a line from a revered innovative male poet to Ball, it also brings into question the universality of Coleridge's line, reminding the reader that, as English cultural theorist and sociologist Paul Gilroy calls attention to, the concept of universalism was, rather paradoxically, premised on the exclusion of certain subjects, one of them being women.[193]

The mechanisation of society transformed the soundscape of cities in unprecedented ways. It was not only the noise of the new machines that seeped out from the factories into the city streets, the Taylorist and Fordist concept of streamlining to improve efficiency also permeated many aspects of early twentieth century American society. At the time of Dada's inception, a pressing concern for city planners was how to control the sounds of the newly mechanised urban spaces, a concern that was driven, according to sound studies historian Emily Thompson, by 'a preoccupation with efficiency that demanded the elimination of all things unnecessary'.[194] Thompson maintains that this drive for control over the soundscape resulted in a modern sound that highlighted humanity's technical mastery over the physical environment and 'exemplified an aesthetic of efficiency', which in turn 'fostered efficient behaviour in those who heard it'.[195] Both Ball and The Baroness were recalcitrant to the modern demand for efficient behaviour in divergent yet equally idiosyncratic ways: even The Baroness would find it hard to maintain

[193] Paul Hegarty. *Annihilating Noise*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020, p. 101; Paul Gilroy. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Colour Line.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 65-69

[194] Emily Thompson. *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America*, *1900–1933*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002, p. 2

[195] Emily Thompson. *The Soundscape of Modernity*. P. 2-3

Thompson defines her understanding of a 'modern sound' thus: 'As the new, nonreverberant criterion gained hold, and as the architectural and electroacoustic technologies designed to achieve it were more widely deployed, the sound that those technologies produced now prevailed. The result was that the many different places that made up the modern soundscape began to sound alike. From concert halls to corporate offices, from acoustical laboratories to the soundstages of motion picture studios, the new sound rang out for all to hear. Clear, direct, and nonreverberant, this modern sound was easy to understand, but it had little to say about the places in which it was produced and consumed.'

Emily Thompson. The Soundscape of Modernity. p. 3

control over the rattles, clinks and swishes of the objects fastened to her body as she moved through the streets of New York. For Ball, the response to the demand for efficient behaviour is most keenly felt in his use of magic. In 1913, he had complained that 'life is completely confined and shackled […] each individual, whether he resists or not, is assigned a specific role and with it his interests'.[196] Three years later when Ball's interest in magic was at its peak, he described it as 'the last refuge of individual self-assertion, and maybe individualism in general'.[197] For Ball, his magical acts weren't just an attempt to disrupt the grammar of war that had led to unprecedented bloodshed, but also an endeavour to resist a shackled existence that hampered independence. In this sense the performances that Ball conceived as magical acts such as 'Lautgedicht', were in keeping with Tristian Tzara's assertion that 'DADA was born of a desire for independence, of a distrust of the community'.[198]

But there were early Dada performances that seemed to promote communality rather than espouse distrust of it, notably those that showcased the simultaneous poem, another form of early Dada sound poetry. Ball defined the simultaneous poem as 'a contrapuntal recitative in which three or more voices speak, sing, whistle, etc., at the same time in such a way that the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre content of the piece is brought out by these combinations.'[199] Irene Gammel has argued that the simultaneous poem 'emerged as the language of trauma in the face of war'.[200] Trauma, however, is certainly not the only emotional state conveyed in performances that were emotionally ambivalent, an idea augmented by Ball's description above, and also the fact that, in addition to being retrospectively understood as non-linguistic expressions of trauma, they have been read as joyous acts of egalitarian communal sound-making by other contemporary art historians.[201]

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[196] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 3
[197] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*. p. 96
[198] Tristan Tzara. *Approximate Man and Other Writings*. Trans. Mary Ann Caws. Boston: Black Widow Press, 2005, p. 125
Hugo Ball. Flight Out of Time. p. 57
[199] Hugo Ball*. Flight Out of Time*. p. 57
Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco and Richard Huelsenbeck first performed the simultaneous poem at Hugo Ball's Cabaret Voltaire on the 30th of March 1916. Along with the performers, Ball has been credited as an artist that helped create the poetic form.
Gammel, Irene, and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl''. p. 259
[200] Gammel, Irene, and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl''. p. 260
[201] *For a far more positive take on the spontaneous poem, see Steve McCaffery. 'Cacophony, Abstraction, and Potentiality: The Fate of the Dada Sound Poem'. The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound. ed. Marjorie*

Because of both the myriad readings the raucous din of the poem provokes and the spontaneous communality of the performances, it is hard not to see the form as being primarily influenced by the cacophony of the city rather than World War I, for which any initial ambivalence harboured by the performers had been replaced with implacable disapprobation by 1916.

It is to be expected that the sound poetry the Dada artists created would, on some level at least, be in dialogue with the new noises of the cities seeing that they were working at a time when urban soundscapes were transforming in unprecedented ways.[202] For Thompson, while these noises may have been an unwelcome addition to urban life for many, they actively assisted the avant-garde practitioners of the early twentieth century in their bid to make innovative art that challenged their audience in novel ways. Much like avant-garde composers that were both influenced by and directly replicated the modern sounds, such as George Antheil and Luigi Russolo, the performers of the simultaneous poem challenged their audience to reconsider what the distinction between the new unwanted noises of modernity and the traditionally pleasing sounds of poetry and music.

'Deathwail': An Elegy Beyond Words

The elegy – a poem or song that typically mourns the death of a person or people – is one of the oldest and most distinguished forms of writing.[203] For this reason, it is perhaps surprising that it is a form that The Baroness, the unwavering iconoclast, turned to in order to produce one of her most emotionally charged works. However, the long-established conventions and traditions concerning who is granted the right to elegise and how the elegy should be both written and read aloud meant that there were many boundaries for her to transgress. In her book *Mothers in Mourning* (1992), Nicole Loraux states that as early as the 6th Century BC, mourning, especially if unrestrained, had come to be understood as a

Perloff and Craig Dworkin. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009 where McCaffery describes the poem as being performed by artists in a state of 'collective jubilation'.

[202] Thompson uses the term soundscape – rather than the term 'sonic environment' which was the dominant term in the English-speaking world prior to the publication of The Soundscape of Modernity – because she felt it did justice to the idea that, like a landscape, it was predicated on the listener's relationship with their environment, and was therefore, 'constantly under construction and always undergoing change'.
Emily Thompson. The Soundscape of Modernity. p. 2

[203] For detailed exploration of the history of the elegy and the conventions of the literary form see: Karen Weisman. *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010

feminine act that if left unchecked could pose a threat to civic order in Athens, where, subsequently, there were calls for it to be banned from the public spaces of the city.[204] Influential Athenians continued to attempt to put restraints on mourning: in Book 3 of *The Republic*, which was written in around 375 BC, Plato, while putting forward a proposed ban on mimesis, prohibited men from imitating women, especially from mimicking the feminine act of surrendering to grief and lamentation.[205] Measures against women grieving in public and attempts to moderate excessive grieving – which has continued to be perceived as a feminine trait – have proved to be as persistent as the elegy itself.[206] While there are also a great number of established customs of women – often highly skilled professional lamenters – performing elegies in Western cultures, they are mostly restricted by a long literary tradition, written mostly by men, that dictates that women conform to preordained modes of mourning.[207]

Max Cavitch has argued that elegies have endured not only because they offer a temporary disruption to intense grief, but also because they can point, 'in their language of loss, toward the sheer commonality of human experience.'[208] What Nicole Loraux and others have made clear however, is that to imagine that there has been a commonality of human experience, particularly regarding (although certainly not unique to) the gendered protocols of lamenting and grieving for the dead, is misguided. This is perhaps why Jean Heap and Margaret Anderson – editors of *The Little Review*, champions of The Baroness and Dada, and perhaps the most influential women associated with the art movement – resisted, at least initially, publishing elegies in their little magazine.[209] However, as the war

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[204] Nicole Loraux. *Mothers in Mourning*. trans. Corinne Pache. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 11
Archilocus called for a ban on women lamenting the dead in public in what is now referred to as Fragment 13, written sometime in the mid-6th century BC*. Archilocus. 'Fragment 13' in A. Pippin Burnett. The Archaic Poets. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 47-48*

[205] Ibid
Loraux argues that public lamentation was a 'threat to be contained, but also to be fantasized about' and asks whether it is contained by Plato so that it can be fantasized about in complete safety.
Nicole Loraux. Mothers in Mourning. P. 11

[206] Max Cavitch. *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p.5
For a detailed exploration of how measures against women grieving in public and attempts to control how women elegise the dead have endured, see the chapters 'Legacy' and 'Revision in Eighteenth-Century Anglo-American Elegy' in *Max Cavitch. American Elegy.*

[207] Gail Holst-Warhaft. *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*. London: Routledge. 2005, p. 1-2

[208] Max Cavitch. *American Elegy*. p.1

[209] Anita Helle. 'Blasé Sorrow'. p. 117-118

raged and nationalist rhetoric filled newspapers and infiltrated elegies, the editors realised that how they responded to war was a pressing concern. As Anita Helle has argued, Heap and Anderson were faced with a conundrum when publishing lamentations for the dead, or even a text that mentioned the war, specifically 'how to acknowledge the embeddedness of mourning postures and conventions of grieving, in violent physical social and rhetorical forms, and how to resist cover ups.'[210] The sudden resurgence of elegies and the posturing and conventions that comes with them would have not only caused the editors concern because of the confines they put on women writers; to have control of how the dead are written about in times of World War Is to have control of an important aspect of political discourse. To use the grammar of war in elegies would promote rather than criticise the violence that led to unprecedented death and could also be used to negate political responsibility. The elegy, therefore, was politically charged, and could be used as a tool to disrupt not only the sexist conventions embedded in the form, but also contemporary reactionary discourse.

Another possible reason for Anderson and Heap to reverse their initial scepticism about elegies was the experimentation that the form afforded the writer.[211] More than any other topic, writing about death and the pain it causes the loved ones left alive lays bare the limitations of conventional language. Elaine Scarry makes this clear in *The Body in Pain* (1985), where she argues that attempts to describe the pain one is feeling, whether it be emotional or physical, leads to a 'shattering of language' due to its inexpressibility.[212] Scarry argues that the shattering of conventional language should be considered a catalyst for a reconsideration of how pain is expressed, rather than an end point, as inexpressibility could led to the effacement of the one suffering.[213] She states that, 'a great deal, then, is at stake in the attempt to invent linguistic structures that will reach and accommodate this area of experience normally so inaccessible to language'.[214] Taking into consideration these two

[210] Anita Helle. 'Blasé Sorrow'. p. 119

[211] Despite working together on the Little Review for 15 years, Heap and Anderson had often contradictory ideological stances. *Ibid*

[212] Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 4-6.
Scarry also pertinently suggests that the language used to discuss and describe the violence of war is different to that used to described other forms of violence, and that 'when one moves from what is essentially a two-person event to one involving hundreds of thousands of persons', the situation requires 'complicated sets of arguments and sub-arguments'.

[213] Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain.* p. 5-6

[214] Ibid

(potentially) revolutionary aspects of the voicing of trauma, it is unsurprising that Heap and Anderson published 'Klink—Hratzvenga (Deathwail)' by The Baroness, an elegiac poem that was divisive and controversial precisely because it disrupted the grammar of war with a new grammar that was radical, challenging, and remarkable.[215]

Helle has located Heap's resistance to publishing art and literature that expressed a sense of mourning in her belief that 'self-consciously embodied performance formed the basis for a revolutionary art', and that the elegy was not an artform that allowed for such performances.[216] However, The Baroness, the artist that Heap and Anderson published more than any other, showed with 'Deathwail' that 'self-conscious embodied performance' could not only be employed to give expression to grief, but that at the time of its conception, was perhaps the most fitting mode of expression. This idea is supported by Martha Minow, who claims that 'to be healing, the act of narrating an experience of trauma needs to move beyond a plain statement of facts to include also the survivor's emotional and bodily responses'.[217] The poem was published in *The Little Review* in March 1920, sixteen months after the end of World War I and 10 months after The Baroness's husband Leopold had died by suicide after being interned in Switzerland following four years as a prisoner of war in Brest, Northern France. It was published alongside her German language eulogy for Leopold 'Irrender König'. Although very different in tone, the two poems, published side by side on a double spread, invite you to read them as companion pieces. The subtitle for 'Irrender König' reads '(an [which translates into English as 'on] Leopold von Freytag-Loringhoven)', and across the page, at roughly the same alignment, the subtitle for 'Deathwail' reads (He is Dead!).[218] Irene Gammel has called 'Deathwail' an 'elegiac sound poem' that can be read as 'a mourning cry for a generation that survived World War I'.[219]

The Baroness was fluent in both German and English and spoke some French, and there are traces of these languages in the poem, but other than the title and subtitle ('He is dead!') there are no words in their entirety.[220] Rather we get fragments or suggestions of

[215] From now on Kilnk -Hratzvenga (Deathwail)' will be referred to as 'Deathwail'
[216] Anita Helle. 'Blasé Sorrow'. p. 118
[217] Ibid: Martha Minow. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1998, p. 245
[218] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhovern. 'Klink—Hratzvenga (Deathwail)'. *The Little Review.* 6.10, 1920, pp. 11,12 Elsewhere in the edition there was an instalment of James Joyce's Ulysses, which Little Review had been publishing periodically since 1918.
[219] Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl''. p. 257
[220] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhovern. 'Klink—Hratzvenga (Deathwail)'. p. 11

English words through rhyme. As for the title, Klink is an Afrikaans word that translates into English as sound, if an e was added to the end, it would become klinke, the German word for door handle, or latch. Hratzvenga is a word in the Bantu language, Shona, which is spoken in Zimbabwe, and translates into English as 'we will not avoid it'. So even before we get to the bracketed English words of the subtitle, we have a sense that the poem will be about death. This subject matter had, and indeed still has, connotations of certain tropes of both the linguistic and formal kind. For the reader and audience member there would be expectations of what was to follow the title and subtitle, even in the context of avant-garde practice.[221]

In their illuminating study of The Baroness's sound poetry, Gammel and Zelazo argue that as 'a fiercely anti-categorical' artist, The Baroness used fragmented language with the intention of a 'proliferation of representation and signification.'[222] However, if *Deathwail* is read as an elegy, a form that, as Eve Sorum has pointed out, 'depends on prosopopoeia – the trope that involves giving face and voice both to an absent figure and to the mourner's own grief' – Gemmel and Zalazo's understanding of The Baroness's fragmentation as an approach that proliferates signification is somewhat troubled.[223] As Sorum argues, '[t]he prosopopoeia of elegy asks us to give face to something that is not simply other, but is also absent', but what if the elegy in question is mourning the loss of something that is incomprehensible or unspeakable and, therefore, the process of signifying or personifying it is unworkable?[224] The Baroness's fragmentation, which itself produces an absence or sense of loss through using familiar sounds that suggest words but withholds the sounds that

[221] Jay Winter argues that the idea that modernists, when searching 'for an appropriate language of loss' sought new modes of expression that rejected traditional language is 'misleading'. He argues that '[t]his now fashionable and widely accepted interpretation will not stand scrutiny, primarily for two reasons. First, the rupture of 1914-18 was much less complete than previous scholars have suggested. The overlap of languages and approaches between the old and the new, the 'traditional' and the 'modern', the conservative and the iconoclastic, was apparent both during and after the war.' Winter concludes that in terms of writing that mourns the loss of WW1, the distinction between new forms of expression and traditional was often 'more rhetorical than real'. Unsurprisingly, Winter's text ignores texts of mourning written by Dada artists, or anybody using language anywhere near as revolutionary as The Baroness.
Jay Winter. Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 3-4

[222] Irene Gammel, and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl''. p. 257

[223] Eve Sorum. *Modernist Empathy: Geography, Elegy, and the Uncanny.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 48

[224] Eve Sorum. *Modernist Empathy.* p. 48-49

complete them, seems to point towards a difficulty of signification rather than an expansion of it. For example, lines 4-11 culminate in the word 'Mardoodaar':[225]

> Arr — karr —
> Arrkarr — barr
> Karrarr — barr —
> Arr —
> Arrkarr —
> Mardar
> Mar — dóórde — dar —
> Mardoodaar!!![226]

The word brings to mind the German word 'Mord,' which translates to murder in English or 'bites' in French, (which could combine with the door latch imagery to evoke the image of something slamming closed whether that be a door or mouth), the French word 'meutre', which again translates to the English word 'murder or 'murderer' or 'mort', French for death. Gammel and Zelazo have argued that because of the multitude of recognisable words evoked in 'Mardoodaar', it concludes the passage above with 'climatic proliferation'.[227] While this is certainly a compelling argument, there is also something else happening. Because the words 'mord', 'mort' 'meutre' and 'murderer' are evoked by similar sounds rather than explicitly said or written in 'Deathwail', The Baroness is already pointing to a difficulty in signification; if there is indeed proliferation it is of indistinct apparitions rather than unambiguous imagery. This may reflect the cultural context in which 'Deathwail' was written: as Susan Sontag makes clear in her influential essay 'Against Interpretation' (1966), in an urban environment where material excess and overwhelming sensory 'bombardment' is the norm, as it was in The Baroness's New York, an individual's senses are dulled rather than sharpened.[228] This is reflected in 'Deathwail', especially in the word 'Mardoodaar!!!', which simultaneously opens the door to a multitude of interpretations

[225] Freytag-Loringhoven, Zelazo, Gammel. *Body Sweats.* p. 180
[226] Ibid
[227] Irene Gammel, and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl''. p. 257
[228] Susan Sontag 'Against Interpretation'. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Picador, 2001, p. 17

while keeping them just out of reach. For example, it is surely not a coincidence that the three aforementioned words evoke by 'Mardoodaar!!!' are English, French and German words, the three most common languages spoken by soldiers of World War I. This, along with the connotations of the words evoked and the three exclamation marks that follow the word, suggest that it carries with it some emotive heft. However, there is still the issue of the words being evoked rather than explicitly said. The fact that to see or hear 'mord', 'meutre' or 'murderer' takes creative reading or listening is more important than what exactly the listener or reader thinks they have heard or seen. Over eight and a half million people died from wounds or disease on the battlefields of World War I, and in 1916 the daily death toll was, on multiple occasions, over sixty thousand.[229] If The Baroness was trying to evoke the various words that mean murder or murderer, then that the words do not come out intact is appropriate: how can the old words concerning killing and death, or any words for that matter, be used in the face of such shocking and unprecedented mass slaughter? Their old meanings have just been irrevocably shattered.

Sontag argues that '[r]eal art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable.'[230] Sontag's philosophical argument is aimed at art critics and historians that 'squeeze more content out of the work than is already there', but 'Deathwail' reveals an artist working from a similar viewpoint as the philosopher. The Baroness would have performed her piece to an audience in post-war New York where the idea of having manageable conformable aspects of their daily lives would have been appealing in the aftermath of the bloodiest moment in history and in an urban space where technological advancements were rapidly changing the day-to-day experience of city living. Yet in 'Deathwail' The Baroness offers no comfort; she points to the deficiencies of conventional language and the implosion or a bourgeois belief system without offering any consolatory words, or indeed, aside from the titles, any recognisable words at all. She uses her poem to reflect the world in which it was written: unfamiliar, discomforting and uninterpretable.

[229] John Graham Royde-Smith. World War I: Killed, wounded, and missing. *Britannica*. September 30th 2022. https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I/Killed-wounded-and-missing [accessed 12th December 2021]
[230] Susan Sontag. 'Against Interpretation'. p. 13

The Baroness's discomforting approach cannot be disentangled from her own experiences of war-related trauma (the suicide of Leopold; being a prisoner of war herself), and in this sense her fragmentary language chimes with that of Virginia Woolf's war-damaged character from her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), Septimus Smith. Woolf's narrative fundamentally contrasts the world view and life experiences of Septimus, who has returned from fighting in World War I greatly disturbed and unable – or perhaps unwilling – to function as British society expects, and Miss Dalloway, whose upper-class existence has largely cloistered her from the horrors of the world. To use the novelist's pithy description of her seminal work: 'Sanity & insanity. Mrs D. [Miss Dalloway] seeing the truth. S. S. [Septimus Smith] seeing the insane truth.'[231] The 'insane truth' that Septimus experiences – and it is worth stressing that while it may be insane it is also legitimate – has many debilitating effects on the character (who, much like The Baroness's husband, ultimately dies of suicide), pertinently, one being his losing the ability to talk fluently. Septimus's broken speech has a both a literal and metaphorical disruptive quality, as Cristine Froula observes: 'Septimus's stammer interrupts the tanklike momentum of the heroic social script […] Like a vulnerable body before their smoothly rolling sentences, his broken utterances mark the site of a reality'[232] Froula is suggesting here that Septimus's stuttering severs the flow of nationalistic heroic rhetoric, creating caesuras in which a shocking reality can be observed. That Septimus is a veteran of World War I – he is confidently assured (to his dismay) that he 'served with great distinction in the War' – only adds to the disruptive power of his language: he embodies the fracture of the construct of a heroic subject.[233]

In his study of English elegies, Peter Sacks argues that one function of the poetic form is that it 'provides a kind of distraction, a channelling of the energy of grief into a highly controlled and skilled exertion'. For Sacks, those who elegise have historically been understood as being able to 'exemplify and […] immortalize the qualities of the deceased, or at least those virtues deemed important for the community's survival.'[234] However, 'Deathwail' does not offer a distraction, nor is it interested in the concept of virtues, rather

[231] Virginia Woolf. *The Hours: The British Museum Manuscript of* Mrs. Dalloway. ed. Helen Wussow. New York: Pace University Press, 1997, p. 412
[232] Cristine Froula. '*Mrs. Dalloway's* Postwar Elegy. pp. 153-154
[233] Virginia Woolf. *Miss Dalloway.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981, p. 96
[234] Peter Sacks. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, p 36

The Baroness's fractured language of her elegy frustrate any possibility of the conventional 'mourning postures' of the form that so effortlessly become a vehicle for nationalistic rhetoric. The Baroness was, of course, invested in experimental avant-garde practices, but it is not difficult to see two other motivational factors that led to her mutilation of such a well-established poetic form: gendered discrimination and violence of an unprecedented magnitude.

> Longstanding sexual discrimination has impinged on women's experience of mortal loss; and the difficulty in identifying with predominantly male symbols of consolation greatly complicates the woman's work of mourning. But we should not lose sight of how such symbols also relate to a sheer lack – man's or woman's – and how the genetic power that they represent could in many respects be of either gender.[235]

The lack that Sacks locates would have mutated during and in the aftermath of the war. The sheer scale of death would mean that a sense of loss inherent with grief would have been compounded with shock, fear, anger and a number of other acute feelings: if, as Scarry has argued, it is necessary to 'invent linguistic structures' that adequately give voice to grief and suffering, doing so in 1918, the year The Baroness penned 'Deathwail', was both more pressing and more difficult than ever.[236]

Much like Scarry, Margaret Higonnet has suggested the kind of grief The Baroness and others would have felt in 1918 'resisted translation into language', and that 'its patterns of repetition-compulsion, stuttering or numbness generating a fractured mode of writing about the war.'[237] The Baroness's 'Deathwail' certainly augments this argument. Reading her piece alongside the example Higonnet gives to support her own position, however, reveals that there is also more happening in the sound poem than the more canonical World War I related poems that use fragmentation. For example, Higonnet points out that in Wilfred Owen's poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', a text that questions whether the fallen soldiers of World War I can be elegised, and one of the most well-known poems to identify the problem of a nationalistic conventional language used simultaneously to elegise the

[235] Peter Sacks. *The English Elegy*. p. 13
[236] Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain.* p. 5-6
[237] Margaret Higonnet. 'The Great War and the Female Elegy: Female Lamentation and Silence in Global Contexts'. *The Global South.* 2:1, 2007, p. 120-133 (123)

dead and promote the war that killed them, 'mechanical, stuttering sounds have replaced human voices'.[238] In the poem, the role of women (or 'girls' to use Owen's phrasing) is to grieve their loved ones who died overseas in an unimaginable hellscape with the 'tenderness of patient minds'.[239] Owen's peer, Siegfried Sassoon, also used his poetry to both highlight the geographical distance between the fighting soldiers and the women that mourn their deaths, and the futility and even counterproductivity of the elegies penned from a position of safety from the battlefields. As Higonnet points out, for Sassoon distance equates to ignorance, and, rather shockingly, also leads to culpability.[240] In his poem 'Glory of Women' Sassoon suggests that women are not only seduced by a nationalistic grammar of war but also, through the rhetoric of their mourning, perpetuate it: 'You worship decorations; you believe / That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace. / You make us shells. […] You crown our distant ardours while we fight, / And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.'[241] This idea, that women are unable to write 'truthful' elegies relating to war, specifically World War I, was widespread during and in the aftermath of the conflict, and, as Higonnet makes clear, continued to be perpetuated by scholars late into the twentieth century.[242]

While it may be churlish to critique the clarity of thought of somebody writing from the trenches, to perceive World War I as an event that exacerbated perceived gender divisions, as was the case for Sassoon and subsequent historians, is to reveal a blinkered outlook. As Higonnet et al. point out in *Behind Enemy Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (1987), the increase of women's first-hand experience of war in the twenty first century begin with World War I, troubling the prevalent 'myth' of the time of 'fierce and

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[238] Ibid
In a preface to his poetry, Owen suggested that the change of form and tone of his elegies were a direct result of the new form of warfare that raged in Europe. He wrote: 'elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.'
Wilfred Owen. The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen. Cambridge, Massachusetts: New Directions. p. 28
[239] Wilfred Owen*. The Collected Poems.* p. 41
[240] Margaret Higonnet. 'The Great War and the Female Elegy'. p. 123-124
[241] Siegfried Sassoon. *Counter Attack and Other Poems*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1918, p.32
[242] Eve Sorum. *Modernist Empathy.* p. 48-49
Higonnet makes clear that it wasn't only reactionary sexist scholars that held this view: 'Even feminist critics have doubted the possibility of powerful poetry by women. Nosheen Khan affirms that "women poets, restricted by their noncombatant status from direct experience of warfare, were dependent solely on news-paper reports and on hearsay for any knowledge about life in the trenches".' Higonnet quoting Nosheen Khan, *Nosheen Kahn. Womens' Poetry of the First World War. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988, p. 121.*

warlike' men venturing from their homes to protect their womenfolk, who, 'as mothers, have an affinity for peace'.[243] Furthermore, Higonnet et al. reveal that this 'myth' was an essential tool used by people in positions of power to maintain social stability at a time when it was under threat, and 'fend off the barbarism implicit in war'.[244] Both the idea that men are inherently fierce and warlike and that they have markedly different dispositions to women were troubled by the phenomenon of shellshock, a post-traumatic stress disorder that was widespread during World War I, and one that by 1916 accounted for over forty percent of war-related casualties (it is likely that Septimus, who had 'grown stranger and stranger' since the war, suffered from shell shock, although this is only implied and never said explicitly).[245] Shellshocked patients were a stark comparison to the masculinist fantasy of a heroic soldier, which, as Elaine Showalter makes clear in her essay 'Rivers and Sassoon: The Inscription of Male Gender Anxieties' (1987), had not only been constructed by real life military leaders such as General Haig but also through poetic imagery in the literary works of such writers as Kipling, G. R. Henty and Rider Haggard.[246]

So ingrained was the image of the unwaveringly brave patriotic soldier that one of the main anxieties harboured by shellshocked soldiers was the fear that they were acting effeminately.[247] Rather unsurprisingly, shellshock has subsequently been seen as a bodily protest against the myth of masculinity, and, through the manifestation of untranslatable emotional excess, an endemic of male hysteria, a condition that up until the war had been widely considered to only effect women.[248] Showalter summarises the conundrum of the soldier thus:

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[243] Margaret Higonnet et al. 'Introduction'. *Behind The Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 1
Higonet et al. continue to say that, 'Advances in military technology and strategy have blurred the boundaries between war zones and the home front. Mass communication and psychological warfare affect all sectors of belligerent societies. Women, like men, have been mobilized for both civilian and military work. They have moved from auxiliary and support roles such as nursing to sabotage and combat. As defence workers producing armaments, they may be said both to complement and to expand the reach of the predominantly male armed forces. Moreover, employed or not, all women have had to contend with food shortages, rationing, and evacuation. In all these ways, then, the realities of the two world wars contradicted the myth that war compels men to go forth and fight in order to protect their women, who remain passive and secure at home with the children.'
[244] Margaret Higonnet et al. 'Introduction'. p. 1-2
[245] Elaine Showalter. 'Rivers and Sassoon: The Inscription of Male Gender Anxieties'. *Behind The Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 63; Virginia Woolf. *Miss Dalloway.* P. 99
[246] Elaine Showalter. 'Rivers and Sassoon'. p. 63
[247] Elaine Showalter. 'Rivers and Sassoon'. p. 64
[248] Elaine Showalter. 'Rivers and Sassoon'. p. 63-64

> Placed in intolerable and unprecedented circumstances of fear and stress, deprived of their sense of control, and expected to react with outmoded and unnatural "courage," thousands of men reacted instead with the symptoms of hysteria; soldiers lost their voices and spoke through their bodies.[249]

While the shell-shocked casualties of war displayed wide-ranging symptoms from the physical such as blindness and limps, to the emotional such as anxiety attacks and insomnia, there were widespread symptoms that straddled the two categories: sexual impotence, and, the most common symptom experienced by soldiers exposed to the horrors of World War I, muteness. Much like the poetry of Owen and Sassoon, 'Deathwail' identifies the traditional language of elegies as a tool used by those who want to promote the war, yet, somewhat ironically, it was The Baroness, rather than the two authors who had experienced the front, who produced a work that utilised a mode of expression Showalter identifies in the shellshocked soldiers: she spoke with her body.[250] In this sense, The Baroness's fractured language can be read not only as a symptom of the fact that women were largely denied an oppositional political voice, a result of years of being restricted by preordained modes of mourning, but also as mirroring the mute shell-shocked soldiers that not only had to contend with the unattainable gendered expectations placed upon them, but also the unspeakable horrors of an industrialized society at war.[251]

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[249] Elaine Showalter. 'Rivers and Sassoon'. p. 64

[250] Fundamentally hysteria was a construct, an imagined illness, applied to women. To use it of men might, therefore, may have implied emasculation.

[251] Showalter makes the link between technological advancement – something The Baroness railed against in her writing – and shellshock clear: The Great War was the first large-scale military operation in which mental breakdown played a significant role. This was so, historians have suggested, because of the high degree of impersonality, tension, passivity, and uncertainty trench warfare produced. As Eric Leed explains, "neurosis was a psychic effect not of war in general but of industrialized war in particular . . . the neuroses of war were the direct product of the increasingly alienated relationship of the combatant to the means of destruction." *Elaine Showalter. 'Rivers and Sassoon'. p. 63 quoting Eric Leed. No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 164*

The lack of politic agency and voice women were afforded in the USA would have been a contemporary topic in 1918, the year The Baroness wrote 'Deathwail'. Two years prior Alice Paul formed the National Women's Party, who protested for the passage of a national suffrage amendment, and one year later in 1917, 'The Silent Sentinels' were arrested for protesting in favour of women's suffrage outside the Whitehouse. When in prison, members of the Silent Sentinals began a hunger strike that gained nationwide coverage.

Corporeal Cacophony

While The Baroness's fractured poetic language is unapologetically radical, it is also unsurprising that, as a woman artist in early twentieth century America, her writing on the violence of war was inexplicit. As previously mentioned, The Baroness was a victim of violence from the hands of her father, her lover, Ernst Hardt, and her peers in New York. Women artists that were victims of violence at the time she was writing would be fully aware of deep-rooted societal expectations to keep the topic out of their work and would, therefore, often rely on 'indirect techniques to evoke the experience of gendered violence and other forbidden subjects'.[252] The Baroness faced a difficult question any time she made a text-based work: how can she best articulate herself when facing systematic restriction on what you are expected to say, and when established signification, once thought to be so stable, has been shaken from the words that previously carried it?[253] Gammel and Zelazo have argued that by 'rendering problematic the very concept of articulation, The Baroness's sound poems let her body speak'.[254] But it not only speaks, it also reflects: as the repurposed detritus from New York's sidewalks that hung from The Baroness's body as she performed suggests, the dichotomy between the body and the space the body inhabits was also under interrogation.

Returning to lines 4-13, the phoneme */a(r)/* is repeated 17 times in the 13 words that comprise them.

Arr — karr —
Arrkarr — barr
Karrarr — barr —
Arr —
Arrkarr —
Mardar

[252] Margaret Higonnet et al. 'Introduction'. p. 15
[253] Sarah Hayden has suggested that when the difficulty words had in retaining their pre-war signification for Dada artists is deliberately replicated in the word 'Dada' itself, which, 'comes to resemble an arcane and redundant mark of punctuation whose original function can no longer be recalled, an arbitrary, recurrent hieroglyph, its signification so disputed as to have become empty of any signification.'
Sarah Hayden. Curious Disciplines: Mina Loy and Avant-Garde Artisthood. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018, p. 63
[254] Irene Gammel, and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl''. p. 260

Mar — dóórde — dar —

Mardoodaar!!![255]

While the sounds of 'Deathwail' are primarily emotive, the repeated phoneme in this passage was chosen to evoke and elicit ambiguous sensations in the audience/reader. /a(r)/ initially sounds like a corporeal resonance, and despite the topic of the piece and the connotations of the word that the phoneme eventually builds to form (Mardoodaar!!!), not necessarily a despairing one. The opening word of this passage, 'Arr', could be a comforting sound reminiscent of something one might say to a baby or child when they are distressed, yet for reasons that will be examined, the sounds never settle as an act of feminine reassurance – perhaps much desired due to the crisis of masculinity at the time she performed – but rather offer the possibility while simultaneously holding it at arm's length. In this sense The Baroness's performances of the poem would have been in keeping with her disjunctive art-as-life practice, and like other aspects of her work, would have aroused affective complexities that helped move her elegy away from conventional feminine modes of mourning towards a more ambivalent form.

The capital 'A' that begins this section would be embodied by The Baroness one year later in a photo taken by Man Ray and sent to Tristian Tzara in which she stands naked, body carefully positioned to portray the 'A' of L'Amerique, French for America. While this can be read as a humorous allusion to the corporeality of her verse, it is also a reminder that her adopted country and what it signifies was something she explored in her art. That 'Arr' of line 4 evokes the sound of the opening phoneme of America, especially when read alongside the word that follows it, 'Karr', which sounds like the final phoneme of the continent (and perhaps also conjures the German spelling of the word, Amerika).[256] Gammel and Zelazo point out that in the score that The Baroness wrote out for 'Deathwail', piercing sounds and sounds that are to be specifically emphasised have been coloured with red ink. Gammel and Zelazo mostly focus on what this means in relation to high pitched penetrating sounds that contain the letter 'i', but as well as words that make these sounds, the dashes are also stained red.[257] Unfortunately it is impossible to know how an emphasis on punctuation

[255] Freytag-Loringhoven, Zelazo, Gammel. *Body Sweats.* p. 180
[256] Freytag-Loringhoven, Zelazo, Gammel. *Body Sweats.* p. 180
[257] Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo. ''Harpsichords Metallic Howl'. p. 266

would have been performed by The Baroness. However, on reading her score, the red that accentuates the dashes intimates that they are as important as the sounds that they disrupt; the dash on line 4 that separates 'Arr' and 'Karr', is particularly heavy with signification as it serves to, albeit abstractly, illustrate an American society and culture that was violently rent in two. In this sense, despite disrupting the scored sounds of the poem, The Baroness's idiosyncratic dashes do not represent an absence of sound, they are perhaps the loudest part of the poem: a visual representation of articulation being violently slashed, exposing the cacophony and confusion of post-war New York life.

Gammel likens The Baroness's language – 'rising out of heaps of fragments' – to Frankenstein's monster; much like Frankenstein, who was repulsed by his creation, The Baroness's audience were repelled by her fractured corporeality.[258] Jones supports the idea that The Baroness's corporeality repelled her audience when she says that she 'scatter[ered] them far to the winds out of their terror of confronting a living embodiment—a mirror—of their own shattered or compromised subjectivities.'[259] This reading is manifestly true and is substantiated by what is known about how The Baroness was treated by her audience and peers, yet how she saw her art – at least how she claimed to see it in a letter to Djuna Barnes – reveals that it may not have been her intention. She suggests that being a mirror of the fractured nature of her audience and society in which they live was not something she set out to do, or even believed she had the capabilities to do: 'I CANNOT TELL EVENTS BUT BE CARRIED BY EMOTION INTO A FANCY WORLD OF SPIRITUAL REALITY' [capitalisation artist's own].[260] The Baroness conjures her 'spiritual reality' through her corporeally charged language, which is perhaps why Eliza Jane Reilly has argued that her

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Gammel and Zelazo go on to say that 'in her handwritten manuscript of the poem (figure 2), The Baroness clearly indicates a visual notation of the intended performance of sound based on an alternation in colour scheme from black to red, wherein insistence in emphasis and pacing is signalled in red. A pointedness is certainly conveyed in The Baroness's red dotting of "i's," as is an underscoring of the connectivity she espouses (between media, between the senses, and between herself and her audience in performance) in her use of red ink to inscribe her characteristic and plentiful dashes and hyphens.'

[258] Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p. 233

[259] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism*. p. 221

Linda Lappin suggests that even those that understood the bravery and radicality of The Baroness's poetry were not immune to being repelled by her: 'Hart Crane, both attracted and repelled by this androgynous woman, ridiculed her at parties by mimicking her speech and mannerisms yet he cheered the explosive spirit of her poetry and admired her courage in speaking out against American conformity.'

Linda Lappin. 'Dada Queen'. p. 315

[260] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. *Baroness Elsa*. ed. P.I. Hjartarson and D.O. Spettigue. Ottawa: Canada Oberon Press, 1992, p. 37

sound work was markedly divergent from that produced by 'machine-centred, anti-humanistic' masculinist Dada practitioners.[261] For example, the phonetics of the word 'karr' would, in isolation, have a distinct connotation: an automobile. The word car was initially used to name the carriage compartment of a horse drawn cart, then primarily for a railway carriage or wagon, before finally being used to mean a motorised road vehicle: it is a word that carries with in it the history of the technological advancement of travel.[262] It therefore changes the relationship between the emotional resonance of the section and the building rhythm of the */a(r)/* sound, troubling what originally appeared to be a 'seductive purr', as Gammel and Zelazo see it, or perhaps an orgiastic increase of bodily pleasure, by introducing traces of the noises and sights of the modern city space into the collagist imagery. The dichotomy between the real-world 'events' that had shattered the subjectivity of her audience and the 'spiritual reality' that her emotions had carried her to, was not as distinct as her claim to Barnes suggests. It is likely to have been, much like her performances, an instance where she was highlighting the difficultly of truthful articulation at a time where one's 'spiritual reality' was shaped by a challenging and distressing historical moment. This does not in any way diminish its poetic beauty or transformative radicality, however, rather it is the base from which she created a piece of art, that more than any other Dada work, affirms Richard Kostelanetz's argument that sound poetry is 'not a substitute for language but an expansion of our verbal powers'.[263]

Despite being elegiac and despairing, performances of 'Deathwail' would also have transmitted a possibility of change; as Rudolph Kunzli observes, The Baroness's disruption of language was just one factor of a wider art practice, the driving force of which was always to transform American culture for the better.[264] Francesca Chiappini supports this argument in her text 'Spelling Errors As a Cry of Protest: The Idiosyncratic Language of The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven' (2017). Chiappini argues against Gammel's understanding that The Baroness's sound works were composed using a 'language of trauma', intended to

[261] Eliza Jane Reilly. 'Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven'. p. 27
[262] Oxford English Dictionary. 'Car n.1'. *OED*. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27674?rskey=OlGVIs&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid
[263] Richard Kostelanetz. *Text-Sound Texts*. New York: William Morrow, 1980, p. 16.
Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. *Baroness Elsa*. p. 37
[264] Rudloph E. Kunlzi. 'Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and New York Dada'. *Women in Dada: Essays in Sex Gender and Identity*. ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998, pp. 442-476

'protest against the sounds of cannons of World War I'.[265] Chiappini reads The Baroness's work as being composed using a transgressive language of protest that was capable of giving expression to the emotional and sensory unlike the conventional language which she describes as being a 'vehicle of a degraded system of values' in post-war America.[266] In this sense the wail of 'Deathwail' isn't only a morbid mourning cry for the dead, it's also a protesting cry of hope for a more fitting language. In this sense, The Baroness's language operates comparatively with how John Holloway's conceptualises the scream: as something more than a forlorn gesture.[267]

> Our scream is not just a scream of horror. We scream not because we face certain death in the spider's web, but because we dream of freeing ourselves. We scream as we fall over the cliff not because we are resigned to being dashed on the rocks below but because we still hope that it might be otherwise. Our scream is a refusal to accept. A refusal to accept that the spider will eat us, a refusal to accept that we shall be killed on the rocks, a refusal to accept the unacceptable [...] our scream is a scream to break windows, a refusal to be contained, an overflowing a going beyond the pale, beyond the bounds of polite society.[268]

While Holloway's argument is concerned with the act of screaming, it can be applied to the wail of 'Deathwail', which, through its confrontational and uncompromising radicality, is emblematic of The Baroness's art-as-life practice as a whole. Everything she did suggested she was resolutely unwilling to accept the unacceptable conditions of life as a woman artist in post-war New York; she refused to be contained in the face of systematic silencing, physical violence and both the threat of, and actual imprisonment. As Marie Thompson points out in her text 'Three Screams' (2013), '[t]here is no certainty that the scream will be met with a solution, […] yet nevertheless within the scream lies the hope of change, the possibility of an opening. The scream calls for a response.'[269]

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[265] Francesca Chiappini. 'Spelling Errors as a Cry of Protest'. pp. 200-202
[266] Ibid
[267] John Holloway. *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. London: Pluto Press, 2010, p. 6
[268] Ibid
[269] Marie Thompson. 'Three Screams'. *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*. ed. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 154-155

Sh — sh —

Vrmm.

In 'Deathwail' The Baroness created a new language to challenge preconceived gendered modes of mourning, yet, despite the revolutionary potential of her work, it does not represent a definite break from the women that had mourned before her. Although her fragmentary language is inseparable from the context in which it was written and performed – especially seeing as it was spoken through her 'body of terror', that was 'marked' with her 'personal history' – that The Baroness conceived of 'Deathwail' as a mourning cry, or more specifically a wail of mourning, meant that she reshaped and recast a historically feminised sound.[270] Perhaps more importantly, 'Deathwail' also looked forward by offering an alternative way to (re)sound and inhabit a performance space. Ella Finer argues that the sound works of women practitioners that have been largely written out of conventional rational art histories are 'rendered intelligible only by the listener, who (in specifying her object) is predisposed to listen in a certain way'.[271] While many of The Baroness's contemporary audience were either incapable of listening in the 'certain way' Finer alludes to, or simply chose not to, there can be no doubt that her sounded interventions resonated long after her death, their spirit echoing in other acts of innovative nonacquiescence.

One such act is the keening of the Greenham Common protesters, which has been described by Anna Feigenbaum in her text 'Now I'm a Happy Dyke!' (2010) as 'a low, long throaty wail' used to 'mourn death'.[272] Much like The Baroness's language used in 'Deathwail' the wail of the protesters was an expansion of an individual and collective's ability to verbally articulate intense emotions, an idea that was fully understood by the

[270] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa.* p. 307
Gammel conceives of The Baroness's body as not just revealing her own personal trauma but also being a site that reflected collective trauma: 'The Baroness's body of terror was pivotal during the World War I era. Written on her body was the trauma of earlier experiences including the tension of perpetual conflict and emotional violence at home. The Baroness's personal history had marked her body with trauma that remained largely unassimilated in her speedy journey through Europe. Memory was deeply registered on her body to be acted out during a time of collective trauma.'
[271] Ella Finer. 'Feminism and Sound'. p. 317-318
[272] Anna Feigenbaum. ''Now I'm a Happy Dyke!': Creating Collective Identity and Queer Community in Greenham Women's Songs'. *Journal of Popular Music Studies.* 22:4, 2010, pp. 367–388 (374)

protesters at the time.[273] As was the case for The Baroness some sixty years before, the sounds emitted by the protesters elicited a mixed response, even from those that supported their cause. Kate McKluskie, writing in *Feminist Review* in 1983, two years after the camp was established, saw keening as a sounding that was in opposition to language, rather than one that enhanced emotive expression, arguing that '[t]he spinning of language offers exhilarating possibilities: it would be a pity for it to be drowned by keening ululation communicating only sorrow and revenge.'[274] Yet testimonies from the protesters reveal that much more than sorrow and revenge was being communicated in their wails:

> we started keening as we embraced the base. This seemed to be some kind of release that you wouldn't do in your own home, but out in the open, against the fence with this crowd of women, it was natural. Women started keening nervously at the start, but by the time it got round the base, it was a horrendous sound, it came from the abdomen and out through the top of the head. There was a sort of abandonment that went with it. I was very touched […] it was very emotional. Inside the base, I think they knew then that they were on to something that was well beyond their ken. That was December 1982, and I believe that's what primed them into using the law a bit stronger.[275]

Keening came naturally to the Greenham Common protesters only once they were fully removed, both physically and emotionally, from the stifling domesticated space of the home and an alternative communal space, the camp, was fully embraced. The wails were sounded out in an act of collective abandon, a touching unharmonious sound that signified and revealed an emotional unity amongst the protesters as well as grief for previous deaths of nuclear war and future deaths too.[276] It is likely that it is precisely because, as Margaret L. Laware has argued, keening became 'representative of women's innate powers, creativity

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[273] One protester explained that keening was used at Greenham Common and on marches because it was 'a nonviolent way of expressing our feelings'.
Margaret L. Laware. 'Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red: Feminist Rhetorical Invention and Strategies of Resistance at the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common'. NWSA Journal. 16:3, 2004, pp. 18-41 (33)

[274] Kate McKluskie. 'Women's Language and Literature: A Problem in Women's Studies' *Feminist Review*. 14:1, 1983, pp. 51-61 (56)

[275] Sarah Hipperson in Lyn Smith. *Voices Against War: A century of Protest*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2011, p. 235

[276] Margaret L. Laware reveals that the Greenham Common protesters weren't only concerned with their contemporary political circumstances, but also used their camp to look back: 'The Greenham women's mediation between the nuclear past and present was most poignantly displayed in their attention to recognizing the anniversaries of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as part of their yearly protest actions'
Margaret L. Laware. 'Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red. p. 34

and the bonds of the Greenham peace community itself' that the police responded to it with violence: it not only represented a powerful emotional connection but also something they could not understand.[277] It is keening, therefore, that confirmed the protesters had freed themselves from the confines of the established patriarchal society in the eyes of their oppressors because, as Anna Caraveli-Chaves points out, keening is an act that allows the keeners to move between different realms of existence: 'life and death, the physical and the metaphysical, present and past, temporal and mythic time.'[278]

Joan Scott has argued that in the face of the restrictive and exclusionary histories written by men, women look to the past to find voices that resonate 'incompletely and sporadically, though discernibly' in order to create their own alternative lineages and genealogies.[279] While the Greenham Common Protesters have never publicly declared The Baroness as a direct influence, the revolutionary potential of her work – specifically her confrontational refusal to adhere to gendered societal expectations – forged a genealogy that can be traced from the performance spaces of Greenwich Village and the pages of Little Review, through the works of artists such as Claude Cahun and Carolee Schneeman, to a muddy field in Berkshire where disquieting wails of defiance unsettled and confused a police force, intent on maintaining the status quo.

Carolee Schneeman was aware of the necessity of revisionist histographies and knew the potential happiness that could be kindled through the creation of genealogies that traced the embodied soundings made by women – genealogies that offered an alternative to the dominant phallocentric narratives that presided over, and often silenced and obfuscated, acts of feminist bodily transgression.[280] Victoria Horne has stated that

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[277] Sarah Hipperson further highlighted the relationship between keening and police violence. Saying that '[t]he police got freaked out on this [keening] because it was extremely powerful'. She continues: 'It was mourning, a penitential thing really, and it was incredibly powerful. I was injured there for the first time by an MOD policeman. He took the top of my arms and pressed his fingers in a way that I couldn't lift my arm for ages. But I stayed with it and we were corralled into a space, and another one came up and thumped me right in the back, a huge thump'.
Sarah Hipperson in Lyn Smith. Voices Against War. pp. 246, 255-256

[278] Anna Caraveli-Chaves. 'Bridge between Worlds: The Greek Women's Lament as Communicative Event'. *The Journal of American Folklore*. 93: 368, 1980, pp. 129-157 (144)

[279] Joan W Scott. 'Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity." *Critical* Inquiry. 27:1, 2001, pp. 284–304 (289-293)

[280] The control exerted over women's bodies was something Schneeman was all too aware of. In her 1964 collaboration with Robert Morris, *Site,* Morris, 'dressed in workman's overalls and a mask, systematically removed sheets of plywood from a makeshift structure that was disassembled to reveal Schneemann at its centre, nude, reclining in a pose reminiscent of Édouard Manet's *Olympia*. Historians have highlighted Schneemann's legally enforced immobility in this scene. Henry Sayre quotes the artist as saying: 'the law at

Schneeman used, 'not only the one act (the performance) but myriad subsequent acts of writing, speaking and insistent inscription to put pressure upon the calcified cultural operations of art history.'[281] Schneeman's collagist approach, laid out by Horne, shows that not only did she bear her predecessor's disruptive nonacquiescence, but also employed similar artistic strategies to do so, an idea augmented by a performance by Schneeman, where not only did she read fragments of The Baroness's writing, but also introduced herself to the audience *as* The Baroness, performing a literal embodiment of her artistic forebearer.[282]

That there are no known recordings of The Baroness reading her work herself is of vital importance when considering the cultural significance of 'Deathwail'. In her text *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (1997), Peggy Phelan argues that the biggest problem anybody writing about performance faces is that all performances disappear, which seems particularly important for a figure such as The Baroness who left behind relatively little of her physical artworks and scant documentation of her more ephemeral creations.[283] Phelan posits that a pitfall that arises from this problem, and one that frequently denies art historians the opportunity to read a text-based performance in a way that does justice to the performance at hand, is to fall for the 'illusion' that the performer can somehow be embodied in the written text of a piece they performed.[284] This is something that must be avoided in a close reading of 'Deathwail', which, when performed, would generate a meaning for each audience member informed not only by the sounds of the scripted language of the piece, but also the spectacle of her body-as-canvas costume, the sound the costume made as she moved on stage, movements and gestures, sounds that can be considered paralanguage such as gasps, wails and sobs, the gaps in between the sounds of the performance, the political relationship that The Baroness had with the space in which she performed and the audience for whom she performed. In this sense it is best to conceive of The Baroness's performances as collagist, but where Schneeman's artistic

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this time stated that persons *could* appear on stage naked [but only] without moving—that is, if they became statues. Movement or physical contact between nude persons was criminal.''
Henry Sayre. The Object of Performance: The American avant-garde since 1970. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p.76. quoted in Victoria Horne. ''the personal clutter… the painterly mess…'
Tracing a History of Carolee Schneemann's Interior Scroll'. Art History. 43:5, 2020, pp. 984-1006 (987)

[281] *Victoria Horne. 'the personal clutter'. p. 1003*

[282] James M. Harding. *Cutting Performances*. p. 22

[283] Peggy Phelan. *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*. New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 3

[284] Peggy Phelan. *Mourning Sex.* p. 148

output was collagist in its incorporation of acts other than performance into her milieu, The Baroness's was collagist due to her incorporation of a wide range of acts into her life-as-art performance.

While collage is often thought as an artistic approach that engenders new meanings through the forging of unfamiliar and exploratory connections, it can also point to the difficulty of signification and the limitations of rational art histories. For example, 'Deathwail' would have disrupted rather than constructed new meaning. This is most evident in the final six lines of the poem:

> Vrmbbbjjj — sh —
> Sh — sh — —
> Ooh!!!
> Vrmbbbjjj — sh — sh —
> Sh — sh —
> Vrmm.[285]

Following on from 'Vrmbbbjjj' – a word that is not just difficult to parse meaning from, but also one that is difficult to translate into sound – is 'sh', which is repeated seven times in the last six lines.[286] Unlike the word that it follows, 'sh' opens up a myriad of potential readings, partly due to it being the shushing sound in the English language, but mostly because of its onomatopoetic qualities.[287] The Baroness's costumes were designed to not only be visually spectacular, but also to make remarkable sounds, sounds that Gammel has delightfully termed her 'live Dada body music'.[288] One feature of her costumes that rang out was her *Limbswish* (ca. 1917-1920) (Fig. 3.), one of the few remaining parts of her costume that can be seen today. *Limbswish*, which The Baroness fastened to her waistbelt, was a whip-like device made from, amongst other things, a metal spring and a curtain tassel, that would rhythmically and audibly swish and swing as she moved.[289] 'Sh' therefore should be read not

[285] Freytag-Loringhoven, Zelazo, Gammel. *Body Sweats.* p. 181
[286] Ibid
[287] Ibid
[288] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p. 188
[289] Gammel highlights contemporary responses to the sounds of The Baroness's costumes in *Baroness Elsa:* Robert Motherwell […] commented on The Baroness's "chains" and "swishing long trains" as she "promenaded

just as a script for the mouth but also one for the body, simultaneously conjuring images of The Baroness telling the engine sounds – evoked at the beginning of the poem and in the final word ('Vrmm') – to stop and offering an alternative to their mechanised movement through visions of her costumes made from detritus to highlight the perpetual beauty in movement. 'Shh' is therefore a reminder that, as Anna Snaith highlights in her introduction to *Sound and Literature* (2018), written text can be a 'site of vocalisation, rhythmics and dissonance as well as an archive of soundscapes and modes of listening.'[290] 'Shh' could also summon the image of her attempted effacement from the history of the avant-garde (The Baroness being told to be quiet) and her simultaneous literal inability to do so (her swishing costumes and the fact that, as previously mentioned, her body would have been noisy simply from inhabiting a performance space). This image would be jubilant were it not for the fact that, as Gammel points out '[t]races of The Baroness's élan [we]re assimilated into the public media in much tamer form, while the wild Baroness herself was silenced and labelled insane.'[291]

Line 25 of the poem, 'Vrmbbbjjj — sh —', therefore encapsulates 'Deathwail's' relation to semantic meaning. It is composed of one word that seemingly closes the possibility of signification, and another that is multisensorial and evokes so many different possibilities of signification as to render one single reading inadequate. This is perhaps why 'Deathwail' supports Craig Dworkin's assertion that 'sound has accordingly been understood as both the defining opposite of meaning and the very essence of meaning.'[292] While The Baroness's collagist kaleidoscopic performances would be full of sights and sounds that, to use Gammel's terms, were primarily 'spontaneous moments of living' intended to elicit 'emotional dizziness and laughter', with no apparent immediate meaning for the audience to grasp, the sounds also resounded beyond the immediacy of her performances to forge new modes of performing, challenging the deep-rooted body politic that women performers faced in avant-garde performance spaces.[293] As Finer pertinently argues, 'sound reflects,

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down the avenues like a wild apparition," while Anderson noted "the peasant buttons ringing like bells" as The Baroness sat down.

Ibid

[290] Anna Snaith. 'Introduction'. *Sound and Literature.* ed. Anna Snaith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 2

[291] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p. 202

[292] Craig Dworkin. 'Introduction'. *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound.* Ed. Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009, p. 10-11

[293] Irene Gammel. *Baroness Elsa*. p. 187-188

echoes, resonates, reverberates – moves in its own continuum – not simply to play-back what has come before, but to vibrate on.'[294]

Sound artist Jaap Blonk has stated that in sound poetry 'sound is more important than meaning, and sometimes there is no meaning at all.'[295] However, in reading works such as 'Deathwail' alongside explorations of sound such as Finer's, it is apparent that despite pointing to the instability of meaning, The Baroness's collagist sound works were not devoid of it, rather they were revolutionary in their potential ability to cause fissures in predominantly white male histographies, and, much like Benjamin's conception of messianic time, their revolutionary potential could be reactivated by a future audience, 'predisposed to listen in a certain way'.[296] Blonk's argument highlights the difference between somebody using fractured non-linguistic vocal sounds from a position of relative historiographical safety and another who is trying to disrupt the flow of a history that seeks to erase them. The Baroness's 'Deathwail' unsettled her audience precisely because there were signs that she had created something radical and potentially galvanizing.[297]

[294] Ella Finer. 'Feminism and Sound'. p. 330
[295] Richard Elliot. *The Sound of Nonsense*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 46
[296] Ella Finer. 'Feminism and Sound'. p. 317-318
[297] Contemporary responses to the poem mixed, ranging from the wholly positive such as the following observation from New York writer Maxwell Bodenheim in 1920 "Else von Freytag-Loringhoven's 'Klink—Hratzvenga' has the virtues of so many languages and the deficiencies of none, since she can create sounds for shades of meaning that have no dictionary equivalents" to the negative, such as when Washington DC-based satirist Helen Rowland claimed that The Baroness was a 'retching assault on art' and New York based writer Evelyn Scott's letter in response to 'Deathwail' in the Little review, the same little magazine it was published in: 'The psychology of the author referred to is that of a mad woman. I feel an intense, horrid, and even beautiful obliviousness to all but the dominating emotion. There exists a callousness of intellectual stupidity and then there is what we see here, the callousness of emotional stupidity.'
Maxwell Bodenheim. 'The Reader Critic'. The Little Review. 6.11, 1920, p. 61
Helen Rowland. 'Concerning Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven'. The Little Review. 5:5. 1919, p. 56
Evelyn Scott. 'The Last Word'. The Little Review. 6.10. 1920, p. 43



Fig. 1. The Baroness in her Greenwich Village apartment, December 7, 1915

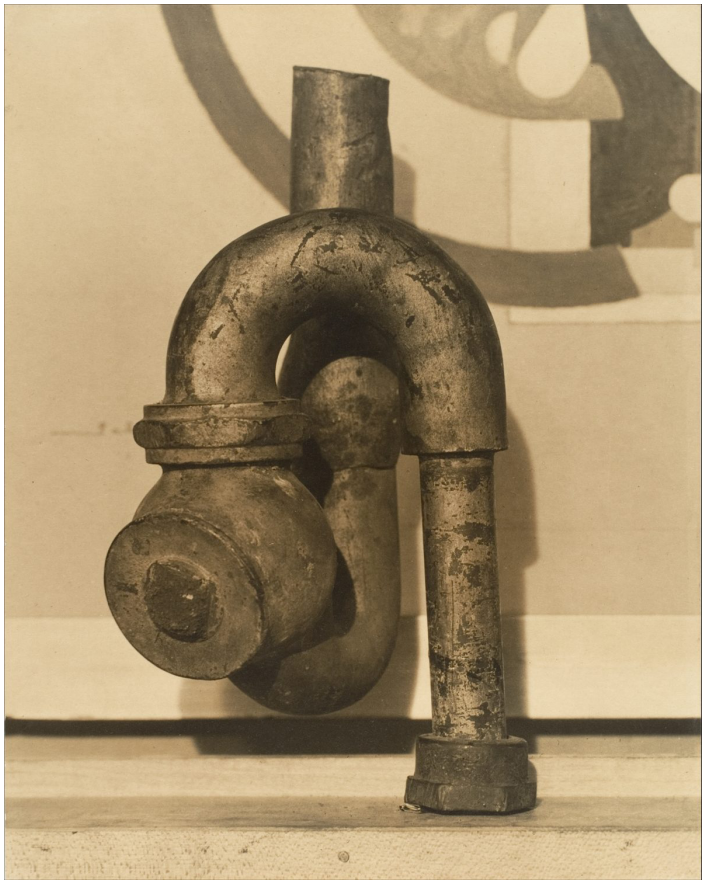


Fig. 2. *God,* (1917)



Fig. 3. *Limbswish*, (ca. 1917-1920)

II

Antonin Artaud: And Now Choke on Your Law

> [H]e has had an impact so profound that the course of all recent serious theatre in Western Europe and the Americas can be said to divide into two periods – before Artaud and after Artaud. No one who works in the theatre now is untouched by the impact of Artaud's specific ideas about the actor's body and voice, the use of music, the role of the written text, the interplay between the space occupied by the spectacle and the audience's space.[298] – Susan Sontag

> I had to learn to scream, to let this scream die out only when it had reached the point of annihilation.[299] – Antonin Artaud

> Evidently, post-Second World War poetic experiments, such as Artaud's, had made clear that language had gone through a cataclysm and been reduced to pure residue.[300] – Jeff Barda

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If, as I have argued, the revolutionary potential of The Baroness's work was stifled and supressed, French dramatist, actor, writer and artist Antonin Artaud, consciously or otherwise, carried it forward after her death by producing confrontational and unconventional works from the margins of society that, like The Baroness's, were viewed by the establishment as dangerous and irrational.[301] Much like The Baroness, Artaud cultivated a shockingly idiosyncratic writing style in which he enacted a derangement of conventional language; his plays were, to use the language of Nancy Luxon, spaces where he 'may vomit his own illness and interiority, with its undigested adherences and general sense of

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[298] Susan Sontag. 'Introduction' in Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver. Oakland: University of California Press, 1988, p. xxxviii

[299] Paule Thévénin and Bettina Knapp. 'A Letter on Antonin Artaud'. *The Tulane Drama Review*. 9:3, 1965, pp. 99-117 (107)

[300] Jeff Barda. ''Poetics of 'Ums and Ahs'. p. 273

[301] Despite Artaud's undoubted influence not just on theatre but also art, it can still be argued that he operated from the margins. I am using Michael Davidson's definition of a marginal artist or writer – those who 'resisted hegemonic values' and the 'the literary-industrial complex' in order to 'defend authentic aesthetic values from their instrumentalized versions in popular culture' – which can be used to define the output of Artaud, as well as The Baroness. Artaud's influence was also most keenly felt in the work of artists who fall under the broad category of American Counterculture, for whom the word margin had 'definite international implications relating to America's geopolitical authority following the war.'

collapse'.[302] Artaud's marginality was not only due to his idiosyncratic use of language, but also his 'angry defiance, coupled with the insistence on the conjunction of life and art [which] puzzled the better-connected reviewers and editors' as well as his clinically diagnosed 'madness'.[303] This is another way in which Artaud can be read as part of the same lineage as The Baroness: he also was forced to contend with being dismissed as mad. Even those that admired his work have to a great extent, both during his lifetime and retrospectively, understood and contextualised it through the prism of his eccentricity and his persistent aberrant behaviour. Yet unlike his German protofeminist predecessor, his legacy has undeniably shaped the work of generations of artists and writers: as Sontag makes clear above, there are not many who have had such a profound influence on the development of modern theatre as Artaud.[304]

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[302] Nancy Luxon in Michel Foucault. 'Literature and Madness: Madness in the Baroque Theatre and the Theatre of Artaud'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *40*:1-2, 2021, pp. 241-257 (242)

[303] Robert Leach. 'Antonin Artaud'. *Makers of Modern Theatre: An Introduction.* London: Taytor and Francis Group, 2004. p. 153

Artaud's madness requires contextualisation. Anne Tomich provides a condensed history of the numerous times Artaud was clinically diagnosed as mad: 'The first time Artaud was diagnosed with mental problems was in 1914, at the age of eighteen when he was diagnosed with "severe neurasthenia". The term "neurasthenia", introduced to medical vocabulary around 1870, was very commonly used at the time to designate what will later be called "neurosis". […] After World War I broke out, he was sent to the front in 1916 and very quickly declared unfit for service due to what was then called "his nerves" (another euphemism to describe mental pathology). He consulted more doctors, received more treatments, and went to more specialized institutions. A new diagnosis led to the conclusion of "hereditary syphilis" – a category that, at the time, was used to qualify many inexplicable mental disorders. […] By 1935 and following the trip to Mexico, Artaud was more and more dependent on drugs, and he spent more and more time in detox. His social behaviour was more and more atypical (gesticulations, screams, vituperations). All this is well documented, as is the Irish episode that changed the course of Artaud's life insofar as it marked the beginning of his institutionalization in a series of mental asylums. Artaud arrived in Ireland in August 1937. He did not speak English, he had serious financial problems and he was very irritable, short-tempered and quick to gesticulate and vituperate in public. What exactly happened in Dublin remains unknown. What is known for sure is that on 23 September, Artaud ended up in Mountjoy Prison and was then sent back to France, where he was immediately handed over to the police and sent, in a straitjacket, to the psychiatric service of the general hospital in Le Havre. The official medical certificate states that he was "dangerous to himself and to others" because of "mental disorders characterized by persecution ideas and hallucinations". He was thus transferred to a psychiatric hospital in Sotteville-lès-Rouen, where he was officially committed ("placé d'office") in November 1937.' Of course, as Artaud would eloquently propose in his text *Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society (1947)*, it is society which is 'abnormal', rather than the 'madman' who dares to speak intolerable truths'

Antonin Artaud. 'Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society'. Selected Writings. ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver. Oakland: University of California Press, 1988, p. 485-487

Anne Tomiche. 'Artaud, madness and/in translation'. Translation Studies. 12: 1, 2019, pp. 24–35 (24-26)

Artaud used the term pejoratively himself. He described the conventional language of the theatre as 'mad, crazy, perverted, rhetorical, philistine, anti-poetic and positivist'

Antonin Artaud. The Theatre and its Double. trans. Victor Corti. London: Alma House, 2010, p. 28

[304] Artaud's influence on modern theatre is based on his essays and manifestos written in the 1930s and collected in Le Théâtre et son Double [The Theatre and its Double] (1938) in which he calls for a theatre of cruelty

In her book, *No More Masterpieces: Modern Art After Artaud* (2020), Lucy Bradnock argues that '[w]ords shape both self and society, so the derangement of speech and writing serves both to dissolve the unitary subject and to dismantle social order […] [i]rrationality is proposed in opposition to the ordering power of the word'.[305] Bradnock's compelling argument elucidates readings of the text-based works of The Baroness – who as Jones points out, disrupts and dismantles the rational ordering of conventional art history because of her irrationality – her observation, however, is concerned with the works and legacy of Antonin Artaud.[306] The relationship between Artaud's madness and the work he produced is complex and has spawned complex narratives, as Bradnock observes.[307] For some members of the so-called Beat Generation his 'madness' was brought to the foreground and overdetermined in relation to the value of his work.[308] This is reflected in the decision of the publishers of *Artaud Anthology* (1965), Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Jack Hirschman, to let 'the process of the mind of Artaud' act as a 'criterion when ordering it', not only in order to replicate the immediacy and idiosyncrasy of his thinking, but also to 'give the grounds for his insanity'.[309] For some, however, such an approach was regarded as a fetishization that obscures the depth of Artaud's work. Most notably Paule Thévenin, Artaud's colleague, editor, and translator, who accused Ferlinghetti and Hirsch of 'intellectual dishonesty' for their positioning of Artaud as the 'precursor to the poetry of drugs and madness'.[310] Yet there is a position between the Beats and Thévenin that sheds new light upon his work, one that, unlike his psychiatrists, considers the horrors of the time that Artaud was working as an artist as having a profound effect on him. After all, the fact that the two longest stretches that Artaud would spend institutionalised in sanatoriums and asylums were three years during World War I (albeit with a break of two to three months when he was enlisted into the army where he was diagnosed with war neurosis) and for the entirety of World War II

For an account of thew extent of Artaud's legacy see *Robert Leach. 'Antonin Artaud'. Makers of Modern Theatre: An Introduction. London: Taytor and Francis Group, 2004*.

[305] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces.* p. 193

[306] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism*. p. 10-22

[307] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces*. pp. 12-19

[308] In addition to Bradnock's work, see Joanna Pawlik. 'Artaud in Performance: Dissident Surrealism and the Postwar American Literary avant-garde'. *Papers of Surrealism*. 8:1, 2010 for an exploration of Artaud's influence on the Beats

[309] Jack Hirschman to Lawrence Ferlinghetti. 'Undated Letter'. *Jack Hirschman Papers*. University of Southern California Libraries Special Collections

[310] Paule Thévenin. 'Artaud Naturalisé Beatnik!' *Le Figaro Litteraire*. trans Lucy Bradnock. 9:1. 1965, p. 9; Paule Thévenin. 'L'imbecilisation par la beat generation'. trans Lucy Bradnock. *Tel Quel*. 44. 1966, p. 66

(1937 to 1946), is unlikely to be coincidental, especially when read alongside works such as *To Have Done with the Judgement of god* that reveals a fear of war that was so affecting that poet Michael McClure claimed that the play painted an 'insanely lucid picture of the military madness of the Cold War', a conflict that Artaud did not live to see develop.[311] Yet it was not only fear that his late works depicted, but also portentous observations about future conflicts, psychiatry, conventional communication, and madness, expressed in a violent idiosyncratic language intended to profoundly shock his audience, which continue to be pertinent well into the twenty first century. That Artaud managed to produce such works after being labelled a clinically incurable solipsist by his psychiatrists is revealing and will be explored in this chapter. Focusing on his radio play *To Have Done with the Judgement of god* [*Pour en Finir avec le Jugement de dieu*] (1947), I will locate an anti-militarism (not to be confused with a position of nonviolence) in his use of non-linguistic verbal sounds through arguing that his disruption of conventional language can be understood as a reflection of and a response to the madness and irrationality of global wars and the disquiet of the inter-war period.

The war that is being waged on me

In the spring of 1916 Artaud was conscripted into the French Army to fight in World War I, a conflict that, much like for The Baroness, would have a devastating impact on him.[312] Artaud was discharged from the military two months after his conscription and just before his twentieth birthday after being diagnosed and treated in a military hospital for war neurosis.[313] War neurosis is a term that was used extensively at the beginning of World War I for the complex psychological and nervous disorders suffered by those exposed to the horrors of mechanical warfare, but as Simon Shimshon Rubin, et al. point out in their essay 'Military Bereavement and Combat Trauma' (2012), it is just one of many terms that attempt to 'form an associative link between specific psychophysiological responses to military trauma', while also revealing the 'prevailing cultural conventions' to such trauma at

[311] Michael McClure. 'What are Souls? An Interview with Michael McClure' with Jack Foley. *Alsop Review* taped 5/24/01. http://www.alsopreview.com/columns/foley/jfmminterview.html. [accessed 13/11/2022]
[312] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre: War, Medicine, and Regeneration'. *Modern Drama*. 65:1, 2022, pp. 1-23 (1-2)
[313] Ibid

the time they were used in a medical context.[314] Symptoms of war neurosis consisted of body tremors, paralysis, muscle contractions, limps that were seemingly unrelated to a physical injury and rigid fixed postures.[315] The treatment of soldiers suffering from war neurosis during times of conflict was deemed to be of vital importance for belligerent countries, not only to have as many militarised bodies on the front line as possible, but also to halt what was deemed to be a potential pervading and debilitating mental health crisis amongst the mainly working-class infantrymen.[316]

War neurosis and the crisis it engendered precipitated shifts in psychiatric care. In France one of the key architects of the reshaping of the national approach to psychiatric treatment was French-Polish neurologist Joseph Babinski. Babinski specialised in hysteria, but unlike his influential and renowned mentor Jean-Martin Charcot who had advocated for patients to work through their fears in what he considered to be a safe therapeutic environment, Babinski believed hysteria, as a 'disease of false symptoms', revealed a weak will and therefore maintained that 'hysterical' patients needed 'correcting' rather than treating.[317] Babinski's early work regrettably allowed high-ranking military personnel and politicians to dismiss war-related trauma as an epidemic of hysteria that revealed weak wills amongst rank and file soldiers that had been rendered 'degenerate' and mentally unfit

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[314] Simon Shimshon Rubin, Ruth Malkinson, Dan Koren, Shahar Mor Yosef, and Eliezer Witztum. 'Military Bereavement and Combat Trauma'. *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Theory, Practice, and Research.* ed by Shoshana S. Ringel, and Jerrold R. Brandell. London: SAGE Publications, 2011, p. 132
Other such terms include Soldier's Heart, Shell Shock, Battle Fatigue, Battle Shock, and Combat Reaction.
F. Lamprecht, M. Sack. 'Posttraumatic stress disorder revisited'. Psychosomatic Medicine, 64:2, 2002, pp. 222–237 (222-223).

[315] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre'. p. 4

[316] Lucy Bond, Steph Craps. *Trauma*. London: Routledge, 2020, p. 50-52
The class of the soldiers was not unrelated to the treatment they received for symptoms of war neurosis. As Lerner states: 'many German doctors feared that the war—and particularly the revival of Oppenheim's ideas would serve as an excuse for a massively debilitating epidemic among soldiers and veterans, a war-time parallel to the so-called pension neuroses among "work-shy" labourers.' German doctors, Lerner continues, 'had two diagnostic choices for war neuroses: They could diagnose traumatic neurosis, guaranteeing their patients indefinite pension payments, or they could choose hysteria, which, attributing symptoms to abnormal psychological reactions, made rehabilitation and an end to pensioning seem possible. […] Convinced that Germany's economic and military strength hung in the balance, his opponents approached the debate as a patriotic battle'.
Paul Lerner. 'From Traumatic Neurosis to Male Hysteria: The Decline and Fall of Hermann Oppenheim'. Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930. ed. Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 157-171
For a detailed account on how the views in Germany laid out by Lerner were also prevalent in other European counties engaged in World War I, see Lucy Bond, Steph Craps. Trauma. p. 50-56

[317] Marc Roudebush. 'A Battle of Nerves: Hysteria and Its Treatments in France during World War I'. *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930.* ed. Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 261

through their hereditary conditioning.[318] Lucy Bond and Steph Craps have argued that the French government went as far as to weaponise the term 'war hysteria' ['hystérie de guerre'] in an attempt to 'absolve itself of responsibility for the psychical legacies of the war, arguing that any long-term psychological damage was caused by the mental weakness of individual soldiers rather than the conditions to which the state had exposed them.'[319]

Despite, as Douglas Kahn observes, Artaud's 'madness' being 'largely a solitary affair', it was shaped in 'a social space constituted by the utterances of doctors […] in the environs of confinement, starvation, and electroshock.'[320] A French soldier hospitalised due to war neurosis during World War I could expect their 'correction' to consist of 'torturous electricity treatments, psychiatric treatment involved military-style discipline, systematic surveillance and interrogation, and a strict protocol of isolation'.[321] It is no wonder then that Artaud would refer to his treatment in military hospital and the subsequent treatment he received in mental health institutions as 'the war that is being waged on me' ['la guerre qu'on me fait à moi'.[322] A perceived interrelation between the medical complex and the military-industrial complex – primarily French, latterly North American – that this quote suggests would be a unifying theme of the work Artaud produced throughout his career.[323] The most striking and explicit example of this occurs in Artaud's radio play *To Have Done with The Judgement of god*, in which he exclaims that sperm from 'artificial insemination

[318] Marc Roudebush. 'A Battle of Nerves'. p. 260-261
Although Babinksi's influence was not as keenly felt in Britain as they were in Italy, Germany and France, similar conclusions were reached in the nation using – or perhaps bastardising – the ideas of British psychiatrists, who 'had been regarded with suspicion by the military and often scorned by other medical specialists'. In April 1920, the government set up a special inquiry into the phenomena of war trauma and shell shock under the chairmanship of influential civil servant Lord Southborough. As a result of the enquiry, war trauma and shellshock were framed 'as a form of hysteria and defined in late nineteenth-century terms of degeneration and constitutional weakness.' It is likely that this finding was influenced by the fact that the Board of Control and Ministry of Pensions were present at the enquiry, and that a to dismiss shell shock and war neurosis as symptoms of hysteria would save them a considerable amount of money in pension costs.
Edgar Jones. Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War. London: Psychology Press. 2005, pp. 44-45
[319] Lucy Bond, Steph Craps. *Trauma*. p. 53
[320] Douglas Kahn. *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts. Cambridge,* MA: MIT Press, 1999, p. 354
[321] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre'. p. 4
[322] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres*. p. 595
[323] Artaud's position may have been influenced by the psychiatrist René Allendy, who treated Artaud in the early 1930s and also served in the French military during World War I. Allendy wrote an essay that highlighted the homophonic similarities of the French words for war and to cure – guerre and guérir – arguing that 'with its etymology, cure implies the idea of war. It is war waged against the disease to drive it away […] like a foreign enemy'.
René Allendy quoted in Florence de Mèredieu. Antonin Artaud Dans La Guerre. Paris: Éditions Blusson, 2013, p. 175

factories' operating in the US is being used to 'produce armies and battleships', because 'Americans are finding more and more that they lack muscle / and children, / that is, not workers / but soldiers'.[324] This remarkable text will be explored in detail later in the chapter, specifically the roars, screams and guttural sounds that pepper the play, which Artaud described as the scream of a wounded warrior'.[325] There is however a detail from Artaud's anti-military and anti-American diatribe that is essential to forming an understanding of his anti-militarism and his use of non-linguistic verbal sounds: his argument that those in power in the US 'want at all costs and by every possible means to make and manufacture / soldiers / with a view to all the planetary wars which might later take place'.[326]

In his influential essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Sigmund Freud states that although war neurosis was not yet fully understood, World War I had cast some light on how and why it happens.[327] He writes, '[T]here are two outstanding features which might serve as clues for further reflection: first that the chief causal factor seemed to lie in the element of surprise, in the fright; and secondly that an injury or wound sustained at the same time generally tended to prevent the occurrence of the neurosis.'[328] In the aftermath of World War I, Freud believed the fundamental basis of war-related trauma to be the phenomena of the psychological reliving or repetition of a specific shocking and violent event previously experienced by a soldier.[329] He viewed the stupefied state of war neurosis – or 'shock neuroses' – as a precautionary bodily mechanism against this distressing repetition.[330] In the essay Freud also counters the synonymous usage of 'fright' ['Schreck'] and 'apprehension' ['Angst'], which for Freud, 'denotes a certain condition as of expectation of danger and preparation for it, even though it be an unknown one'.[331] Freud continues, '[i]n my opinion apprehension cannot produce a traumatic neurosis; in apprehension there

[324] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver. Oakland: University of California Press, 1988, p. 555-556
[325] Antonin Artaud. 'Theatre of the Seraphim'. *Selected Writings*. ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver. Oakland: University of California Press, 1988, p 273– 74.
[326] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 555
[327] Sigmund Freud. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. *The International Psycho-Analytical Library*. 4:1. 1922. pp. 4-55 (7-8)
[328] Sigmund Freud. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. p. 8
[329] Sigmund Freud. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. p. 9
[330] Ibid
[331] Sigmund Freud. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. p. 8

is something which protects against fright.'[332] Freud's understanding that it is uniquely the reliving of a specific event from the past and never an apprehension or fear about future events that causes war-related trauma has subsequently been rethought and contradicted, with the bulk of this reworking coming towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century.[333] Whether or not Artaud had first-hand experience of combat before his diagnosis of war neurosis is unclear; most of his biographers agree that he probably did, but none of them have proof that this was the case.[334] Regardless, the war that haunts Artaud and his work is not a war of the past, rather it is the 'wars which might later take place'.[335]

In his text *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (2015) Paul Saint-Amour argues that the years between World War I and World War II were characterised by a pervasive sense of apprehension of a future war that would be even more catastrophic than the last, and were, therefore, experienced 'in real time as an interwar period'.[336] He continues:

> The real war and the rehearsal for war become psychotically indistinct, become nearly interchangeable backdrops before which the highly automated ritual of anticipation, dread, and mass traumatisation unfolds […] No longer a passive field within which violence unfolds, time – and anticipation in particular – has become a new medium for delivering injury. The concept of the front is implicitly transformed as well: not just enlarged spatially to include the city, but also redefined as a space that hosts a

[332] Ibid

[333] In the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which is the principle reference point for the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders as well as one of the key texts for policy and law makers concerned with mental health disorders in the United States, 'directly experienced traumatic events' that can cause long lasting psychological damage are defined as including, but not being limited to, 'exposure to war as a combatant or civilian', and 'actual or threatened physical assault in which the threat is perceived as imminent and realistic'. One of the 'indirectly experienced traumatic events' listed is the 'indirect exposure […] to the grotesque effects of war'.
American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition Text Revision. Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2002, pp. 460-461
As Simon Shimshon Rubin et al observe, in 1994 when DSM-IV was published, the language used suggested that, war-related 'traumatic exposure […] is not limited to a combat situation wherein the survivor was personally present in a life-threatening situation.'
Simon Shimshon Rubin et al. 'Military Bereavement and Combat Trauma'. p.135

[334] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre'. p. 18

[335] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 555

[336] Paul Saint-Amour. *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopaedic Form*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 8

> particular temporality. The front is anywhere futurity is attuned to imminent military force.[337]

Saint-Amour argues that the dread described above led to an epidemic of 'proleptic mass traumatisation' and locates this psychological and psychic harm in the 'encyclopaedic' urban post-WORLD WAR I novels of writers such as Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf.[338] In these novels Saint-Amour identifies the manifestation of the dread and trauma of 'both a past conflagration and the prospect of a worse future one' in the 'provisioning against catastrophe', achieved through exhaustive detailing, polyphony, fragmentary forms, and complex orientations of time.[339] The relationship between the fractured untranslatable language used and the perpetual imminent threat of war was made explicit by Artaud in 1934. Explaining what drove him to the use of such language, he connected his idiosyncratic 'consumption of language' ['la consommation interne de la langue'] to the pervasive apprehension and turmoil that permeated the interwar years.[340] Much like the writers that Saint-Armour studies, Artaud saw that a new form of verbal and written expression was needed in order to reflect the militarised society heading towards an indistinct but rapidly approaching catastrophe and the mass traumatisation that this phenomenon engendered.[341] He proclaimed mainstream popular French theatre to be 'a false theatre, easy and fake, the theatre of the bourgeoisie, the military' because it used a rigid Latinate language that lacked 'truthful' emotional spontaneity and, therefore, either propped up the militarised status quo through a mechanical mimicry of reality – repetition of learned movements, military drills, etc – or expressed 'ideas that are dead and finished'.[342] For Artaud this theatre was not unlike the military training he had experienced or, for that matter, the treatment he received for his war neurosis that aimed to return his supposedly broken body back to fighting shape: it promoted automatic reflex responses and nullified truthful instantaneous emotions.

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[337] Paul Saint-Amour. *Tense Future. pp.6, 8*
[338] Paul Saint-Amour. *Tense Future. pp.7, 8-10*
[339] Paul Saint-Amour. *Tense Future*. p. 9
[340] Ibid
[341] The relationship between the fractured untranslatable language used and the perpetual imminent threat of war was made explicit by Artaud in 1934. Explaining what drove him to use of such
Antonin Artaud. Oeuvres. p. 1015
[342] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings*. p. 234; Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres*. p. 38

Artaud's theatre challenged the concept of mechanical bodily rigidity that was proposed by mainstream theatre, reflecting instead the unstable, permeable and open-ended nature of the human body, an idea that Warren Kluber has suggested was informed through experiencing war neurosis first-hand and through observing the behaviour of other shellshocked soldiers. Warren Kluber theorises that Artaud's belief that the French mainstream theatre and the military were in alliance was founded on Artaud's position that such theatre consisted of mechanical acting that in turn induced mechanical emotional responses in the audience: 'For Artaud, the mainstream French theatre – serving up a mix of realism and melodrama – constitutes a mode of bodily discipline and knowledge production continuous with the military and medical establishments. Spectators learn to feel and act mechanically, repressing their vital energies and the inner truths behind external images.'[343] For Artaud, the principal aim of the mainstream theatre that he opposed was a scrupulous representation (albeit of a superficial image) of the militarised reality of the interwar period. He concluded that such theatre relied on acting that was essentially no more than mechanical mimicry, which in turn led to the human body becoming, as Ros Murray argues, an 'automaton that must be destroyed in order to be rebuilt as its true self.[344] Artaud believed that only once this was achieved could there be a 'true theatre', where 'intonation is found within, driven to the exterior by an ardent impulsive feeling, and not obtained by imitation'.[345] Therefore, for Artaud, reality and the real were not synonymous terms, in fact they could be antonymous: the reality that mainstream theatre attempted to mimic was one of fixed meanings. The theatre that Artaud proposed challenged this simplification of mimesis and its 'ability to represent reality as an external and universal constant' through

[343] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre'. pp. 6-7
Kluber argues that, '[w]hen Artaud writes that bodies are "not impermeable and fixed organisms" ["des organismes imperméables et fixés"] he knows this because he has seen it three times over: first, through military training to program reflex responses and override inhibitions, acting automatically with a body-machine; second, through the physical and psychic injuries that made mutilated and shell-shocked bodies into broken or malfunctioning machines, performing involuntary movements, tics, and spasms; and third, through the psychiatric treatments that bent bodies back into fighting shape. To understand them different kind of remaking that Artaud wants for actors and spectators who "go to the theatre the way [they go] to the surgeon".' Artaud Quotes from: *Antonin Artaud. Oeuvres. p. 399; Antonin Artaud. Selected Writings. p. 157*
[344] Ros Murray. *Antonin Artaud: The Scum of the Soul*. p. 141
Warren Kluber not only develops this idea, burt also, crucially, connects it to the medical complex: 'For Artaud, the mainstream French theatre – serving up a mix of realism and melodrama – constitutes a mode of bodily discipline and knowledge production continuous with the military and medical establishments. Spectators learn to feel and act mechanically, repressing their vital energies and the inner truths behind external images.' *Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre' p. 6*
[345] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres*. p. 38-39

unrestricted moments of violent rupture that transcended everyday words, reason and logic.[346] Artaud's theatre was not, therefore, simply destructive: it aimed to expose the repression and coercion inherent in the presiding reality through 'the unprecedented eruption' of an 'ephemeral but real world' that was 'tangential to objective reality'.[347]

For Artaud the repression he identified was contingent upon a form of communication that was defective: he envisioned his art and writing as a means to 'search for a lost world and one that no human language integrates'.[348] But rather than completely dispensing with his mother tongue to achieve his aim, Jacques Derrida has argued that Artaud had to 'write against' it through the use of a language that was 'scarcely translatable' because of 'the twist it imposes on syntax.'[349] As Derrida observes, Artaud 'does not propose to abandon words, sentences, nor the letters that are caught up in them. But he means to bend them to a new relation, a new 'comportment', a new destination […] without any submission to writing in the current sense'.[350] For Artaud, current sense was a fabrication, an idea that the language he used had to reflect. Rather than being fixed, his language, much like the actors that generated it, had to be open-ended and adaptable.[351] He conceptualised it as being 'born on the stage' in moments of 'spontaneous creation', and because of this it was not simply generated through words and their sounds but rather through a confluence of the various components of the mise-en-scène, the setting of the stage through the positioning of the actors, props and scenery.[352]

In a 2021 study of the life and work of Artaud, Morris Blake states that 'Artaud's specifically theatrical language is beyond words; instead, it must be experienced on a level of feeling and intuition' by producing moments that are 'real but also exceed reality'. Such

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[346] Timothy Murray. *Mimesis, Masochism, & Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, p.2
[347] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 155
[348] Antonin Artaud. 'Dix ans que le langage est parti... 1947'. *Luna-Park,* 5:1,1979, p. 8
[349] Jacques Derrida. 'Unsense The Subjectile'. *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud.* trans. Mary Ann Caws. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998, p. 67
[350] Jacques Derrida. '*Unsense The Subjectile'*. p. 119
[351] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 234
[352] Ibid
Artaud even suggested that the spoken and written word were not significant in the creation of his language, although he later suggested otherwise: 'I maintain that insofar as this language is born on the stage, draws its power and its spontaneous creation from the stage, and struggles directly with the stage without resorting to words […] it is mise-en-scene that is theatre, much more than the written and spoken play. No doubt I shall be asked to state what is Latin about this point of view opposed to my own. What is Latin is the need to use words in order to express ideas that are clear.'
Ibid

an intuitive feeling is to be invoked by the extensively planned setting of the stage, and offering 'a glimpse of the magic of the universe' as Blake confirms: '[t]he mise-en-scène did not create an illusion of real life but instead attempted to create a startling new reality through theatrical means.' [353] An integral part of the mise-en-scène was the soundscape, which Artaud constructed with 'the greatest attention to detail' alongside composers and sound designers.[354] This reinforces the idea that while the language of Artaud's plays spawned from spontaneous eruptions of emotion, the foundation for the emotions was a meticulously devised staging process. For example, one of the key components of the soundscapes of Artaud's plays were the guttural screams both he and his actors emitted.

On hearing the screams of Artaud, it is tempting to conceptualise them as either spontaneous eruptions of anger or howls of physical and psychic pain that clearly plagued the playwright, particularly after his confinement at Rodez and other asylums. While this reading certainly bears some truth (Artaud described his screams as 'corporeal expression of the soul') it obscures a key detail of Artaud's screams: they were scripted and extensively rehearsed.[355] As Douglas Kahn observes in his book *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (1999), when Artaud declares in 1935 that '[n]o one in Europe knows how to scream any more', he is not only referring to what he perceived to be the passive trance-like state of European actors at the time, but also to the disregard of theatrical techniques of screaming in European theatre.[356] For Artaud the two were related: he believed that the process of learning how to scream would also revive actors from their trance-like state, a position that Paule Thévenin's description of working 'very long and arduously' with Artaud substantiates:[357]

> I had to learn to scream, to let this scream die out only when it had reached the point of annihilation, to go from the over-shrill to the deep tones, to prolong a syllable until my breath was exhausted. I believe I understood during the course of those long sessions what the 'theatre of cruel purgation' really was.[358]

[353] Blake Morris. *Antonin Artaud*. Milton Park, Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021, pp. 86, 98-99
[354] Antonin Artaud. *Collected Works Volume 2.* trans. Victor Corti. London: Calder & Boyars, 1971, p. 113
[355] Antonin Artaud. 'An Affective Athleticism'. *The Theatre and Its Double*. New York: Grove Press, 1958, p. 135
[356] Antonin Artaud. 'An Affective Athleticism'. p. 141; Douglas Kahn. *Noise, Water, Meat.* p. 351
[357] Paule Thévénin and Bettina Knapp. 'A Letter on Antonin Artaud'. p.108
[358] Paule Thévénin and Bettina Knapp. 'A Letter on Antonin Artaud'. p. 107

'Theatre of purgation' here alludes to both Aristotle's understanding that theatre should be a purgative, cathartic experience and also to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, where the word 'cruelty' does not simply denote physical or emotional violence but rather Artaud's aim to violently confront both the audience and his actors with a disruptive truth that they may not be prepared to encounter. As Kimberly Jannarone makes clear, Artaud's cruelty is conceptualised as both a 'cosmic process' and 'a focused force of destruction', it is 'violence called forth to create a crisis, the moment of exaltation, the frenzy of eruption that liberates us from 'asphyxiating matter'.'[359] Therefore, the process that Thévenin describes may be cruel, but for Artaud there is also a vital element of transcendence at play. For Thévenin and the other actors that participated in similar processes, the widely assumed bodily and linguistic capacities of actors are surpassed and revealed to be limiting and unfounded: they are no longer asphyxiated. As Murphy argues, the 'cruelty' of Artaud's theatre is not for cruelty's sake, but rather 'a means, towards the 'new body'.[360] Artaud indicated how this new body was formed when he gave a detailed description of how he generated his own screams:

> To launch this cry I empty myself. Not of air, but of the very power of noise. I stand my human body before me. And having cast on him 'THE EYE' of a horrible measurement, piece by piece I force him to return into me.[361]

Warren Kluber understands this quote as Artaud asserting that the scream was a key tool in the reconfiguration of his body: 'the scream aims to make literal Artaud's surgical metaphors: cutting up the body's encrusted forms and habits so that it might regenerate differently.'[362] What it also suggests is that for Artaud the voice is not separate from the body, and that any attempt to 'regenerate it differently' must include the reattachment of one to the other.[363]

As Murray makes clear, for Artaud there 'was not a straightforward distinction between language and sensation', a position that influenced his 'creation of a corporeal

[359] Kimberly Jannarone. *Artaud and His Doubles*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010, pp 42-43, 47
[360] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. p. 147
[361] Antonin Artaud. 'Theatre of the Seraphim'. p. 272
[362] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre' p. 13
[363] Ibid

language which emphasises the materiality of the body'.[364] Murray finds issue with what she terms his 'violent, physical language' however, arguing that it is always 'contradictory', because 'it must be a direct expression of thought coming from the body, and therefore outside what might be understood as language systems, yet must be comprehensible, and so always ends up being based on some sort of code.'[365] However, as Murphy argues, rather than being subsumed to the cloistering language systems Artaud wished to destroy, 'it is his scream that is his supreme weapon in disabling and splintering language and fixed representations of any kind.'[366] Artaud appears to have conceptualised his scream as anterior to conventional language, despite them being a scripted element of his plays, which is evident in his description of them as his 'corporeal expression of the soul'.[367] The disruptive power of Artaud's scream came from the coalescence of body and voice that it engendered, it countered the fixed and stifling nature of the conventional language that reinforced the 'dead, illusory and fragmented' society that Artaud hoped to destroy.[368]

The scream was not only an antidote for the disconnection of voice and body, but also in its absence an indication of a disconnection, as Artaud makes clear in 1935: 'actors in a trance no longer know how to cry out […] having forgotten they have a body on stage, they have also lost the use of their throats'.[369] Through acts such as the scream, Artaud's suffering body became his primary instrument used to achieve a perhaps surprising self-stated ambition, 'to awaken the corporeal glory' of the oppressed and working class in France.[370] For Marianne DiQuattro, Artaud's aim to liberate the pacified and oppressed citizens of France reveals 'the community possible in performance' – an idea that was the basis for her remarkable argument that even his most confrontational and violent work 'represents a utopia'.[371] While Artaud's work may not be straightforwardly utopic, his ability

[364] Ros Murray. *Antonin Artaud: The Scum of the Soul.* p. 18, 25
[365] Ros Murray. *Antonin Artaud: The Scum of the Soul.* pp. 19-20
[366] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. p. 153
[367] Antonin Artaud. 'An Affective Athleticism'. p. 135
[368] Ros Murray. *Antonin Artaud: The Scum of the Soul.* P. 99
[369] Antonin Artaud. *'An Affective Athleticism'.* p. 99
For Artaud, the inability to scream of European actors is related to the abstraction of body and voice, as the full quote highlights: In Europe no one knows how to scream any more, particularly actors in a trance no longer know how to cry out, since they do nothing but talk, having forgotten they have a body on stage, they have also lost the use of their throats. Abnormally shrunk, these throats are no longer organs but monstrous, talking abstractions. French actors now only know how to talk.
[370] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. p. 148, quoting Artaud in *Antonin Artaud. Oeuvres. p. 131*
[371] Marianne DiQuattro. 'Vector'. *Papers on Language and Literature, Special Issue: Fictions of Circulation and the Question of World Literature.* 56:1, 2020, 34-59 (49)

to revive his subdued audience from their trance-like state reveals his insistence that an individual's body and voice are one through acts such as screaming – the sounding of the insistently corporeal voice – and a transformative communion on a grander scale: the connection between performer and audience member. This connection was not forged through the transmission of clear perspicuous ideas, rather it depended on both parties being willing to accept that the idea such a transmission can be made is flawed. Therefore, while DiQuattro's statement that 'Artaud's breaths, groans, and screams can be understood as attempts to transmit the disabling pain he experienced his entire life' bears some truth, it must be remembered that he was always aware of the 'impossibility of sharing that suffering with an audience.'[372] Perhaps a more fitting link between his experience of psychiatric treatment rooted in corporeal matter and his relationship with his audience is to understand the aim of his corporeal expressions as not straightforwardly representing his personal experiences for his audience, but rendering them as equally corporeal. Artaud may have considered his screams to be 'the corporeal expression of the soul', but he also considered his suffering body as difficult to fully comprehend and, therefore, as something that both exceeds and reveals the limitations of a conventional language that has been conceptualised as anterior to the body. The scream was, then, the perfect tool to explode beyond these limitations; as Murphy observes, in the battle Artaud waged against the military-serving establishment, 'one of his principal weapons is the scream.'[373]

The Body Without Organs

Perhaps some day we will no longer really know what madness was [..] Artaud will belong to the foundation of our language, not to its rupture.[374] – Michel Foucault

god,
and with god
his organs.

[372] Marianne DiQuattro. 'Vector'. p. 36
[373] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. p. 141
[374] Michel Foucault. 'Madness, the Absence of Work'. *Critical Inquiry.* trans. Peter Stastny and Deniz Şengel, 21:1, 1995, pp. 271-296 (290).

For you can tie me up if you wish,
but there is nothing more useless than an organ.

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.[375]

Artaud first uses the term 'body without organs' in *To Have Done with the Judgement of god* two years after World War II and one year after his release from Rodez, a psychiatric asylum in Vichy France where he had been confined since 1943.[376] It is a concept that Artaud uses to provoke his audience to reimagine the potentiality of the body once it moves beyond the imposed and assumed limitations of the physical flesh. As Bradnock affirms, it is 'a procedure in which the body itself is dismantled and reconfigured as a means to escape the binds of authority.'[377] Artaud's concept was developed and recontextualised by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their attempt to explicate their idiosyncratic understanding of the development of the schizophrenic subject. While their body without organs (often shortened to BwO) differs from Artaud's – as Laura Cull observes, 'it has less to do with the body as such, and more to do with ontology' – they were inspired by the differential presence implicit in his 'destratified voice' which 'escapes from signification into incantation' through 'putting elements like intonation, diction, pitch and meaning into variation.'[378] For Deleuze, Artaud's body without organs renders words 'illegible and even unpronounceable, as it transforms them into so many active howls in one continuous breath.'[379]

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[375] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 571

[376] 'Vichy (1940– 1944) was the territory still under French control after the German occupation in World War II. The Vichy government cooperated and collaborated with the Nazis, including the Nazi's genocidal policies towards Jewish people and other minorities. Conditions in the Vichy asylums, however, were relatively better than they were in the areas directly under Nazi control.'
Blake Morris. Antonin Artaud. p. 36

[377] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces*. p. 98

[378] Laura Cull. 'How Do You Make Yourself a Theatre without Organs? Deleuze, Artaud and the Concept of Differential Presence'. *Theatre Research International.* 34:3, 2009, pp. 243–255 (246, 248-249)

[379] Gilles Deleuze. 'Thirteenth Series of the Schizophrenic and the Little Girl'. *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*. ed. Edward Scheer. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 33

It is because Artaud's body without organs can be felt most acutely in his cries, screams and howls, that Murphy understands it as a consequence of his experiences at Rodez during World War II, forged in 'the cauldron of a horrific psychiatric confinement, simultaneously a defence of a shattered body and psyche, and an offence against its torturers.'[380] Straightforwardly mapping the biographical against Artaud's artistic output is not always fruitful however, in no small part because the reliability of both his recollections and those of the workers at Rodez are provoked by their own particular agendas. Yet as Murray observes, 'Artaud himself certainly did not attempt to create any distinction between his work and his life', which, she argues, leads to the following questions:

> Does this mean that his readers should also fail to make a distinction? How are we do deal with Artaud's 'madness'? These are difficult questions for anyone approaching Artaud's work because he himself writes so vehemently about the psychiatric treatment he received; his texts are not only, in many cases, a direct result of his treatment but they also explicitly draw attention to it.[381]

It is significant, however, that it was shortly after his release from Rodez that Artaud stated that his aim was for the 'organic and physical transformation of the human body'; an aim that was undoubtedly concomitant with the 52 instances of electro shock treatments he was subjected to in the asylum and which manifested most markedly in the guttural screams in *To Have Done with the Judgment of god*.[382] Artaud screams throughout the play, but most frequently during the fourth interlude towards its conclusion. The screams are sometimes produced by a sudden raising of volume in the delivery of the scripted words of the play, other times single phonemes of words are screamed, and at other times the screams are non-lexical. The most striking aspect of Artaud's screams are the pitch in which they are delivered: Artaud's voice – already high in pitch – suddenly raises a pitch further to produce a shockingly piercing howl, which Kahn has described as 'a male falsetto version of a scream.'[383] At times the screams are delivered in a mocking tone, yet they are their most affecting when they sound like howls of pain-stricken anguish. Artaud conceptualised these

[380] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. P. 141
[381] Ros Murray. *Antonin Artaud: The Scum of the Soul.* pp. 25
[382] Antonin Artaud*. Oeuvres.* p. 1544
[383] Douglas Kahn. *Noise, Water, Meat.* p. 350

screams as feminised (for Kahn, feminised screams are always 'the sound of subjugation', yet of course The Baroness's defiant screams of nonacquiescence challenge this understanding), and explicitly linked them to war:

> I want to attempt a terrible feminine. The cry of the revolt that is trampled underfoot, of anguish armed for war, of the demand for justice. […] You understand, it is the blazing images of a massacre that nourishes my own war. My war is nourished by a war, and it spits out its own war.[384]

Although the interrelation of the electroshock treatment, war, and the screams of Artaud's post-Rodez work is unequivocal, it is far from straightforward. Kahn argues that despite the fact that even the screams of *To Have Done with the Judgement of god* were scripted, it is 'reasonable to expect to hear' in them echoes of his 'mad screams' from the treatment table of Rodez, and that the audience 'could probably assume that Artaud was often talking through his mad screams.'[385] Murphy also links Artaud's screams from the table Artaud was strapped to for his electroshock therapy to those in *To Have Done with the Judgement of god,* arguing that their use in the fragmentation of the more conventional language in the radio play – one part of what Murphy terms 'an operation of dismemberment' – reflects the way that he was both physically and psychologically transformed by the violent treatment he received.[386] In this sense, for Murphy, Artaud's screams, and in a more general sense his fragmented language, were a 'violent taking back of his voice silenced for nine years in the asylums.'[387] What these arguments suggest is that Artaud's screams can be interpreted both as an echo of his tortured cries on the treatment table, and an act of defiance against the people that strapped him to it. The aposiopetic nature of the screams of *To Have Done with The Judgement of god* – where screams often end abruptly as if the performers have unexpectedly run out of air – certainly evoke the nature of the screams Artaud would have emitted in Rodez, which would have suddenly and shockingly ended due to the artist losing consciousness on the treatment table.[388] Yet to argue that the only thing that happened to his voice during his confinement at Rodez was

[384] Antonin Artaud. 'Theatre of the Seraphim'. p. 272
[385] Kahn. *Noise, Water, Meat.* pp. 349-350
[386] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. p. 148-149
[387] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. p. 149
[388] Mischa Twitchin. 'A blank page… or 'Ten years since language left...'. *Performance Research*. 26:5, 2021, pp. 160-164 (161)

that it was brutally silenced – despite the fact that it was the institution where he received violent electroshock treatments – would be misleading.

Rodez was the last of four asylums that Artaud would be confined within between the years of 1937 and 1946, meaning that he would spend the entirety of World War II institutionalised. He spent almost two years in Quatre-Mares, a psychiatric hospital in Sotteville-lès-Rouen, before being transferred to Sainte-Anne's in Paris's fourteenth arrondissement in the spring of 1938.[389] It was here that Jacques Lacan, before he had become one of the most influential psychoanalysts of the twentieth century, declared Artaud untreatable and his artistic career over, stating that his 'hopeless mental state [would] no doubt prohibit him from any creation'.[390] The diagnosis led to him being transferred to Ville-Évrard, a larger asylum just east of Paris in Seine-Saint-Denis, in the spring of 1939 where he was enrolled as an incurable and therefore given no treatment; he would, however, restart written communications with his friends and family after not doing so for close to three years.[391] In the summer of 1940, the war had led to a shortage of food and the patients of Seine-Saint-Denis were often left hungry and malnourished resulting in the death of hundreds of Artaud's inmates.[392] The food shortage was perhaps one of the factors that led to Adolph Hitler passing a decree that allowed certain doctors the right to end the lives of asylum patients deemed to be untreatable.[393] Fearing for the life of her son, Artuad's mother, Euphrasie Nalpas, asked the surrealist poet Robert Desnos, who was a friend of both Artaud and, crucially, the head of psychiatry at Rodez, Gaston Ferdière, to move him from Nazi-occupied France to Rodez in Vichy France.[394] Artaud was committed to Rodez in February 1943 and placed under the watch of Ferdière, who, as a minor surrealist poet himself, took particular interest in Artaud, and even invited him to his home for

[389] Blake Morris. *Antonin Artaud.* p. 34
[390] David Shafer. *Antonin Artaud.* London: Reaktion Books, 2016, p. 155
[391] Blake Morris. *Antonin Artaud.* p. 35
[392] Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. trans. Joanna Spinks, Minneapolis: Univocal, 2015, pp. 19
Lotringer highlights how widespread malnourishment was in asylums: While malnourished, no one died of hunger during the Occupation— except for forty thousand mental patients who presented the same symptoms— emaciation, cachexia, intestinal haemorrhaging, comatose stupor, pale complexion, weak pulse, lifeless stare, paralysis of the jaw, contraction of the upper limbs reminiscent of decerebration— as people who were deported to the camps.
[393] Thomas Mueller and Thomas Beddies. ''The Destruction of Life Unworthy of Living' in National Socialist Germany.' *International Journal of Mental Health.* 35:3, 2006, pp. 94-104 (98)
[394] Blake Morris. *Antonin Artaud.* p. 35

dinner.[395] Artaud claimed he arrived at Rodez as a 'living corpse' and would thank 'true friend' Ferdière for getting him 'back on a diet fit for a human being, rather than for a ravenous beast, martyred and poisoned' as he claimed he had been for the previous 5 years.[396] Sylvère Lotringer argues that it is this initial positive perception of Ferdière and Rodez, where '[h]is reputation as a poet had preceded him […] and he was treated with more respect than the local farmers who populated the mental hospital', has been obscured by 'the myth of Artaud alienated in his madness, cut off from the world, and persecuted by sadist doctors'; a myth that has been perpetuated as a result of the horrific general mistreatment and neglect of mental health patients in France during World War II.[397] However, while this may be the case, to describe Artaud's stay at Rodez as a time of recuperation and resocialisation would also be to perpetuate a myth that he himself would later rail against: it was a time of complex change for Artaud, where his conceptions of the nature of both the human body and language would be radically reshaped, in part due to the violence enacted on his body, but also due to the earth-shattering violence that raged outside of the institution he was confined within.

Explicit references to specific details of World War II in Artaud's work are rare; the only indication that the playwright, who was born to Jewish parents, had even considered the atrocities of the conflict is in a letter sent to Pierre Bousquet in 1946 where he states, 'I considered myself obligated, as you did, not to forget any part of the agony of my deportation because being deported, I was also a prisoner in a mental asylum'.[398] Lotringer has described this letter as 'a rare admission on Artaud's part that his own suffering had brought him closer to the fate of his people'. However, Lotringer fails to mention that Bousquet was a Nazi collaborator who was deported from France to Germany after World War II only to return later to become the first treasurer and founding member of the antisemitic far-right party National Front. The irreconcilable aspects of Artaud's admission –

[395] Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. pp. 22, 152
[396]Antonin Artuad quoted in Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. pp. 22-23
[397] Ibid
[398] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres*. p. 268-9
Although Artaud's parents were Jewish, they hid their son's heritage from him until he was a teenager, which is likely to have helped shape his idiosyncratic and unsympathetic relationship with the religion. How much detail would Artaud really have known about the Holocaust, even at the time he died, given the secrecy that surrounded the Final Solution and the reluctance to confront the atrocity in France for quite a long time, is unclear.
Sylvère Lotringer. Mad Like Artaud. p. 15

that the person to whom he at least appears to display sympathy for the people murdered in concentration camps is an antisemite who would later question whether the Holocaust happened – is indicative of the fractured nature of Artaud's personality at this time, as well as a result of the denial that characterised the French position more broadly.

During Artaud's confinement at Rodez, Ferdière had a mentee called Jacques Latrémolière who wrote about Artaud in his doctoral thesis. He wrote that when the artist first arrived at Rodez he was 'suffering from chronic hallucinatory psychosis, with profuse polymorphous delusions: dual personality, bizarre metaphysical system of the kind 'I redeem humanity by accepting to suffer under the empire of demons'; renunciation of human reproduction due to the impurity of sexuality; hypochondriac ideation with multiple influences, developing over many years.'[399] Ironically, one of the symptoms that Ferdière and Latrémolière initially identified in Artaud, dual personality, was deemed a by-product of electroshock therapy by their patient: 'Electroshock, Mr. Latrémolière,' Artaud wrote to the trainee psychiatrist in early 1945, 'reduces me to despair, it takes away my memory, dulls my mind and my heart; it turns me into someone who is absent and knows himself to be absent, and sees himself chasing after his own being for weeks, like a dead man next to the living man he no longer is.'[400] The dual nature of Artaud's personality was therefore seen as a symptom necessitating electroshock treatment by Ferdière and a result of it by Artaud. While determining whose position was correct has proved unrewarding to the many that have tried, one thing that is certain is that this perceived rupture was evident in Artaud's writing both during and subsequent to his confinement at Rodez.[401]

What is crucial in Artaud's description to Latrémolière, despite the unmistakable evocation of physical and mental suffering, is the possibility for reconstruction – for a new being to emerge from the 'dead man' beside him. This potentiality manifests itself most clearly in the radical shift in both Artaud's written and verbal expression during the last years of his life, a period in which Naomi Greene in her influential essay 'Antonin Artaud: Metaphysical Revolutionary' (1967) has described as a time when the artist – a 'man

[399] Jacques Latrémolière's doctoral thesis, *Accidents & incidents observés au cours de 1200 électrochocs*. qtd in Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. p. 23

[400] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 438

[401] Ferdière says as much in an interview with Lotringer: I couldn't have done Artaud any harm. And in fact, he began working again; he remembered what poetry was. All the work that followed, including the admirable Van Gogh, would not have existed had I not done what I did.
Sylvère Lotringer. Mad Like Artaud. p. 176

changed radically' – attempts to 'utterly transform and revolutionize traditional language'.[402] The transformation described by Greene can be perceived most strikingly in Artaud's destratified voice, which Cull describes as 'a voice that escapes from signification into incantation, from the illusion of communication to the affirmation of affective breath-words (mots-souffles) and howl-words (mots-cris)', and argues the playwright uses 'in a pursuit of differential presence – as a nonrepresentative encounter with difference that forces new thoughts upon us.'[403] For Cull, the differential presence provoked by a destratified voice is an 'encounter with difference, or perpetual variation, as that which exceeds the representational consciousness of a subject, forcing thought through rupture rather than communicating meanings through sameness.'[404] These moments, Cull concedes, are few and far between, and, as Deleuze and Guattari recognise, are not materialised through 'wildly destratifying' but rather through a moment in which the language of representation can be ruptured.[405] In the case of *To Have Done with the Judgement of god*, the striking and unmistakable criticism of American militarised imperialism that starts the play is the foundational language from which the destratified voice, and therefore, differential presence, emerges.

I don't like surface poems or surface languages

That such a remarkable transformation should emerge from the wreckage of World War II is significant and helps elucidate Artaud's complex attitude to the conflict, which is still contested and debated more than seventy years after his death. Artaud was a sufferer and survivor of war neurosis who spent the majority of the world wars in asylums and emerged from Rodez in 1946 to write his masterpiece, which, at least initially, is an attack on American militarism and the atomic war threatened by America and Russia. He also, however, used the language of war favourably to describe the radical potential of art that he so desperately wanted to unleash, and, remarkably, even wrote a letter of ambiguous

[402] Naomi Greene. 'Antonin Artaud: Metaphysical Revolutionary'. *Yale French Studies: Literature and Revolution*. 39:1, 1967, pp. 188-197 (193, 197)
[403] Laura Cull. 'How Do You Make Yourself a Theatre without Organs?'. p. 245
[404] Ibid
[405] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* trans Brian Massumi. London: Athlone Press, 1988, p. 160-161

intentions to Adolph Hitler.[406] This idiosyncratic relationship to war is elucidated by the contextual details surrounding his stylistic and ideological reshaping from the beginning of his stay at Rodez up until his death in 1947: his confinement in Rodez and the behaviour that led to Ferdière and Latrémolière administering electroshock treatment is partly a result of the terror induced by World War II, yet the fundamental changes in his writing and his whole body without organs project emerged from that terrifyingly traumatic experience. Artaud would imply as much in *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Societ*y (1947), an essay in which Artaud challenged psychiatrist François-Joachim Beer's portrayal of Van Gogh's incurable madness, combatively rebutting Beer's clinical analysis with a counterargument that it was in fact the madness of the society in which the painter lived that led to his death by suicide.[407] The essay is inseparable from the post-war landscape in which it was written and one which will be explored further in the next chapter. He states: 'on the occasion of war, a revolution, or a social upheaval still in the bud, the collective consciousness is questioned and questions itself, and makes it's judgement.'[408] Yet what Artaud failed to communicate was that such reflections happened on a smaller scale, that artists and thinkers that survive earth-shattering events also make judgements about how they themselves were producing art beforehand and what changes need to be made.

It was the work made by Artaud in the years immediately after the conflict in which Greene identified a radical change in his language, arguing that it was during this period that he 'ceased to reject verbal language and demanded instead that it liberate itself from the control of the intellect.'[409] She continues:

> Artaud's ideas concerning revolution did not evolve without a concurrent change in his theories involving language. And, for the first time, his poetry

[406] The letter reads: 'To Adolf Hitler, in memory of the Romanische café in Berlin one afternoon in May of '32, and because I pray God give you the grace to remember all the wonders by which HE has GRATIFIED (RESUSCITATED) YOUR HEART, this very day, Kudar dayro Zarish Ankkara Thabi. Antonin Artaud, 3 December 1943'.
Antonin Artaud. Selected Writings. p. 644

[407] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 484-486

[408] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 486
This is where the common belief that Artaud was ambivalent about war comes from despite his diatribes against the military: for Artaud good art should act like war in that it shakes spectators out of their stupor and encourages people to question society and the collective consciousness. For example, Van Gogh's paintings, specifically their capability of' seriously upsetting the spectral conformity' of French society, are likened to 'atomic bombs', yet are also described as being more disruptive than war.
Antonin Artaud. Selected Writings. p. 483-484, 488

[409] Naomi Greene. 'Antonin Artaud: Metaphysical Revolutionary'. p. 195

> really illustrated his theories. No longer eager to find a language uniting being and thought, he sought one that stemmed from man's physical being.[410]

Yet this transformation of language, where it was liberated from the intellect in order to become more corporeal as a response to the historical context in which Artaud was writing, had started before the war was over. Father Julien, the chaplain at Rodez during Artaud's confinement, under instruction from Ferdière and somewhat surprisingly, asked Artaud to translate a section of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), which contained the first stanza of the nonsense poem 'Jabberwocky', a process that the psychiatrist would claim to be the first instance of art therapy.[411] The text that Artaud composed was far from a standard translation, a highly innovative work that not only furthered the torquing of language that Carroll had begun more than seventy years before, but brought into question the relationship between fractured language and temporality while attacking Carroll for not taking his own project far enough (perhaps because his work had been canonised and therefore pacified despite its grammatical innovation) and, in a remarkable act of anachronism, for stealing his ideas.[412] While it may be tempting to read such an unusual accusation – especially alongside the untranslatability of Artaud's translation – as an indication of his clinical mental illness, it must be remembered that his relationship to madness at the time was highly complex and that his dissatisfaction with Carroll was predicated on his belief that his predecessor had not disrupted the language that propagated the madness of society sufficiently enough, and was merely a gesturing towards such a disruption. For Artaud there was no suffering in 'Jabberwocky', rather the text was

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[410] Ibid

[411] Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. p. 141
Although this idea of freeing language from the intellect was actualised as a result of Artaud's time in Rodez and the greater context of that period it was envisioned in 1932 when Artaud wrote that he wanted a new 'kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought' that 'ultimately breaks away from the intellectual subjugation of the language, by conveying the sense of a new and deeper intellectuality which hides itself beneath the gestures and signs, raised to the dignity of particular exorcisms.'
Antonin Artaud. The Theatre and its Double. 2010, p. 89, 91

[412] Artaud's accusation of plagiarism against Carroll: 'For years I've had an idea of the consumption, the internal consumption of language by the unearthing of all manner of torpid and filthy necessities. And in 1934 I wrote a book with this intention, in a language which was not French but which everyone in the world could read, no matter what their nationality. Unfortunately, this book has been lost. It was printed in a very limited edition, but abominable influences on the part of people in the government, the church, or the police caused it to disappear, and there is only one copy left, which I do not own but which is in the hands of one of my daughters […] 'Jabberwocky' is nothing but a sugar coated and lifeless plagiarism of a work written by me, which has been spirited away so successfully that I myself hardly know what is in it.'
Antonin Artaud. Selected Writings. p. 451

playful and operated on a surface level, something that Artaud made clear he found unappealing in a letter to Parisot in 1945:

> 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 or heart 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".[413]

Gilles Deleuze compares the language of Carroll and Artaud in his influential book *The Logic of Sense* (1969), in which he agrees that in comparison with Artaud's language, which is 'carved into the depth of bodies', Carroll's is marked in its surface level shallowness.[414] Deleuze attributes this textual difference to the 'difference between their retrospective problems', claiming that Carroll had not felt the 'problem of suffering, of death, and of life', problems that, for Deleuze, result in 'problem[s] of language.'[415] Deleuze identifies the splintering of approaches that reveal such fundamental difference in the use of a specific word. He explains:

> As we read the first stanza of 'Jabberwocky,' such as Artaud renders it, we have the impression that the two opening verses still correspond to Carroll's criteria and conform to the rules of translation generally held by Carroll's other French translators, Parisot and Brunius. But beginning with the last word of the second line, from the third line onward, a sliding is produced, and even a creative, central collapse, causing us to be in another world and in an entirely different language. With horror, we recognize it easily: it is the language of schizophrenia.[416]

Deleuze's diagnosis of schizophrenia here is unlike the diagnoses of Ferdière; Deleuze is not a medical practitioner, and his use of the term schizophrenia is an attempt to transcend the official clinical understanding of the condition. He would later use the term in his writings with Félix Guattari to theorise social codes and structures to explicate their conception of the body without organs. Yet these ideas would be fulfilled later; in the passage above taken from *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze uses Artaud's translation to explore what the deviation

[413] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 488
[414] Gilles Deleuze. *The Logic of Sense.* trans. Mark Lester. London: The Athlone Press, 1990, p. 84
[415] Ibid
[416] Gilles Deleuze. *The Logic of Sense.* p. 83-84

from the 'rules of translation generally held by Carroll's other French translators, Parisot and Brunius' tells us about how Artaud's personal madness shaped how he interacted with the world rather than how the madness of the world shaped how he wrote.[417] This is unsurprising, as Artaud had been in mental institutions for more than five years by the time he wrote his translation of Carroll, and the writing was a result of an intended therapeutic process prescribed by a medical professional. Yet this reading strips Artaud of his artistic agency – perhaps one reason why Paule Thévenin reacted so angrily to it – because although, as Deleuze observes, his language is corporeal, his reading glosses over the fact that it is also scripted and the actualisation of a project that was laid out ten years earlier in his collection of manifestoes *The Theatre and its Double* (1938). Artaud's glossolalia and fragmented guttural sounds did not emanate spontaneously from unknown bodily depths, rather, as poet and scholar Laura Wetherington observes in her illuminating essay 'Language and its Double: Artaud Through the Looking Glass' (2016), 'his invented syllables are a consummate refusal to accept the world he was given'; they were a tool designed to reveal spiritual realities obscured by the stifling nature of the reality imposed upon society, a reality that was shaped by language.[418]

A comparison of the first stanza of 'Jabberwocky' does, as both Artaud and Deleuze have suggested, reveal one poet operating on the surface of language and another attempting to transgress the surface through violent means.

Carroll

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.[419]

Artaud

Il était Roparant, et les vliqueux tarandsAllaient en gilroyant et en brimbulkdriquant

[417] Ibid
[418] Laura Wetherington. 'Language and its Double: Artaud Through the Looking Glass'. *Jacket 2*. 2016, https://jacket2.org/commentary/artaud-through-looking-glass. Accessed 24th May 20-23
[419] Lewis Carroll. *The Annotated Alice.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000, p. 215

Jusque-là où la rourghe est a rouarghe a rangmbde et rangmbde a
rouarghambde:
Tous les falomitards étaient les chats-huants
Et les Ghoré Uk'hatis dans le GRABÜG-EÛMENT.[420]

While both versions are, at first, disorientating to a new reader, the original can be decoded, which Carroll demonstrates in *Through the Looking Glass*, when Humpty Dumpty, who is 'very clever at explaining words', interrupts Alice's reading of 'Jabberwocky' after the first stanza to explain the meaning of the 'hard words' she had already encountered: ''slithy' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word [...] To 'gyre' is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To 'gimble' is to make holes like a gimlet.'[421] The initial disorientation caused by the strangeness of the poem is negated by Humpty Dumpty's explanations which pull the unfamiliar words of 'Jabberwocky', and therefore the reader, from unsteady ground where meaning and the word have been severed, back to the familiar and reassuring world of fixity and signification. Humpty Dumpty's explanations present Alice with the tools to translate the words of the poem herself, and she uses it to guess correctly – if we are to accept the authority of the egg she is talking to – the meaning of the word 'wabe': 'the grass plot round a sun-dial'.[422] 'Wabe' is the final word on the second line of the first stanza, which is the moment of Artaud's translation where Deleuze identifies a collapse of meaning: the point of the poem where Alice is able to use logic to grasp meaning and signification in the original 'Jabberwocky' is where such concepts begin to feel out of reach for readers of the Artaud translation.[423]

The words that precede the word that initiates the 'sliding' that Deleuze identifies in Artaud's text (brimbulkdriquant) resemble a traditional translation through fairly standard

[420] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres Completes IX*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 140
[421] Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Saw There*. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1902, pp. 119-121
[422] Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking Glass.* p. 121
Interestingly Carroll opens *Through the Looking Glass* with a preface that instructs his reader how to pronounce the words of Jabberwocky: 'Pronounce 'slithy' as if it were to the words 'sly, the': make the 'g' hard in 'gyre' and 'gimble': and pronounce 'rath' to rhyme with 'bath.' This markedly different from how Artaud opens his translation where he presents a grid of nonsense words and asks his readers to use it to create their own title.
Lewis Carroll. Through the Looking Glass. p. 6
[423] Ibid

usage of verbs, pronouns and adjectives ('it was' ['Il était']; 'and the' ['et les']; 'were going to' ['allaient en']).[424] There is even a noun that resembles an attempted translation of Carroll's nonsense words: 'slithy' becomes 'vliqueux', which can be translated to English as 'slimy' or 'sticky', two words that somebody using Humpty Dumpty's method of decoding may arrive at.[425] Yet a reader aware of Artaud's opinions on Carroll may read a different potential meaning of 'vliqueux', a more pejorative usage of the word can mean 'smarmy', and it does not take long – less than two lines – for Artaud's translation to leave behind the 'sugar coated' original as a reference point by moving in a radically different direction.[426] The final syllable of 'brimbulkdriquant', 'quant', indicates a level of humour, or perhaps mockery, as it is usually used as 'quant à', which translates to English as something similar to 'in regard to', suggesting that further explanation or a qualifying sentence is about to follow. Rather the following line is 'Jusque-là où la rourghe est a rouarghe a rangmbde et rangmbde a rouarghambde:'.[427] 'Jusque-là où la' roughly translates into English as 'until where the', yet what follows is far harder to translate.[428] While the 'roaur' of 'rouarghe' of is an anglicisation of the Arabic word for roar and the 'rang' of 'rangmbde' translates from French to English as 'row' (as in a row of houses) or 'line', the predominant feeling the words provoke is one of an intensifying unutterability caused by the clusters of consonants.[429] An attempt to speak the line results in an experience of frustrating syntactic limitation and generates sounds somewhere between stuttering and extemporaneous bodily emissions, meaning that even the standard French words 'et' [and] and 'a' [to] that intersperse the consonant-heavy words are distorted by them and therefore take on a corporeality – more a straining for breath than an articulation.

In her insightful essay 'The Asylum of Nonsense: Artaud's translation of Lewis Carroll', Alexandra Lukes builds upon Deleuze's reading of Artaud's translation of Carroll, arguing that the unutterable corporeal words of Artaud are 'moments of interruption', which the 'schizophrenic mind needs in order to buttress the loss of thought and self by

[424] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres Completes IX*. p. 140
[425] Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking Glass.* p. 119; Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres Completes IX*. p. 140
[426] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres Completes IX*. p. 140; Antonin Artaud*. Selected Writings*. p. 451
[427] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres Completes IX*. p. 140
[428] Ibid
[429] Ibid

which it is plagued.'[430] While Lukes is right to argue that Artaud's words are 'moments of interruption', the idea that he used them to 'buttress the loss of thought' is less convincing.[431] Far more compelling is Kahn's argument that one factor in the development of Artaud's corporeal language was his 'ingrained inability to move thought or rather too many thoughts (either as wildly proliferating insight, association, or incoherence) onto the tongue.'[432] In this light the stutter Artaud had when speaking in French can be read as the breakdown between his thoughts and the unsuitability of his mother tongue – which he mistrusted – to express them, and the move towards a more corporeal language as a means to fix the fissure between thought and tongue; a 'unique' language Artaud would describe as 'half-way between gesture and thought'.[433] Lukes positions the disruptive language in Artaud's Carroll translation in opposition to other forms of invented syllables, which she reads as potentially galvanising:

> these so-called words are untranslatable because they resist all forms of readability and vocalization. Contrary to the invented syllables that infuse life into the soul that finds a rhythmic echo to them, we are confronted by cacophonous screams that tear asunder the nuts and bolts of language.[434]

To position Artaud's language contrary to 'the invented syllables that infuse life into the soul' because it is inherently disruptive is to understand it as a failure.[435] Artaud wasn't simply being disruptive for disruption's sake. Rather, he invented a language that was so far removed from conventional linguistic structures that it encouraged new patterns of unrestrained thought; it was, therefore, radical in its potential to vitalise both himself and his audience. Artaud hints at the open-ended nature of his language in the third line of his translation of the 'Jabberwocky' verse. The final word 'rouarghambde:' is followed by a colon, which suggests a connection between the most difficult to translate word and what is to follow, while also suggesting a renaming or illumination: rather than shut off transmission the most difficult word is punctuated in a way that suggests more is to come.[436]

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[430] Alexandra Lukes. 'The Asylum of Nonsense: Artaud's translation of Lewis Carroll'. *Romanic Review*. 104:1/2, 2013, pp. 105-126 (124)
[431] Ibid
[432] Douglas Kahn. *Noise, Water, Meat.* p. 357
[433] Antonin Artaud. *The Theatre and its Double.* p. 91
[434] Alexandra Lukes. 'The Asylum of Nonsense' p.121-122
[435] Ibid
[436] Antonin Artaud. *Oeuvres Completes IX*. p. 140

Deleuze reads the sliding away from the surface world of language (the 'frontier of sense'), triggered by the word brimbulkdriquant, as the moment that the fragmented, porous and dissociated 'schizophrenic body' begins to take shape.[437] However, much like Ferdière and Latrémolière, he does not connect the striking elements of Artaud's writing during his confinement in and immediately after Rodez with the violent and tumultuous context of the times, despite Artaud making the link explicit in a letter to Ferdière not long after her performed his translation.[438] As Kluber makes clear, in his writing during and in the aftermath of World War II, 'Artaud envisions medical, educational, industrial, and military institutions working in concert to produce and destroy mechanical bodies': what Artaud is doing here is demechanising the body by rupturing it from a language that has become militaristic and thoughtless.[439] In this sense Artaud's translation of Carroll is violent in its sudden and shocking destruction of language while also being in opposition to the violence of World War II, particularly the militarised dominant language that led to the conflict. To construe Artaud's corporeal language as one that reveals a personal madness is, therefore, to miss the point entirely. Rather it is an attempt to violently disrupt a language that both facilitated, and was subsequently imbued with, the madness of the moment of history it was produced in allowing for new modes of being and communicating.

Throw the Spectator into Magical Trances

Artaud's rendering of Carroll's text is not simply untranslatable, it is beyond representation: it is sound without depictive signification. What it does instead of depicting is draw attention to the bodily process of sound production, and the limitations of this process. Much like the language that Artaud claims to have invented in a book he lost, which was somehow (poorly) plagiarised by Carroll when he wrote 'Jabberwocky', 'everyone in the world' can read the language of Artaud's translation as long as they are prepared to engage with his corporeal language using an approach that, to quote Derrida, 'no longer obeys the

[437] Gilles Deleuze. *The Logic of Sense.* pp. 86-88

[438] The following is taken from a letter Artaud wrote to Ferdière where he makes clear the link between the nonsense words and 'the disorder' and 'incredible cacophony' of the 'events we are experiencing': 'Et je comprends que l'idée vous soit venue de remettre le livre de Lewis Carroll en vogue. Cela certes est du pur humour! le rapport entre sa poésie intrinsèque et le désordre, la cacophonie incroyable qui sont au fond des événements que nous vivons'.
Antonin Artaud. Nouveaux Écrits de Rodez: Lettres au docteur Ferdière, 1943-1946, et autres textes inédits, suivis de six lettres à Marie Dubuc, 1935-1937. Paris: Gallimard, 1977, p. 65

[439] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre'. p. 15

conventional law of meaning, of reference, of representation'.[440] Allen Weiss, however, has argued that Artaud's nonrepresentational sounds are not devoid of signification and 'neither particularly incantatory nor shocking but rather somewhat poetic'.[441] This is due to Weiss understanding that the 'interior of the soul speaks through the interior of the body' even if unintended, 'since the subglottal regions of the body are full of signification and overtly expressive'.[442] What Weiss fails to see is that what a body signifies is predicated upon the use of language, and at the time Artaud was translating Carroll the fascist leaders of the Nazi party had for some time used nationalistic rhetoric and pseudo-scientific reasoning to argue that certain bodies – those of Artaud and his ancestors for example – were materially inferior to others in order to justify genocide. Cull's counter position, that Artaud was writing using a destratified voice, is far more persuasive if read against the context in which Artaud was writing.[443] Artaud's language escaping signification was vital if he had any hope of shaking his readers and spectators out of their trance-like acceptance of reality; breaking free from the strictures of representational language does not mean a breakdown in communication, rather it reconstructs the dynamics of communication through changing the role of the spectator from passive onlooker to active witness. Cathy Caruth describes an attempted literary description of trauma as a 'wound that cries out, that addresses us in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available'.[444] The audience that witnessed the screams of *To Have Done with the Judgement of god* are not expected to fully comprehend what personal trauma Artaud is giving voice to, instead they are invited, to use the language of Caruth, to 'witness' and 'respond' to the crying wound: representation is replaced by an equivocal corporeal transmission.[445]

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[440] Antonin Artaud*. Selected Writings.* p. 451*;* Jacques Derrida. '*Unsense The Subjectile'*. p. 119

[441] Allen S. Weiss. 'From Schizophrenia to Schizophonica'. *Phantasmic Radio*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995, pp. 9-34. (33)

[442] Allen S. Weiss. 'From Schizophrenia to Schizophonica'. p. 26

[443] Laura Cull. 'How Do You Make Yourself a Theatre without Organs?'. p. 245

[444] Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History.* p. 4

[445] Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History.* pp. 5, 138

Peggy Phelan describes the relationship between exploring the limitations of representation and political change thus: 'Representation follows two laws: it always conveys more than it intends; and it is never totalizing. The "excess" meaning conveyed by representation creates a supplement that makes multiple and resistant readings possible. Despite this excess, representation produces ruptures and gaps; it fails to reproduce the real exactly. Precisely because of representation's supplemental excess and its failure to be totalizing, close readings of the logic of representation can produce psychic resistance and, possibly, political change.'

Peggy Phelan. Unmarked. p. 2

This active yet enigmatic engagement with the spectator was not happenstantial. In a letter written to Wladimir Porché, the general manager of La Radio-Broadcasting-Television Francaise (RTF) shortly after his public broadcasting company had cancelled a broadcast of *To Have Done with the Judgement of god* in January 1948, Artaud defended his radio play precisely because it revitalised the individual's body which in turn made possible the unification of multiple bodies in the name of preventing future wars: 'American capitalism like Russian communism are both leading us to war, so with voices, drums, and xylophonics I am alerting separate individualities so that they may form a body.'[446] Earlier in the letter, Artaud had prefaced this remarkable claim by revealing the impetus behind the writing of *To Have Done with the Judgement of god*:

> I wanted a fresh work, one that would make contact with certain organic points of life, a work in which one feels one's whole nervous system illuminated as if by a miner's cap-lamp with vibrations, consonances which invite man to emerge WITH his body to follow in the sky this new, unusual, and radiant Epiphany.[447]

The ideas articulated here by Artaud and presented in his radio play are the manifestation of decades of theorising about both future wars and their relation to the supressed unifying possibilities of the human body. Eleven years before he wrote to Porché, Artaud had outlined how his project to 'remake' the body so that it was freed from the fixity of organs was a collaborative undertaking.[448] In *The Theatre and Its Double*, he stated that a 'direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator'.[449] This communication relied on the actor's ability to 'know in advance the points of the body that must be touched […] to throw the spectator into magical trances'.[450] The points of the audience members' bodies that Artaud hope to touch are mostly internal and, therefore, reached through 'unbearably piercing', movements and

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[446] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 579
Antonin Artaud's collaborator on *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, Maria Casarès, said that at the time of recording the radio play she was mindful of future wars, specifically that she was in 'a state of aggravated euphoria which kept me upright, hardly sleeping, for seven whole weeks, at the borders of reality, and which carried me when I did sleep into arid, devastated regions, where nightmares of futurist warfare mixed together with the most refined weapons and means ever invented.'
Maria Casares. *Résidente Privilégiée*. Paris: Fayard, 1980, p. 468
[447] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 578
[448] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 570
[449] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 248
[450] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 266

sounds that travel 'through the skin'.[451] For Artaud such sounds and movements, often cries and screams, must be transmitted from the actor 'not into the ear but into the chest of the spectator.'[452] This was a means 'to change the function of speech in theatre […] not to do away with speech in theatre but to change its function, and above all to reduce its role.[453] This is highlighted by the fact that *To Have Done with the Judgement of god* is the best example of Artaud laying bare his body without organs, yet the form in which it was presented – a radio play – meant that the physical body of Artaud or his actors were not on display even though he was trying to express them directly, but rather, through corporeal soundings, were present as sonic bodies. Artaud claimed that for him there was 'no question of abolishing speech in theatre', yet the multi-vocal work he created, where a collective that have radically reworked conventional language to scream in chorus against the inhumanity of a geopolitics that results in mass slaughter and locks up those that resist authority, also gestures towards the abandonment of the single voice by suggesting something more culminative and collaborative.[454] Indeed, Artaud's breakdown of conventional language created a space where new forms of communal language could be explored and it is here that the importance of the non-linguistic verbal sounds are revealed: his corporeal language such as words with unutterable clusters of consonants and scream are not devoid of meaning but rather are the tools used to galvanise and reconnect human bodies through the conveyance (for the actors) and the encountering (for the spectators) of

[451] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 247
This is another instance of Artaud using language to describe something that he both opposes (World War II) and what he sees as a means to avoid further catastrophe. For example, in a letter to Henri Parisot written in 1946 he says: The world of war and of black markets, how many children has it *pierced* [italics artist's own] in the body, in the double fat of the organic membrane, whose suffering it has never admitted or the blood it has taken'. Not only does Artaud say that the direct communication between actor and spectator was depended on the latter being pierced, but he also said, in the same letter that is quoted above, that he wanted to make a poem 'with blood'.
Antonin Artaud. Selected Writings. p. 477
[452] Antonin Artaud. Selected Writings. p. 475
[453] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 270
Artaud makes explicit the relationship between more conventional language and the language of his plays: 'All popular audiences have always been fond of direct expression and imagery; spoken words and explicit verbal expression occur in all the clearest and most distinctly elucidated parts of the plot, those parts where life is lulled to sleep and consciousness takes over. And words will be construed in an incantatory, truly magical sense, side by side with this logical sense'.
Antonin Artaud. The Theatre and Its Double. London: Alma Books, 2013, p. 90
[454] Antonin Artaud. 'Oriental and Western Theatre'. *Artaud on Theatre. ed.* Schumacher. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 123

unrepresentable emotions, a phenomenon Artaud claimed 'reforged the magic chain' by shocking people out of their stuporous state.

It is Not Man but The World Which Has Become Abnormal: Artaud, Psychiatry and Posterity

Less than a year after he left Rodez and shortly before *To Have Done with the Judgement of god* was cancelled, Artaud wrote the essay 'Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society' (1947). It was a text that was inseparable from the post-war landscape in which Artaud had written it, despite the fact that it primarily served the purpose of looking back through history for a kindred antecedent to explicate the years of silencing and confinement that he had faced. For Artaud the judgement was unsatisfactory, for despite the upheaval caused by World War II, both the inimical response to his art and the descent into a cold war between the two malevolent forces identified in his letter to Porché – namely 'American capitalism' and 'Russian communism' – had revealed to him that society had not been shaken from their stupefied state by World War II.[455] Furthermore, rather than new ideas or modes of living arising from the rubble, people emerged ready to make the same mistakes again. In the essay, Artaud reveals that his time in Rodez was inextricably linked to the barbarisms of society:

> Society has strangled in its asylums all those it wanted to get rid of or protect itself from, because they refused to become its accomplices in certain great nastiness. For a madman is also a man whom society did not want to hear and whom it wanted to prevent from uttering certain intolerable truths.[456]

Yet while this link was immediately apparent to his supporters and like-minded artists who would have been aware that Artaud had, for some time before the publication of *To Have Done with the Judgment of god*, alluded to war when discussing his psychic struggles – albeit often in an inexplicit mystic fashion, for Ferdière and his mentee, the war was often striking in its absence in their discussions of their patient. In an interview with Lotringer, Latrémolière described the ideas put forward in 'Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society' as

[455] Antonin Artaud. *Selected Writings.* p. 579
[456] Antonin Artaud. 'Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society'. p. 495

'a joke'.[457] He also stated that after reading 'what he expressed in its totality […] his whole oeuvre is basically a scream' and that he found, 'very little that's understandable'.[458] He continues:

> I saw him scream, I heard him scream. […] I believe that Man will find nothing in Artaud's work. Nothing. It will not advance civilization. Certainly not. […] But those cries behind the curtain, that horrific scene he made in Paris. He screamed there too. He had lost his papers and started screaming. He kept carrying on, and I consider someone who is unable to control himself incapable of offering anything to anyone.[459]

At this point Lotringer attempts to contextualise the screams by reminding Latrémolière that they occurred during the bloodiest moment in history: 'When a world is in the process of annihilating forty million people, a scream is significant.'[460] Latrémolière's response revealed his understanding that there was no connection between World War II and Artaud's screams: 'I've seen him cry out. It didn't hold any ground. He revealed himself. He alone mattered—nothing else.'[461] Yet for Artaud to reveal oneself is not a solipsistic act, in fact it is a means to communicate to spectators the reality of their own lives as Greene makes clear: 'Artaud, as a poet, had to deal with language, which he felt had to be utterly transformed. He believed that any writer who used language traditionally could not reveal metaphysical truths to man, for ordinary language obscured the spiritual realities of the universe'.[462] It was not just metaphysical truths that Artaud's work revealed however. As Murphy observes, despite Artaud's clinical diagnoses of incurable madness, *To Have Done with the judgement of God* 'presents a vision of the catastrophic future already present', a vision of a 'hyper-mechanised war' fought by remotely controlled machines redolent of the wars of the twenty first century where drone bombings and cyber-attacks prevail.[463] French philosopher and cultural theorist Frédéric Neyrat also identifies some prophetic content in the radio play, specifically the first section where Artaud calls attention to the 'knot'

[457] Latrémolière quoted in Lotringer. Mad Like Artaud. p. 73
[458] Latrémolière quoted in Lotringer. Mad Like Artaud. pp. 98, 69
[459] Latrémolière quoted in Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. p. 68
[460] Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. p. 81
[461] Latrémolière quoted in Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. p. 76
[462] Naomi Greene. 'Antonin Artaud: Metaphysical Revolutionary'. p. 190-191
[463] Jay Murphy. 'Artaud's Scream'. p. 153

between monotheism, advancements in technology, imperialist war and hyper capitalism, a knot that has only tightened in the seventy seven years after his death.[464]

[464] Frédéric Neyrat. *Instructions pour une prise d'âmes: Artaud et l'envoûtementoccidental*. Strasbourg: La Phocide. 2008, p. 18



Fig. 4. Gaston Ferdière and Antonin Artaud (right), in the gardens of the Rodez asylum.



Fig. 5. Antonin Artaud. ‘Le Théâtre de la Cruauté’, 1946.

III

A Howling Mass: Isidore Isou and Meaning Deferred

While Artaud may have felt that he was underappreciated during his lifetime, in many ways the Second World War and his death a little less than three years after the conflict ended acted as a catalyst for the critical reconsideration of his work and ideas. Emerging from the ruins of catastrophe, many of the post-war avant-gardes of the late 1940s and 1950s, much like the Dadaists in the aftermath of World War I, made it their aim to dismantle, dissect, and reshape conventional language. Of the mid-twentieth century artists for whom this was an objective, it is perhaps the Lettrists, led by poet, filmmaker and playwright, Paris-based Romanian Isidore Isou, who were most discernibly influenced by Artaud. Remarkably, Isou would also be confined at Rodez under Fredière in the late spring of 1968, leading to the publication of the pamphlet *Who is Doctor Fredière* (1970) two years later.[465] Isou, who co-authored the text with fellow Lettrist Maurice Lemaître, used the pamphlet to take aim at Fredière's assertion that he was an expert and early proponent of art therapy, arguing instead that he wilfully detected insanity in 'normal and natural form[s] of aesthetic expression.'[466] In a provocative but somewhat glib attack, the authors likened Fredière's aesthetic position as analogous to that of the Nazi party, arguing that Fredière, 'the Eichmann of Nazi psychiatry', was like 'the Hitlerists who called modern art degenerate art and banned it.'[467] Isou and Artaud also shared certain personality traits: much like Artaud, Isou was an iconoclast, becoming 'the talk of the Left Bank' and even attaining a book contract at Gallimard, by crashing the play *La Fuite* (1947) by fellow Romanian avant-gardist Tristan Tzara to loudly declare that Dada was dead and Lettrism was ready to take its place.[468] This event suggests a clear break between the approaches of the Dadaists and

[465] Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. p. 141
[466] Isidore Isou. *Who is Doctor Fredière. Quoted in* Sylvère Lotringer. *Mad Like Artaud*. trans. Sylvère Lotringer. Minneapolis: Univocal, 2015 p. 141
[467] Ibid
[468] Andrew Hussey. 'From Bucharest to the Beat Hotel: Isidore Isou and the Lettrist Revolution on the Left Bank'. *Esprit Créateur*. 58:4, 2018, pp. 76-88 (76)
Isou had met the editor at Gallimard six months earlier when he barged into his office to declare that he had 'come to save mankind with his revolutionary theory of new poetry and music', not only mirroring Artaud's belief that his theatrical language was revolutionary, but also echoing his assertion that he could 'redeem humanity'.

Artaud-inspired Lettrists, an idea supported by Kaira M. Cabañas in her influential text *Off-screen Cinema: Isidore Isou and the Lettrist Avant-garde* (2014). There she writes, 'Dada reduced poetry to phonemes (the smallest sound unit that forms meaningful contrasts between utterances), the Lettrist endeavour hinged on the question of bodily intonation, explored as a means by which to divide a phoneme's articulation internally.'[469] While Cabañas is attempting to highlight a disjunction between the grammatically subversive Dadaists and subsequent corporeal work of Artaud and the Lettrists who had a 'shared fascination' with such bodily sounds as 'gurgles and screams', her ideas can also be used to support an artistic affiliation that this chapter puts forward, one that traces the corporeal language of the post-war Lettrists and the screams in the late work of Artaud, back to the corporeality of the Baroness's life-as-art performances made in response to, amongst other things, her first-hand experience of war trauma.[470]

Perhaps the most infamous of Isou's artworks is the Lettrist film known in the English language as *Venom and Eternity* [*Traité de bave et d'éternité*] (1951). *Venom and Eternity* contains text written by Isou, but rather than presenting the words and visual images as working in concert, Isou uses methods such as montage discrépant – the deliberate nonsynchronization of sound and image – to highlight a disjunction between the visual and the textual. By directly drawing onto the celluloid film, sudden bursts of letters, numbers, scratches and symbols act as disruptors of the visual images they punctuate rather than as moments of elaboration.[471] Voicing the character Daniel, Isou employs voiceover as a vehicle for a manifesto of sorts, making proclamations such as 'sound and image, the two wings of cinema, must be torn asunder'.[472] It wasn't just the severing that was important for Isou however, he also proclaims, 'whereas up to now speech was but a commentary on the

Ibid; Jacques Latrémolièr. Doctoral Thesis: Accidents & incidents observés au cours de 1200 électrochocs. qtd in Lotringer. Mad Like Artaud. Minneapolis: Univocal, 2015 p. 23

[469] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema: Isidore Isou and the Lettrist Avant-garde. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,* 2014, pp. 10,12

[470] Ibid

[471] Kaira M. Cabañas *Off-screen Cinema*. p. 1

[472] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)

Cabañas has argued that Isou's decision to use *Venom and Eternity* to demonstrate his preference for the aural over the visual, was inspired by his engagement with the works of Artaud, specifically his positions on sound and image such as: 'There is no possible identiication between sound and image. he image presents itself only in one dimension—it's the translation, the transposition of the real; sound, on the contrary, is unique and true—it bursts out into the room and acts by consequence, with much more intensity than the image.' Antonin Artaud, in Stephen Barber. *The Screaming Body. Antonin Artaud: Film Projects, Drawings, and Sound Recordings.* (London: Creation Books, 1999, p. 16.

image, hereafter the image will be the compliment of the sound.'[473] Indeed, for large sections of the film the aural takes precedence over the visual, none more so than in the initial thirty minutes of the film that shows an undemonstrative Isou walking the streets of Paris alongside various quotidian street scenes as both the text on the screen and Isou's impassioned voiceover make such declarations as, 'I want to destroy the picture by the speech', and asks questions such as 'who said that the cinema, whose meaning is movement, must be movement of image and not movement of speech?'.[474] Further proof that Isou venerated the aural over the visual came after *Venom and Eternity* was screened at Cannes, when he stated, 'I am certain that *Traité de bave et d'éternité* will change cinema drastically and push it toward unexpected paths. It requires only that juries lend it an attentive ear.'[475] Yet the ears required must also be prepared to listen in new ways, for Isou states in the film that the sounds of his new cinema will also represent a break from the sounds of the cinema of the past: they 'must be incoherent.'[476]

Venom and Eternity is presented in three parts: 'Principle' [Le principe], 'Development' [Le développement], and 'Proof' [La preuve]. Each chapter utilises non-linguistic verbal sounds to some degree, but none more so than 'Proof' which is introduced by written text on the screen that declares:

> The Lettrist poems you're about to hear have no meanings whatsoever. They were produced solely for the beauty of pure noise, for the harmony of outcry. […] Art is a convention in which a work empties itself and then collapses. Lettrism has the weakness of being a new convention, a poetry of letters that does not have behind it thousands of years of customs, as does the poetry of words.[477]

The final page of the introductory text, before Isou declares that 'The framework of this film is dedicated to the author's mother', begins with the lament that 'for thousands of years imbeciles have not yet laid down their arms' and finishes with the assertion that 'one must either love or keep quiet'.[478] The aural accompaniment to this text, which is presented in

[473] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)
[474] Ibid
[475] Isidore Isou. *'Préambule à un* Film'. (Le Film français (Cinémonde), 1951)
[476] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)
[477] Ibid
[478] Ibid

white lettering against a black backdrop, is polyphonic chanting and a single voice that produces an array of sounds that the audience could reasonably presume were produced 'for the beauty of pure noise', although if they were to listen carefully it is possible to hear (or imagine) distorted bird calls and a slowed-down machine gun.[479] As the page that states 'one must either love or keep quiet' is presented, the chanting both speeds up and increases in volume to create an extraordinary crescendo, the kind used in more conventional movies to indicate a climactic moment in the narrative.[480] Yet the image on the screen remains the same, and the text lingers as the crescendo is reached, triggering the chants to suddenly slow and momentarily decrease in volume to produce sonic space for an anguished cry of a single voice.[481]

Cabañas has highlighted the inspiration Isou took from Artaud in regard to the sounds of cinema, arguing that Artaud, despite being frustrated by the fact his cinematic projects remained largely unfulfilled, had similarly understood the role of sound as something that should thwart representation, being of the belief that 'noises and screams' should 'lacerate the flow of visual images'.[482] It is unsurprising then, that the use of polyphony and anguished cries in *Venom and Eternity* recall Artaud's radio play *To Have Done with the Judgement of god.* The level of success Isou – or Artaud for that matter – achieved in preferencing the aural over the visual is up for debate; while the sounds presented in *Venom and Eternity* certainly jar with the images on the screen and are often successful in being the predominant sensory experience due to their disruptive quality, the principal effect of Isou's montage discrepant approach is the opening up of new possible sound/image relations rather than the creation of a hierarchical system.

One of the most striking aspects of *Venom and Eternity* is that alongside the nonsynchronization of sound and image that give the impression of disjunction, moments and details emerge to challenge the idea that sound and image can be thought of in binary terms. For example, while Isou and his collaborator Lemaître mostly drew scratches and what appears to be strokes of white paint directly onto the celluloid, in some instances during the third section, 'Proof', there are letters and numbers printed. For the most part

[479] Ibid
[480] Ibid
[481] Ibid
[482] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema*. p. 141

these letters are presented in constellations that flash on the screen and almost immediately disappear, making them impossible to read in a conventional sense. They are, however, undecipherable even to those with the capacity to freeze the film to study them, and therefore seem to be contributing to the 'incoherent' cinema Isou proposed while serving a similar function as the symbols, swathes and scratches: primarily aesthetic and non-symbolic rather than representative.[483] Nestled amongst the incoherence, however, is a sudden flash of the word 'Image'.[484] In the particular sequence where the word 'Image' appears – the word 'Start' also appears on occasion – Isou (as Daniel) is performing a Lettrist poem with remarkable spirit. The apparent incoherent words that he performs appear as subtitled text at the bottom of the screen, although they are only visible when they are not being obfuscated by the flashing images.[485] The effect is sensory overload: the audience have the near impossible task of reading the subtitles as well as trying to glimpse the conventional words before they disappear, while simultaneously trying to decode the symbols and sequences of numbers that flash on screen while also listening to the poem being bellowed by Isou. On top of this there are also the mercurial dashes and swirls of striking white that are abstract to the point of often being indistinguishable from the (presumably) unintentional flecks and marks that appear on most celluloid films made on a relatively low budget. For Cabañas this provokes an exceptionally active engagement from the audience:

> Lettrist cinema offers a hybrid audiovisual experience for spectators: they are at once viewers of images, readers of text, and interpreters of textual marks and signs that interrupt filmed images, just as they are auditors of a debate and subject to the interruption of linguistic meaning by the eruption of seemingly senseless sounds.[486]

While Cabañas's understanding of the role of Isou's audience is thoroughly convincing, there is also something else happening, which both the appearance of the word 'Image' and the indistinguishability of unintentional and intentional marks point towards. The possibility for the audience to make a clear distinction between the 'text', 'textual marks', and 'images' of

[483] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)
[484] Ibid
[485] Ibid
[486] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema*. p. 17

the film, especially in sections of 'Proof', is withheld; therefore rather than just being multifarious, there is a complex entanglement of the roles the spectators are encouraged to perform.[487] Isou gestures towards this entanglement by planting the word 'Image' amongst the harder-to-decipher aspects of the film.[488] The choice of this word, particularly in a sequence that has both incoherent constellations of letters in the subtitles and flashed on screen, seems pointed. As Cabañas makes clear, Isou wanted to create a new type of film precisely for the reason that he understood mainstream cinema as contributing to the – from Isou's perspective – undesirable codification and representation of words.[489] The word 'image' has a similar meaning in both French and English: an imitation or representation of something. Isou would have chosen to use it as the one clear aspect of an otherwise highly non-representational moment of the film because amongst the swirls, scratches, shouts and traces it questions how fixed the meanings signified by the word 'Image' are, while simultaneously raising the same question for all of the other images in the film.

While Isou uses his character Daniel to denounce cinema's historic precedence for the visual (which he hopes to 'destroy'), he also, revealingly, posits a new relationship between the visual and the aural, where sounds 'reveal the limitations and the possibilities of the image'.[490] The images of *Venom and Eternity* are often agitatingly pedestrian. They consist of the character Daniel – who is also played by Isou – slowly meandering through the streets of Paris (which are also shown without Daniel present), close up shots of Daniel's love interest Eve (who like Daniel seems aware of the presence of the camera pointed at her but appears to be indifferent to it), alongside found footage of fisherman in their trawlers, soldiers performing military drills and army officials carrying out diplomatic tasks.[491] The apparent nonchalance in the sequencing and interrelation of the miscellaneous images is reflected in how they are presented: defaced, scratched, over-exposed, and even occasionally upside down. In the film, Daniel remarks that a central issue he has with cinematic images is that 'it is possible to make them say whatever one wants' as well as 'that which they do not say'.[492] The blemished and disjointed images of *Venom and Eternity*

[487] Ibid
[488] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)
[489] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema*. Pp. 25-26
[490] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)
[491] Ibid
[492] Ibid

enact a visual frustrating of the shaping of images into a narrative. They resolutely call into question the linear passing of time experienced by audiences of mainstream cinema where images are presented sequentially and meaning is established through the persistent flow of one visual representation to another.

Chiara Quaranta argues that Isou's rupturing of conventional cinematic time is due to his conjuring of something akin to German philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of 'profound boredom', which is a state of enlightening aesthetic indifference where possibilities that were previously considered worthwhile appear pointless.[493] Unlike other forms of boredom the person experiencing 'profound boredom' does not aim to relieve themselves of their indifference precisely because, as Heidegger states, 'this boredom wishes to tell us something.'[494] But what exactly do the boring images have to say? What exactly are the 'possibilities of the image' that Isou speaks of?[495] Quaranta argues that:

> *Venom and Eternity's* disruption of a conventional cinematic world can achieve this phenomenologically profound form of boredom because it presents viewers with both images on the verge of unintelligibility and non-representational images that frustrate pleasure and "stretch" time.[496]

This would be in keeping with Sami Sjöberg's argument that Isou's poetry operated in a temporal realm that was disparate to conventional capitalist time.[497] It also would not be surprising if this was an intention of Isou's as he was not only interested and invested in the concept of messianic time but would also be keenly aware as an artist working in the aftermath of World War II that, as scholars of temporality such as Susana Narotzky and Niko Besnier make clear, moments of crisis produce moments of 'radical uncertainty' that reveal

[493] Chiara Quaranta. 'A Cinema of Boredom: Heidegger, Cinematic Time and Spectatorship'. *Film-Philosophy.* 24:1, 2020, pp. 1–21 (5)
[494] Martin Heidegger*. The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. trans. W. McNeill & N. Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 135
[495] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)
[496] Chiara Quaranta. 'A Cinema of Boredom'. p. 16
[497] Sami Sjöberg. 'Remaking the Present Through Language: Messianic Time in the Works of Yvan Goll and Isidore Isou Contra Benjamin and Agamben'. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*. 14:2, (2014) pp. 199-214 (210) Nigel Thrift has argued that alongside the development a capitalist economics, 'it is possible to chart the gradual diffusion of a new type of time, based upon calculative rationality, from a point where it has melted into the interstices of practical consciousness and become just another part of the ordinary, taken-for-granted world of lived existence.' This gradual diffusion, Thrift argues, ultimately resulted in a 'new time consciousness under the harsh rule of industrial capitalism'. See *Nigel Thrift. 'The Making of a Capitalist Time Consciousness.* The Sociology of Time*. ed. John Hassard. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, pp. 105-129*

the fragility of modern dominant conceptions of time: for politically revolutionary artists looking for targets for their discontent, the conventional concept of time is a good place to start.[498] But by prioritising the visual over the aural, Quaranata's argument falls into the sort of critical understandings of cinema that Isou wanted to dismantle. It is, after all, the heterogeneity and variegation of the soundtrack of *Venom and Eternity* that is the predominant factor in the creation of a unique spatio-temporality. For example, Quaranta considers the images of *Venom and Eternity* in isolation before coming to the decision that they have an 'unintelligibility and non-representational' quality that 'frustrate pleasure', yet through a comparison between the visual and aural elements of the film, a more striking aspect of the images is revealed: despite often depicting human activity, they have a discernible lack of corporeality.[499] The actors afforded closeups often portray characters that appear unfeeling or disinterested, and in the long shots of sailors and soldiers where facial expressions are unable to be seen and in the images of military personnel who have had their faces scratched out by Isou's collaborator, Lemaître, they are often working in a machinic unison or performing perfunctory tasks. This is in stark contrast to the voices that pepper the soundtrack, which despite also often being unintelligible, reveal a corporeality that portrays a range of intense human emotions.

Cabañas has argued that 'Isou imagined the soundtrack as a site for recovering the phonetic substance of speech and the materiality of words.'[500] If this is the case then it would appear that the substance was recovered from the images, which were left devoid. The third chapter 'Proof' starts with a poem called 'March' [Marche]. As the rhythmic chants of the poem rise to audibility the audience is told that the poem has 'no meaning'.[501] Yet the militaristic title and pulsating call and response chanting that evoke army drills is likely to

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[498] Susana Narotzky and Niko Besnier. 'Crisis, Value, and Hope: Rethinking the Economy: An Introduction to Supplement 9.' *Current Anthropology.* 55:9, 2014, pp. 4-16 (7)
'Modern time' is, of course, a contested term. Here the term is used with Laura Bear's description in mind: 'Modern time here is understood to be a complex historical product. At its centre is the abstract time-reckoning of capitalism, which acts as a universal measure of value, but which always comes into conflict with concrete experiences of time. Its social disciplines emerge from Christian practice, but the ethics of these routines are marked as secular and universal. Its politics is founded on representations of the natural connections of communities through a homogeneous historical time. Its science and technology tightly link social, human time to external non-human rhythms.'
Laura Bear. 'Doubt, conflict, mediation: the Anthropology of Modern Time'. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute. 2014, pp. 3-30 (3)
[499] Chiara Quaranta. 'A Cinema of Boredom'. p. 16
[500] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema*. p. 24
[501] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)

make the audience recall the found footage of military personnel used in the second part of the film, 'Developmnent' ['Le développement'] that Isou repurposed from Service Cinématographique des Armées.[502] The detached nature of the reused images differ so markedly in their affect when compared to the sensational and reverberating soundtrack that the distinction itself becomes a prominent aspect of the film. In this sense Cabañas is right to argue that *Venom and Eternity* highlights the semiotic incompatibility between the iconicity of the images of cinema and the indexical quality of soundtracks, yet rather than the triumphant freeing of the aural at the expense of the visual that Isou hoped for, the film reinforces the interdependence of the audience's senses when attempting to generate meaning.[503] The striking corporeality of the voiced poetry is all the more striking precisely because it jars with the insubstantial images that they soundtrack. Isou's intention for there to be total disjunction between the soundtrack and the images, therefore, does not result in a total severance but rather an unsettling and arresting dissonance.

A language worn in tatters

Rather than relegating the visual aspects of cinema to obsolescence – an objective that even Isou must have known was forlorn – *Venom and Eternity* posits a new way of interpreting the relationship between the visual and the aural aspects of cinema, one which prompts the audience to interrogate the default ways in which they had previously consumed the images of the film that they are watching. This is not in spite of the lack of materiality in the images of *Venom and Eternity*, but rather a consequence of it. Quaranta has argued that *Venom and Eternity* emptied the images 'of their entertainment value', producing a boredom that, conversely, make their presence 'experientially' felt 'through the various manipulations of cinematic time'.[504] For Quaranta this makes Isou's imagery more conducive to contemplation than the images of mainstream cinema, where the audience is often 'lulled by pleasant, referential images.'[505] There is a sense, however, that regardless of Isou's manipulation of cinematic time, the images featured in *Venom and Eternity* would elicit contemplation from the audience. It feels particularly pointed that the military personnel

[502] Ibid
[503] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema*. p. 28
[504] Chiara Quaranta. 'A Cinema of Boredom'. p. 16
[505] Ibid

that feature in the footage appear to be situated in countries where the French army were fighting imperialist wars, given that, as Cabañas has pointed out, 'in France in the early 1950s, the Cold War as well as anticolonialist movements precipitated a moment of intellectual radicalisation'.[506] One reason for the radicalisation was the disparity between how wars such as the Cold War and the First Indochina War were presented in France – the latter being depicted in mainstream media as a mission civilisatrice, the attempt to rationalise colonialisation through an argument that colonised subjects would benefit from being westernised – and the barbaric reality of the conflicts.

Much like Artaud before him, Isou's political positions were unstable and inconclusive when considered in their entirety. One thing that is clear however, is that, as a Jewish person who spent the duration of World War II in Romania, he had firsthand experiences of the barbarity of war: in the early stages of the conflict anti-Jewish riots plagued Romanian cities, an upheaval that was followed by the deportation and massacre of over three hundred thousand Jewish people. Isou only narrowly escaped the pogrom of 23rd of January 1941, after which many friends and family initially feared he had been killed.[507] Fearing for his life and carrying a trauma he claimed never left him, he unsuccessfully attempted to flee from Romania to France during the conflict.[508] However, once Isou finally made it to France in 1945 he found little respite amongst the 'paranoid chaos' of post-war Paris, where, as historian Andrew Hussey makes clear, he encountered a 'savage place, where the dominant emotions were hatred and recrimination', an environment that Isou captured 'beautifully and brilliantly' in his art.[509]

The Lettrist Poetry Manifesto [Manifeste de la Poésie Lettriste] was published in 1947, although Isou claimed he had written it in during the war in Romania three years prior. In the manifesto, Isou compares language to clothes, declaring that the French language had been torn and mended so many times that by the time of writing it was 'worn

[506] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema.* p. 43
[507] Andrew Hussey. *The Strange and Enchanted Life of Isidore Isou*. London: Reaktion Books, 2021, p. 294
[508] Andrew Hussey. The Strange and Enchanted Life of Isidore Isou. p 288
Isou claimed that the horrific events in Romania during the war lead to him 'leaving mentally', an idea that he says is reflected in him abandoning his mother tongue and writing in French before he made the physical move to France.
Andrew Hussey. The Strange and Enchanted Life of Isidore Isou. p. 66
[509] Andrew Hussey. *The Strange and Enchanted Life of Isidore Isou*. pp., 158, 128

in tatters'.[510] For Isou the aim of keeping language alive in order for it to be able to accommodate both the aesthetic innovations and the political realities of mid-twentieth century France had been a failure.[511] It is unsurprising then that, as Lucy Bradnock observes, Isou is a prime example of an artist who realised that occupying a space outside of conventional language 'opened up the space for both material and philosophical enquiry'.[512] This self-consciously political move is reflected in Isou's understanding of his film *Venom and Eternity* as 'a kind of cinematic anti-grammer [une éspece d'anti-grammaire du cinema].'[513] This form of 'anti-grammar' did not only present itself in the fragmented, corporeal and resounding elements of the soundtrack, but also, crucially, in the dissonance between the disembodied rationality of the representations of the found images repurposed for the film, and the embodied irrationality of the Lettrist poetry that peppers the play and calls into question the visual representations that they soundtrack.[514] Hannah Feldman suggests that Isou's attacks on representation in *Venom and Eternity* were a response to the function of cinema in occupied Paris during World War II, where it 'had been conceived as a site for a particular form of governmentality' that 'extended from the types of films that could be shown, and the monitoring of the viewing public's behaviour, to the Aryanization of the industry.[515] In this sense Isou's 'anti-grammar' cannot be separated from the post-war context in which it was produced; however, World War II would not be the only conflict that shaped Isou's cinematic language.

The Cold War precipitated a shift in the political and cultural environment that would forever change the status of the artistic avant-garde.[516] Culture was weaponised as both

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[510] Isidore Isou. 'Le Manifest de la Poésie Lettriste'. *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et à une Nouvelle Musique.* Paris: Gallimatrd, 1947, p. 14

[511] This was not a unique observation. In 1949, two years after Manifeste de la Poésie Lettriste was published, the San Francisco Art Association held a three-day event titled 'Western Round Table on Modern Art', with the purpose of discussing the purpose of art in post-war America. Literary critic Kenneth Burke, who along with renowned figures such as artist Marcel Duchamp, composer Arnold Schoenberg and architect Frank Lloyd Wright, made up the panel, vehemently argued that 'recent global catastrophes— from economic collapse to total war— had not only irreparably damaged the average individual but had destroyed the traditional vocabularies through which the world was understood.' *Robert Genter. Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 2*

[512] Lucy Bradnock. 'Bite Your Tongue'. *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason 1950-1980*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017, p. 68

[513] Isidore Isou. *Oeuvres de spectacle.* p. 29

[514] Lucy Bradnock. Bite Your Tongue'. p. 68

[515] Hannah Feldman. 'New Writing Systems/Writing New Systems. *Spectres of Artaud: Language and the Arts in the 1950s.* ed. by Kaira M. Cabañas. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía Press, 2012, p. 118

[516] Greg Barnhisel. *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 2

Capitalist USA and Stalinist USSR saw how it could be a tool for obtaining influence and support overseas.[517] Crucially, Europe became a 'battleground' for the Cultural Cold War, leading to the instrumentalising of the art of the American avant-garde, which diplomats were keen to argue reflected the freedom afforded citizens of the United States in the hope that the innovation and transgression evident in the art obfuscated – or at least mitigated – what many European progressive intellectuals perceived to be the conservative and imperialist foundational principles of American capitalism.[518] Suddenly, the avant-garde, which had once been viewed as a threat to the progress of a conformist industrial society, were being brought in from the margins and celebrated as products of American capitalism.

The desire for the USA to equate artistic freedom with the concept of American freedom peaked in 1954 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower, speaking at the Museum of Modern Art's 25th anniversary, argued that 'freedom of the arts' should be a 'basic freedom' and that it was 'one of the pillars of liberty' in the USA.[519] In case it was not clear that the freedom he purported was being implicitly contrasted to the totalitarianism of the USSR, Eisenhower continued:

> our people must have unimpaired opportunity to see, to understand, to profit from our artists' work. As long as artists are at liberty to feel with high personal intensity, as long as our artists are free to create with sincerity and conviction, there will be healthy controversy and progress in art […] My friends, how different it is in tyranny. When artists are made the slaves and tools of the state; when artists become chief propagandists of a cause, progress is arrested and creation and genius are destroyed. Let us resolve that this precious freedom of the arts, these precious freedoms of America,

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[517] Ibid
The 'Cultural Cold War' between the USSR and the USA went beyond championing home-grown art and artists: *'The battles of the cultural Cold War ranged from heated exchanges at international conferences to duelling theatrical productions to competing literary and cultural journals.'*
Ibid

[518] Greg Barnhisel. *Cold War Modernists.* pp. 2-3
Barnhisel highlights the extent to which moves to weaponise the American avant-garde were state-sanctioned: *Modernism's specific uses as cultural-diplomatic propaganda were as diverse as those who put policy into practice, from government offices such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) to government-supported groups such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) to private organizations such as the Ford Foundation.*
Greg Barnhisel. Cold War Modernists. p. 3

[519] Dwight D. Eisenhower. MoMA: Program for the Opening Ceremonies of the 25th Anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art, Oct. 19, 1954.
http://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/1874/releases/MOMA_1954_0095_89.pdf ?2010, [accessed August 20th, 2023]

> will, day by day, year by year, become ever stronger, ever brighter in our land.[520]

However ironic it may be for the president of the USA to push the propagandist concept of American contemporary art as being the signature for American freedom whilst simultaneously accusing the enemy of using their artists as propagandists, the argument he was attempting to propagate was well received. As Greg Barnhisel makes clear, as the Fifties progressed the idea that there was an inherent connection between 'American liberty, artistic freedom, and modernist experimentation' was becoming more widespread and imbedded in America and more popular amongst foreign artists and art critics with sympathies for the USA.[521] There were, however, limitations on the kind of freedom that could be expressed in the art being championed – McCarthyism and the resulting blacklisting of filmmakers suspected to have sympathies for communism, which occurred concurrently with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) funding experimental art, being a case in point – and therefore artworks that demonstrated aesthetic innovation while maintaining an apoliticality were primarily promoted. The CIA's new and unexpected role of taste-making was evident in what Barnhisel has described as 'MoMA's entanglement in US foreign policy', which manifested most notably in their co-championing of Abstract Expressionism as the signature of American culture.[522]

One effect of the co-option of avant-garde art as a tool for propaganda was the gradual decline of any politically radical aspects of artworks in favour of a celebration of individualistic freedom and formal techniques, which resulted in contemporary art becoming largely 'safe for consumption by American middle-class audiences'.[523] However there was also another effect, and *Venom and Eternity* is a prime example of its manifestation. Rising from the destruction of World War II and living through the proceeding colonialist wars and the Cold War, the dissenting voices within the artistic avant-garde, appalled by the rationalisation, commodification and co-option of art, began making

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[520] Ibid

[521] Greg Barnhisel. *Cold War Modernists*. p. 79

[522] Greg Barnhisel. *Cold War Modernists*. p. 7
For an illuminating insight into the CIA's involvement with the championing of Abstract Expressionism see: Frances Stonor Saunders. *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. New York: New Press, 2000 and *Frances Stonor Saunders. 'Modern Art Was CIA 'Weapon'. Independent. October 22, 1995, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/modern-art-was-cia-weapon-1578808.html [accessed Friday 1st September 2023]*

[523] Greg Barnhisel. *Cold War Modernists*. p. 3

irrational art, where the irrationality was 'created within, shaped by, and fully legible only in the historical context of an ongoing (and profoundly disruptive) war.[524]

Reasonable Delirium

In her insightful essay 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium' (2017), Kelly Baum proposes that a defining feature of 'postwar art' is that it is 'haunted by irrationality.'[525] Baum suggests that the irrationality present in much of the art made in the postwar period reflects, both consciously and unconsciously, the delirium of life at that specific time.[526] Baum makes it clear that the postwar period should not be considered as straightforwardly irrational; in fact, many of the aspects that define that time as senseless, absurd, and deeply regrettable – USA and the USSR bringing the world to the brink of nuclear catastrophe not long after nuclear bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – were repeatedly rationalised and justified by those in power and continue to be so today.[527] But as Guattari makes clear, the rational is always 'traversed by the irrational and defined only by a certain type of relation between irrational factors. Underneath all reason lies delirium.'[528]

By interrogating the dialectical knot between the rational and irrational, Guattari was continuing – albeit with a markedly different approach – the work of German cultural theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Published four years prior to *Venom and Eternity*, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) laid out how film had been one of the more efficient tools of the culture industry in regard to the reinforcement and perpetuation of the social conventions and hierarchical structures of the postwar

[524] Hannah Feldman. *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, p. 2

[525] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason 1950-1980*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017, pp. 19-20

[526] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. p. 19

[527] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. p. 19-22
Baum points to 'Richard Nixon's so-called Madman Theory' as an example of the rational and the irrational coalescing. The theory suggests that Nixon feigned irrationality and instability in order to deter the USSR from provoking him through fear he may respond erratically. For a detailed description of the theory and an exploration of how it still informs USA's foreign policies see:
James Boys. The unpredictability factor: Nixon, Trump and the application of the Madman Theory in US grand strategy'. Cambridge Review of International Affairs. 34: 3, 2021, pp. 430-451

[528] Félix Guattari. 'Capitalism: A Very Special Delirium'. *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews, 1972-1977*. ed. Sylvère Lotringer. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 35-36

period.[529] Film, they argued, was 'intent upon reproducing the world of everyday perceptions': [530]

> Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theatre of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without losing the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality.[531]

For Horkheimer and Adorno, this blurring of film and the world outside of the cinema in which it was viewed reinforced the status quo not only because of the dispassionate standardised content of movies but, crucially, because of the approach moviegoers inevitably used when responding to a film – one that was chiefly unimaginative and automatic – was transferred to how the same people engaged with the ruinous events of the real world.[532] Vitally, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that this was not because the developed capitalist society in which they lived had strayed from the rationalising concepts that underpinned the enlightenment, which for many thinkers was regarded as the defining moment of western intellectualism, but rather were the culmination of those ideas: the technological products being produced in Western capitalist countries – the fruits of the Enlightenment – were not freeing individuals from the confines of modern life but keeping the whole together with 'automobiles, bombs, and movies.'[533] As Baum maintains, 'the

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[529] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* trans. John Cumming. London: Verso, 2016, p. 84
Horkheimer and Adorno lay out their understanding of their term 'the culture industry' and its relationship to technology thus: The sociological theory that the loss of the support of objectively established religion, the dissolution of the last remnants of precapitalism, together with technological and social differentiation or specialization, have led to cultural chaos is disproved every day; for culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. […] Interested parties explain the culture industry in technological terms. It is alleged that because millions participate in it, certain reproduction processes are necessary that inevitably require identical needs in innumerable places to be satisfied with identical goods. […] Furthermore, it is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumers' needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest.
Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Dialectic of Enlightenment. p. 82-3
[530] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* p. 84-85
[531] Ibid
[532] Ibid
[533] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* p. 82

heinous levels of human and environmental destruction' during World War II and in the immediate aftermath 'were also carried out with the aid of the most advanced forms of science and technology available', a phenomenon that 'triggered' the 'growing disenchantment with rationalism after 1945.'[534]

By nestling footage from contemporary French colonial wars amongst jarringly unrelated images, Isou made a conscious decision to hold a mirror up to the incoherent delirium of the postwar years, which supports Baum's understanding that postwar art is 'haunted by irrrationality'.[535] Yet there are other less explicit and more subversive ways in which the film reflects the irrationality of the times, felt most keenly in the rousing frenzy of the soundtrack: it refuses rationalisation and co-option, and denies the viewer the ability to respond automatically. In this sense it also can be read as in dialogue with the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, who had argued that in the aftermath of World War II, 'spoken and written language served only to persuade and delude, not to enliven and galvanise.'[536] Despite the typically enigmatic language of Isou's manifesto *Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music* [*Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et à une Nouvelle Musique]* (1947), he uses it to reveal that the difficulty a viewer would find rationalising the soundtrack of *Venom and Eternity* was a deliberate artistic choice.[537] The principle catalyst for the choice, however, was not the destruction and murder of World War II, but rather something that the violence accelerated: the ineffectuality and inoperability of language.[538] Isou makes a connection between the delirium identified by Baum as typifying the postwar years in which he was writing, and the sudden inefficacious nature of words in that particular moment.[539] The 'brutality' of words, Isou maintains, lies in the marked contrast between the sprawling feverishness of contemporary life ('bursts of energy […] intimate experiences […] fluctuations […] all delirium is expansive'), and the fact that 'no word is capable of carrying the impulses one wants to send with it.'[540] One result of this disjunction, Isou claims, is the

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Adorno and Horkheimer believed that the enlightenment 'destroyed itself by transmuting itself from a critical philosophy into an affirmation of the status quo and its dominant positivist and pragmatist philosophies'. *Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Dialectic of Enlightenment. p. 2*

[534] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. p. 24

[535] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. pp. 19-20

[536] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. p. 57

[537] Isidore Isou. 'Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music.' *Visible Language*. 17:3, 1983, pp. 70-76 (71-72)

[538] Ibid

[539] Ibid

[540] Isidore Isou. 'Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music'. pp. 70-71

dulling of lived experience resulting in the untranslatable emotions (although even 'the translated word does not express') passing into oblivion: 'Feelings without words in the dictionary disappear. Every year thousands of feelings disappear for lack of concrete form.'[541] Isou's solution to the diminution of feeling is the 'destruction of words (which 'have been mended so much they are in stiches') for LETTERS' [capitalisation artist's own].[542] This movement from words to letters is ultimately a movement from the lexical and denotive to the aural (indicated by the title of Isou's manifesto *Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music*) and visual, which manifests most clearly in Isou's written poetry, but is evident in the short single phoneme vocal sounds of a *Venom and Eternity* and the moments when single letters flash on the screen. As well as being a tool to carry the 'impulses one wants to send', the freeing of letters from the denotive structure of the word also has a political dimension: the absence of lexical signification makes Isou's art harder to rationalise and standardise.[543]

The movement from denotive to the aural and visual is interconnected to yet another way in which *Venom and Eternity* resists rationalisation and co-option: Isou's choice of technological equipment used to make the film. Rather than using the latest high spec filmmaking technology, Isou used a mixture of outmoded equipment alongside more recently made machinery for both the visual and audio aspects for his film. Cabañas explains how this decision was made due to concerns similar to those espoused in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> Isou disavows a definition of film that hews too closely to the medium's technological mechanisms and support, singling out those authors who confuse the development of technology with the critical elaboration of aesthetic strategies, as if the former drove the ruptures of the latter.[544]

Consciously or otherwise, moves such as this meant that Isou produced a film that managed to circumvent Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of the resulting 'standardisation' and 'coercion' of a technological and rational approach to culture:[545]

[541] Isidore Isou. 'Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music'. p. 72
[542] Isidore Isou. 'Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music'. pp. 70-71
[543] Ibid
[544] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema.* p. 9
[545] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* p. 82

> A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself. […] It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system.[546]

The 'logic' of *Venom and Eternity* repeatedly evades the viewer.[547] Even the more coherent aspects of the film, such as the impassioned debate on the merits of cinema, particularly the films made by Lettrists, have irrational characteristics such as sudden raises of volume and unexpected cheering and booing that does not always correspond with the debate taking place.[548] More importantly, in regards to Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of the relationship between technology, film and the domination that defines contemporary western social systems, the outmoded technology used in *Venom and Eternity* draws attention to the materiality of the sounds being made by showcasing the functional noises of the recording process that are routinely considered unwanted and therefore hidden in conventional cinema. Isou was aware that such decisions contributed to the 'revolutionary' quality of his work, using the subtitles of *Venom and Eternity* to comment that he retained 'certain noises or crackling, which have been kept because they contribute to the — involuntary — revolutionary character of the film.'[549] These noises, along with the many specks that blemish the physical film, constantly remind the audience of *Venom and Eternity* of their role: they are observers of a piece of art made by an artist. As Cabañas argues, Isou's 'purposely flawed sound track' defies representation and 'complicates a realist semiotics of listening' by refusing to be subsumed into the role of unobtrusive support for the visual elements of the cinema. To use the language of Horkheimer and Adorno, Venom and Eternity evades the 'ruthless unity' that helps reinforce the 'technological rationale' that symbiotically allies culture with the social structure that it is produced in: it refuses to

[546] Ibid
[547] Ibid
[548] Ibid; Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)
It is unsurprising that logic evades the audience. Isou's collaborator on *Venom and Eternity* Lemaître warned that looking for 'any logic […] beyond the image' would be futile.
Maurice Lemaître. Sur Quelques Erreurs Commises à propos du film d'Isidore Isou, Traité de Bave et d'Eternité. Paris: Centre de Créativité, 1995, p. 9
[549] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)

be an 'instrument of social control'.[550] It is unsurprising that *Venom and Eternity* actualises many of Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of what art should do, but seldom did. While Isou's intellectual project was manifestly different to those of the Frankfurt School, by surveying the earth-shaking destruction of World War II they took aim at the same foe: the flawed rationalism that led to the catastrophe. As Hussey maintains, Isou, who founded Lettrism 'as a response to the lies and propaganda that [he] had met head-on as a young Jew in the holocaust of Nazi-occupied Romania […] he not only opposed the rationalism of Western thought, which had culminated in the Jewish apocalypse of the Second World War', but also aimed 'to shatter the rational discourse imbedded in the Enlightenment project'.[551]

The 'crackles' are not the only aspect of the soundtrack where materiality is foregrounded in *Venom and Eternity*.[552] Perhaps the most striking aspect where this is the case is the fragmented language of the Lettrist poetry used in the film.[553] Isou believed that the new technology in cinema, much like developments in the printing press previously, resulted in 'language's codification and representation'.[554] It is unsurprising then that much of the language of Venom and Eternity defies representation and, to an extent, codification. The first voices heard are the aforementioned chanters and a single voice that pulls away from the (not quite) rhythmic incantation to stutter, splutter, and squawk, managing to evoke both the breakdown of human language and, on occasion, the sound of a machine malfunctioning.[555] This visual accompaniment to this cacophony, at least for part of the time, is somebody, presumably Isou as Daniel, revealing Isou's biography from 1947 up until *Venom and Eternity* in chronological order. The film shows one book being removed to reveal another below that has the title written in bold black writing. Yet on two occasions a shadow falls onto the book that has been revealed, causing the title to be obfuscated, reminiscent of a war general's face being covered by Lemaître's scratches later in the film. It is a subtle detail that, along with the indistinct chanting, casts into doubt the reason that the bibliography is presented as a way of starting the film. Chronologising bibliographies is of

[550] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* pp. 82, 83, 99
[551] Andrew Hussey. 'From Bucharest to the Beat Hotel. pp. 85, 87
[552] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951)
[553] Ibid
[554] Kaira M. Cabañas. *Off-screen Cinema.* p. 26
[555] Isidore Isou. *Traité de bave et d'éternité.* (Astoria Films, 1951) Enlightenment project

course a rationalising procedure; it suggests a development of ideas and a construction of argument that occurs over time and over multiple texts. It would be a strange thing for the anti-rationalist Isou to use to start his film, even considering his taste for self-aggrandisement and self-promotion. Yet by accompanying this visual bibliography with a confounding soundtrack and the apparent self-defeating obfuscation of titles, it serves the function of promptly establishing a theme of *Venom and Eternity* that will run throughout: the dialectical knot between the rational and the irrational that philosophers such as Adorno and Horkheimer were theorising at the same time as Isou was making his film.

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It is worth remembering that Isou did not necessarily consider his fragmented language to be irrational, despite it ultimately being a mystifying response to rational discourse. Speaking in the first person, he claimed his faltering speech 'stuttered towards a future language', and was, therefore, 'never present, but to come [Isidore pretend bégayer un langage future. Il n'est donc jamais présent, mais à venir].'[556] Isou's self-positioning as a speaker of a language where meaning is deferred meant that he could operate outside of contemporaneous philosophical and theoretical discourses; he foregrounded the materiality of human speech in favour of discursive language. But Isou didn't turn towards a corporeal language simply to allow the body to speak, rather he sought to free language from its function of primarily being a carrier of semantic meaning.[557] Like Artaud before him, Isou's attempt to reshape the use of language was informed by mystical visions.[558] Isou believed that his poetry sent 'a total message to the future' ['envoie vers l'avenir un message total'], a future he described as a 'paradisiac society' of 'perpetual joy'.[559] This has led Sjöberg to argue that Isou's poetry is 'not linked to chronological time but rather to a future messianic time' therefore establishing 'its meaning, anachronistically, from and in the future'.[560]

[556] Isidore Isou. *Oeuvres de Spectacle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 129
[557] Sami Sjöberg. 'Remaking the Present Through Language'. p. 202
[558] Sami Sjöberg. 'Remaking the Present Through Language'. pp. 202-206
[559] Isidore Isou. *Mémoires sur les forces futures des arts plastiques et sur leur mort.* Paris: Cahiers de l'externité 1998, p. 31; Isidore Isou. 'La Création divine, la transformation récente de l'église catholique et la revelation messianique'. *Lettrisme* 4:5, 1972, pp. 1–20 (8-9)
[560] Sami Sjöberg. 'Remaking the Present Through Language'. p. 210

Sjöberg concludes that 'in practice, this suggests that even non-meaningful combinations of letters should be grasped as not-yet-meaningful.'[561]

Isou not only used *Venom and Eternity* to showcase his language with deferred meaning, but also in poems such as *Research for Pure Prose Poem* [Recherches pour un poème en prose pure] (1950) that simultaneously gestures away from the visual and towards the aural while deranging conventional language. One way Isou achieved this in the poem was by shutting down the possibility of the reader attaining immediate meaning:

Ghprstnstzdgfblmkrstvxwtsrkmbfpntzsch nsntzze! FMNZ TGGGHTZ HH
HHKRRVCPMPCRTRCPT[562]

While the shock of Artaud's translation of Carroll came from a sudden slipping from a recognisably conventional syntactical structure into something anomalous and unsettling, Isou's poem offers no syntactical starting point through a complete absence of consonants and a 37-letter long and unpronounceable word used to open the poem. Sjöberg argues that through such poems as the one above, Isou, informed by his spirituality and knowledge of ancient Jewish traditions, was corresponding with kabbalistic letter permutations, which 'were not required to be immediately meaningful', only becoming imbued with meaning in a 'messianic moment' of the future.[563] While this may be the case, denying immediate linguistic meaning for the reader does not mean shutting down meaning altogether; in fact, for Isou, it creates a more veracious meaning, one that has not been stifled by words that have no longer have the capacity 'to express' the reality of lived experiences.[564] However, Isou's act of negation in his poems mean that the new meaning he hopes to create is not immediately accessible, rather it poses the question to the reader of what to do with a text when the widely accepted foundational approach to decoding has been shut off. The

[561] Ibid
[562] Isidore Isou. *Precisions sur ma Poesie et Moi*. Paris: Exils, 2003, p. 132
[563] Sami Sjöberg. 'Remaking the Present Through Language'. pp. 202, 204
This is an idea that is supported by Issou's own understanding of the role of his unpronounceable poems: 'the method of creation is the secret of the Gods that the Messiah must provide, and I consider my innovative contributions—artistic and philosophical—as stages of the messianic process' [la méthode de creation qui est ce secret des Dieux que le Messie doit apporter et je considère mes apports novateurs—artistiques ou philosophiques—comme des étapes de la démarche messianique]
Isidore Isou. 'La Création divine'. p.12
[564] Isidore Isou. 'Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music'. p. 70

answer seems to be that once the grammatical pathway for understanding has been closed, for those readers and viewers who have some patience left, other approaches such as aural and visual can be explored. Isou's poems therefore, deliberately or otherwise, call attention to the underappreciated role that the visual and aural play in the transcription of the written letters, which is further highlighted by the fact that Isou's non-linguistic language was not only presented as text on the page but also in visual art and film, a reminder that, as he maintains in his manifesto, 'letters have a destination other than words.'[565]

[565] Isidore Isou. 'Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music'. p. 72

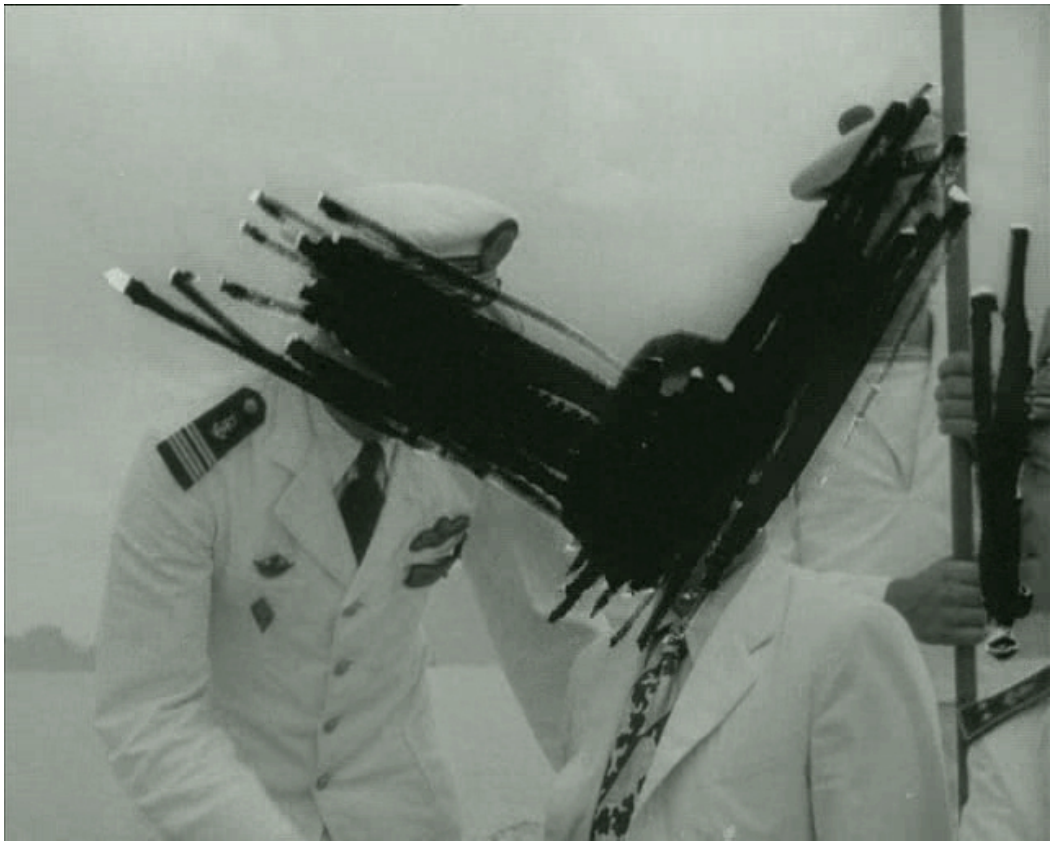


Fig. 6. Detail from *Venom and Eternity*, 1951



Fig. 7. Detail from *Venom and Eternity*, 1951

IV

1975: Irrational Bodies

For members of the Frankfurt school such as Adorno and Horkheimer, World War II confirmed what they saw as a contradiction at the heart of the Enlightenment: while it is undeniable that the project accelerated developments in science and technology and was pivotal in establishing parliamentary systems of political governance in the West, it was precisely these developments that enabled unconscionable levels of systematic violence and barbarity.[566] For Adorno and Horkheimer, the technological rationalism that the Enlightenment project was founded upon inevitably led to 'political error and madness', for the reason that the true objective of such an approach was to use the latest scientific developments to gain mastery over nature and humanity.[567]

While Adorno and Horkheimer were damning in their appraisal of the compromised reason that underpinned the enlightenment and the madness it produced, their philosophical aim was not to do away with reason entirely, as Baum illustrates:

> As attentive as they were to the contradictions that plagued reason in an age of nuclear bombs and industrialised labour, none of the Frankfurt school philosophers sought to dispense with it [reason] altogether. If anything, they wanted to rehabilitate reason and put it once again in the service of progress.[568]

This was not the case for the thinkers that took up the mantle of the philosophical interrogation of systemised madness, irrationality and reason from the Frankfurt School. In 1975 Sylvere Lotringer organised a conference at Columbia University in New York titled *Schizo-Culture: A Revolution in Desire*. The conference brought together theorists such as

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[566] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* p. 3
This sentiment is similar to surrealist characterisation of WORLD WAR I: the conflict read as a demonstration of the fact that post-enlightenment 'achievements' of scientific empiricism, rationalism, parliamentary democracy had only conspired to produce new possibilities for humanitarian crises.
Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski. 'Introduction: Surrealism as a Collective Adventure'. Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations. ed. Michael Richardson, and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, London: Pluto Press, 2001

[567] Max Horkheimer. 'Reason Against Itself: Some Remarks on the Enlightenment'. *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers to Twentieth-Century Questions.* ed. James Schmidt. Berkely: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 359-367

[568] Kelly Baum. 'Notes'. *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason 1950-1980*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017, pp. 219

Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Jean-François Lyotard, radical psychiatrists R. D. Laing, David Cooper and François Peraldi and members of the American avant-garde such as William Burroughs, Kathy Acker, John Giorno, and John Cage. While it would be facile to attempt to homogenise the complex and diverging ideas of the participants, there was a unifying objective: to reconceptualise and give greater currency in philosophical discourse to the irrational, madness and schizophrenia, by, ultimately, understanding and applying them as terms that contain a dialectical invocation.[569] Use of such terms, therefore, were undertaken not with the intention of clinical diagnoses, but rather in order to explicate the political reality of the mid-seventies, as Lotringer makes clear in his interview with the composer Phillip Glass during the Schizo-Culture conference:

> There seems to be in Western culture a distinct reversal of priorities. Any element of continuity, unity, melody. syntax, etc. is being broken down. This is basically what I refer to as schizophrenia; but in political terms, not in clinical terms.[570]

For Lotringer, what he identified as the 'priorities' in avant-garde culture at the time of his conversation with Glass – the disruption of 'continuity', specifically, the breakdown of 'syntax' and 'melody' – can be conceptualised as schizophrenic.[571] Crucially, Lotringer understands the 'schizophrenic' refractory elements of such approaches as proposing a method for resisting the homogenising power of a western capitalist society.[572] This sentiment is echoed by François Peraldi, who argued at the conference that through such noncooperative 'schizo' ways of being and making, 'schizos began to appear potentially immensely rich' and, 'schizophrenia may be considered as a revolutionary process'.[573] During his talk, Peraldi makes it clear that such ideas were the result of an engagement with

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[569] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. pp. 32-34

[570] Sylvere Lotringer. 'Phil Glass Interview' *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvère Lotringcr. 3:2, 1978, pp. 178-191 (178)

[571] Ibid

[572] Ibid

[573] François Peraldi. 'A Schizo and the Institution (a non-story)' *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvère Lotringer. 3:2, 1978, pp. 20-28 (28)

Whether schizophrenia is depathologized or fetishized at the conference is still up for debate. What separates Peraldi from his fellow speakers, however, is that he draws on his experience of working at the mental health institution Lavans in remote Eastern France where he worked with patients who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia. Unlike the majority of the speakers, therefore, he uses the term clinically rather than purely politically or philosophically, which further complicates the debate.

the critical writing of Deleuze and Guattari, who used their platforms at the conference to argue that clear communication was vital to the dominant power structures, or 'control societies' – who no longer operated 'by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication' – in their attempt to regulate and survey populations.[574] This would be the foundational idea that gave rise to Deleuze's theorising statement that 'what is at issue is what type of politics is pursued with regard to different linguistic arrangements that exist'.[575]

The disruption of clear communication and the political possibilities of a breakdown of conventional communication was a long-standing philosophical concern for Deleuze. In a discussion with Italian political philosopher Antonio Negri fifteen years after the Schizo-culture conference, he argued that in order to challenge 'control societies […] we must hijack speech' by creating 'vacuoles of noncommunication' and 'circuit breakers'.[576] As Raymond Blake Stricklin eloquently puts it, such acts 'trip the marching feet of the syntactical army' – and, much like for Lotringer, they are, through their destabilising and deterritorialising properties, theoretically associated with schizophrenia by Deleuze, who declared to his audience at the conference that, 'the true revolutionary is the schizophrenic'.[577] Much like Lotringer, Deleuze is also not talking clinically when using the word schizophrenic, which is highlighted by the examples of 'schizorevolutionaries' that he provides to Negri: artists and writers Artaud, who was diagnosed as schizophrenic during his lifetime, and William Burroughs, who was not.[578] For Deleuze, Artaud and Burroughs fit the description of a schiozorevolutionary because, 'embracing all that flows and counterflows

[574] Ibid; Raymond Blake Stricklin. '"I Have Nothing to Say": John Cage, Biopower, and the Demilitarization of Language'. *Journal of Modern Literature*. 43:3, 2020, pp. 98-115 (98); Gilles Deleuze. 'Control and Becoming' *Negotiations:1972-1990. 1990*. trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 174
[575] Gilles Deleuze. 'Control and Becoming' p. 175
[576] Ibid
[577] Raymond Blake Stricklin. '"I Have Nothing to Say": John Cage, Biopower, and the Demilitarization of Language'. p. 102; Gilles Deleuze. 'Politics'. *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvère Lotringcr. 3:2, 1978, pp. 154-163 (159)
[578] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. trans.* Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 270
Artaud's diagnosis as a schizophrenic is not straightforward. Sontag claims that 'he had been diagnosed and treated as a schizophrenic for some years' at the time of his death, yet most references to schizophrenia in relation to Artaud are concerned with the schizoid (in the Deleuzian sense) aspects of to his artistic output, leading him to be problematically conceptualised as an 'exceptional schizophrenic', to use Catherine Prendergast's term.
Antonin Artaud. Selected Writings. ed. Susan Sontag. p. 802
Catherine Prendergast. ''The Unexceptional Schizophrenic': A Post-postmodern Introduction'. Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies. 2:1, 2008, pp. 55-62.

[…] and knowing nothing of meanings and aims' they create from an (unfixed) position where 'the value of art is no longer measured except in terms of the decoded and deterritorialized flows that it causes to circulate beneath a signifier reduced to silence'.[579]

Despite many references to both schizophrenia and madness at the conference, an explicit exploration of the relationship between the two is not outlined. In his influential introduction to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), however, philosopher and Schizo-Conference participant Michel Foucault reveals what he believes the relationship between the two to be for Deleuze and Guattari: 'Madness is a radical break from power in the form of a disconnection. Militancy, in Deleuze and Guattari's framework, would learn from madness but then move beyond it, beyond disconnections and deterritorializations, to ever new connections.'[580] In this sense, for Deleuze and Guattari, madness can be conceptualised as the start of a militant process, because as they make clear, 'madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough […] from the alienated starting point of our pseudo-sanity, everything is equivocal. Our sanity is not 'true''.[581]

The untruth of reality was of critical concern of Deleuze and Guattari's fellow conference speaker, radical psychiatrist David Cooper. Cooper was a self-styled 'anti-psychiatrist', who used his platform to denounce psychiatry – 'a convenient but ultimately misguided way of evaluating the social meaning of madness' – which he argued was, 'a principal agent' of capitalism, used as a 'repressive device' for 'the destruction of the absurd hopes, fears, joys and the despair of joy of people who refused containment by that system.'[582] Under the alternative system that Cooper proposed and called 'anti-psychiatry', 'profoundly disturbing, incomprehensible, 'mad' behaviour is to be contained, incorporated in and diffused through the whole society as a subversive source of creativity, spontaneity, and, crucially, not a 'disease'.' Cooper concluded, however, that 'under the conditions of

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[579] Ibid
Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the relationship between art and schizophrenia in *Anti-Oedipus:* 'If schizophrenia is the universal, the great artist is indeed the one who scales the schizophrenic wall and reaches the land of the unknown, where he no longer belongs to any time, any milieu, any school.'
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Anti-Oedipus. p. 88

[580] Michael Foucault in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. trans.* Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. xxiii

[581] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari*. Anti-Oedipus.* p. 131

[582] David Cooper in Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. ed. Howard Richard. London: Richard, Taylor & Francis Group, 2001, p.vii; David Cooper. 'The Invention of Non-Psychiatry'. *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvère Lotringer. 3:2, 1978, pp. 66-73 (66)

capitalism, this is clearly 'impossible'.'[583] Before speaking at the conference, Cooper was perhaps best known for writing the introduction to the English language edition of Foucault's pivotal book on madness, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961). Cooper opened his introduction with the bold assertion that, 'madness has in our age become some sort of lost truth', an idea that, much like the Schizo-culture conference, suggested that a critical reappraisal of madness was vital in the cold war period.[584]

In lieu of explicit elucidations of the relationship between madness, schizophrenia and the irrational at the Schizo-culture conference, Foucault's book is a good place to turn, especially considering the resounding influence it had on many of the speakers at the conference, as well as the broader public. For Foucault, critical understandings of madness have always been contingent upon contemporary conceptions of the human body, and it is through this interrelatedness that madness and the rational and irrational intersect:[585]

> madness is still only an intense movement in the rational unity of soul and body; this is the level of unreason; but this intense movement quickly escapes the reason of the mechanism and becomes, in its violences, its stupors, its senseless propagations, an irrational movement.[586]

The 'irrational movement' of madness identified by Foucault is not necessarily conceptualised as prejudicial or undesirable, rather it has the potential to expose the critical unsoundness of the persistent attempts to rationalise the human body; a rationality that is 'undone' by the 'violence and truth in the madman' s frenzy.'[587] Despite madness being 'constantly in retreat from reason', and regardless of its fundamental negativity, (which leads to Foucault's conceptualisation of it as 'ultimately nothing'), it is revealing due to the fact that it eventually fails in its retreat; madness is ultimately perceived only once it makes 'an appearance in the order of reason': 'the paradox of this nothing is to manifest itself'. This is one of the primary reasons that the dominant power structures are persistent in their

[583] David Cooper in Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization*. p. xi
[584] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. ed. Howard Richard. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001, p. vii
[585] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* pp. 72-73
[586] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* p. 87
[587] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* p. 72

attempts to rationalise and pacify people afflicted with what they understand as madness, specifically by monopolising definitions of reason, and therefore, unreason:

> Meaningless disorder as madness is, it reveals, when we examine it, only ordered classifications, rigorous mechanisms in soul and body, language articulated according to a visible logic. All that madness can say of itself is merely reason, though it is itself the negation of reason. In short, a rational hold over madness is always possible and necessary, to the very degree that madness is non-reason.[588]

Of all the published work written by the conference participants it is perhaps Foucault's argument in *Madness and Civilisation* that after the Enlightenment both the rational and irrational and reason and unreason existed 'for each other, in relation to each other' and that the relationship 'constitutes for Western culture one of the dimensions of its originality' that can most easily be read as being in dialogue with the work of Horkheimer and Adorno.[589] The ideas presented at the conference were, however, largely divergent from the credo of the Frankfurt school. The most notable of these ideas was the comparable philosophical objective of Lotringer, Deleuze and Guattari's to essentially divest madness, specifically schizophrenia, of its negative connotations and to 'make a model of irrationality'.[590] Why such a model was being posited at a conference at that precise moment in 1975 in front of two thousand people – still a remarkable number of audience members at an academic conference today – is complex and down to many factors, such as Lotringer's canny ploy of marketing French post-structuralist philosophy to the American art crowd. In terms of the political factors however, it had become painstakingly clear to anybody with a critical eye that in a post-war world that 'was divided into competing "camps" by the two giant power blocs', as Penelope Rosemont observes, 'the Ubuesque global social system that led to the Holocaust, the gulags, apartheid, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remained in control.'[591]

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[588] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* p. 101
[589] Michael Foucault. *Madness and Civilisation.* p. x-xiii
[590] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. pp. 33-34
[591] Penelope Rosemont. 'Surrealism versus the Cold War, 1946-1959'. *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2001, p. 199
The conference was, of course, held only two years after US troops withdrew from Vietnam, a conflict which provoked an unprecedented level of anti-war activism. It is estimated that 'as many as six million Americans took to the streets, signed petitions, wrote letters, attended meetings and rallies, participated in vigils, and engaged in other antiwar activities.'

Crucially, it was not simply that the horrific acts of violence and cruelty of World War II and the post-war years were perpetrated by structures of power that purported to hold rationalism as a central tenet as Adorno and Horkheimer had previously observed, but also that dissenting voices were dismissed as dangerous because of their irrationality.[592] This was not lost on Ulrike Marie Meinhof, journalist and founder of The Red Army Faction who was on trial for murder and attempted murder as the Schizo-Culture conference took place. In her call to arms 'Armed Anti-Imperialist Struggle' (1978) which was published in the Schizo-Culture Conference edition of the *Semiotext(e)* journal which came out three years after the event and two years after Meinhof's tragic death, she outlined the 'psychological warfare' that the ruling powers wage on their citizens to dampen the potential of any revolutionary groups who may have ideas about how humanity can live otherwise.[593] Meinhof argued that the counterrevolutionary objective that she and her comrades faced was:

> to mystify the material, real aims of revolution, which matter – liberation from the rule of imperialism, from occupied territories, from colonialism and neo-colonialism, from dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, from military dictatorship, exploitation, fascism and imperialism […] to make the perceivable nonperceivable, the rational seemingly irrational.[594]

For Meinhof, the ruling power's casting of anti-imperialist resistance as irrational functions not only as a means to stifle the revolutionary potential of such resistance but also as a punitive act: the retaliatory response of not just one imperialist state whose mandate has been challenged, but all imperialist states. Writing a little over a hundred years after the insurrection of Paris against the French government by the communards, Meinhof argued:[595]

> Since the Paris Commune, it has been obvious that the attempt of one people in an imperialist state to liberate itself on a national level will call for revenge, armed powers, the mortal hatred of the bourgeoisie, of all other imperialist states.[596]

Simon Hall. *American Social and Political Movements of the Twentieth Century: Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011, p. 1

[592] Ulrike Marie Meinhof. 'Armed Anti-Imperialist Struggle'. *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvère Lotringcr. 3:2, 1978, pp. 140-153 (148)

[593] Ibid

[594] Ibid

[595] Ulrike Marie Meinhof. 'Armed Anti-Imperialist Struggle'. p. 141

[596] Ibid

The timing of such a statement is significant; six years prior to when Meinhof initially made the argument (five years before 'Armed Anti-Imperialist Struggle' was published by Lotringer) there had been widespread civil unrest in France, and the reverberations were still profoundly shaping political discourse in the mid-seventies. The 'near-revolution' of May 1968 had been both 'unanticipated', and 'widely held to be an absolute impossibility' yet despite the miraculousness of the widespread strikes, protests and occupations, the unrest essentially failed to develop into a total political revolution: the Gaullists – whose legitimacy May 68 challenged – were victorious in the general election of June 1968, winning 352 of 487 possible seats.[597] By 1975, those who saw revolutionary change as a necessity were both heartened by the uprising seven years prior (which despite failing politically did have long-lasting cultural reverberations) yet also aware that new approaches were necessary if there was any hope of turning a 'near-revolution' to a revolution.[598] Lotringer states as much in his discussion with Jack Smith during the Schizo-Culture conference, arguing that if new ways of living were to become possible then a new way of thinking was necessary, and, crucially, that a new language was needed to express these thoughts: 'the world is starving for thoughts. I worry about the thoughts. A new thought must come out in new language.'[599] This, of course, was something the revolutionaries of May 68 were also aware of: as Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse points out, they ultimately wanted 'to see, hear, feel new things in a new way'.[600] In order to search for this 'new sensibility' many of the protesters turned towards the 'artistic fantasy' and 'revolutionary […] non-conformism' of Surrealism, taking to the streets carrying placards daubed with Surrealist slogans that can still be frequently spotted at anti-establishment protests in the West some fifty years later.[601]

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[597] Penelope Rosemont. 'The Making of 'May 68' and its Sequals' *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2001, pp. 346, 429

[598] Penelope Rosemont. 'The Making of 'May 68' and its Sequels p. 429

[599] Sylvère Lotringer and Jack Smith. 'Uncle Fishhook and the Sacred Baby Poo Poo of Art.' *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvere Lotringcr. 3:2, 1978, pp.

[600] Marcuse Herbert. *An Essay on Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 36
For more on Marcuse's understanding that May 68 did not only summon the revolutionary aspects of Surrealism but vindicated the art movement after decades of systematic marginalisation of many surrealists see: Herbert Marcuse. *'Interview'*. New York Times, 17 October. 1968.

[601] Oliver Marchart. 'Marcuse's Contribution to Political Thought: On Potentiality, Pre-enactment, and the Surrealism of Liberation'. *Theory, Culture & Society*. 2021, 38: 7-8, pp. 131– 142 (138, 141)

It was not only the artists associated with Surrealism who confronted the reason and rationale that underpinned the capitalist reality in which they lived, however. The years between The Second World War and the Schizo-Culture Conference were marked by a new art avant-garde that 'challenged good form, disobeyed the rules of grammar, performed bizarre tasks for the camera, indulged in excessive repetition, destabilised space and perception, and generally embraced all things ludicrous, nonsensical, and eccentric': it was not just the Frankfurt School who had been foundational in the post-war remonstration against and interrogation of all things irrational.[602] Given the important role that practitioners played in this attack, it is perhaps unsurprising that Lotringer, Deleuze and Guattari would all go on to theorise the works of Artaud in relation to irrationality – because as previously argued, it was at this moment and in the hands of the artists referenced by Baum above that his reputation and legacy was broadened – however there were many contemporary artists whose art also explicates their arguments.

Abramović: Open-ended Experimentation

Serbian conceptual artist Abramović's desire to disturb and shock her audience, while simultaneously denying – and potentially calling into question the idea of – explicit meaning or signification means that her work is imbued with an irrational force. Her art, however, has a complex relationship with the irrational, which moves beyond straightforwardly making art in opposition to the rational and ordering world of the signifier and the signified by calling into question the culturally defined ways of thinking about gendered bodies and the language that they produce. As philosopher Luce Irigaray observes, woman 'does not have access to language, except through recourse to 'masculine' systems of representation which estrange her from her relation to herself and to other women.'[603] Tom Sutherland argues that 'any utterance not conforming to such systems is denounced as abnormal,

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The protester's turn towards surrealism was also likely to be related to the support that prominent surrealist artists explicitly demonstrated for May 68. See: *The French Surrealist Group. Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations. ed. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, London: Pluto Press, 2001*, specifically 'Down with France' and 'Portrait of the Enemy'; For more on the French Surrealists response to War, specifically their 'efforts to transform a world whose moral decrepitude, political dysfunctionality, and social iniquity had been starkly revealed to them by their collective experiences of World War I', see: *Will Atkin. 'Endless Metamorphosis: Surrealism and Alchemy'. Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity. Munich: Prestel Publishing, 2022, pp. 137-164*

[602] Kelly Baum. 'Think Crazy: The Art and History of Delirium'. p. 19

[603] Luce Irigaray. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 85

irrational or unintelligible – even pathological.'[604] *Freeing the Voice* (1975), which Abramović first performed the same year as the Schizo-Culture conference and consisted of the artist laying on her back screaming continuously until she lost the capacity to scream, is an artwork where Abramović refuses to conform to 'masculine systems of representation' by provocatively challenging expectations about how women communicate. While the artwork may not have been explicitly engaged with the contemporary context from which it emerged – especially when compared to Abramović's later works such as *Balkans Baroque* (1997), which dealt directly with war-related trauma suffered by people in the Balkans – it is illuminated when read alongside the contemporary discourse on madness and rationally, especially some of the ideas presented at the Schizo-Culture Conference.[605] As Maureen Turim argues in her book chapter, 'The Violence of Desire in Avant-garde Films' (2005), Abramović's early work raised 'new dimensions in ongoing inquiries into the dynamics of the gaze, the body, and the psyche', yet her contribution into these contemporary inquiries were far from straightforward, and manifest most strikingly in moments of transgression, which can be read as staged escapes from the rational.[606]

Abramović had only begun performing two years prior to *Freeing the Voice* in 1973 (although she conceptualised her first performances four years before that) and the works that she produced during this initial burgeoning yet prolific period were, according to Christina Demaria, 'first of all experiments with pain, disgust and physical unease […] in line

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[604] Thomas Sutherland. *Speaking Philosophically: Communication at the Limits of Discursive Reason*. London: Bloomsbury, 2023, p. 156

[605] Demaria highlights the explicit ways in which Abramović's corporeal performance dealt with war trauma: 'Probably the last of Abramovic's performance in which she tries the (im)possible representation of a staged pain is the installation Balkan Baroque, which won the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Biennale in 1997 […] There is probably no need to underline how this text engages with the folly and cruelty of the war(s) which have torn the former Yugoslavia, a madness whose image is that of cleansing and mourning (the artist sitting on the pile of bones) and whose story is that of hunting, fear, identity and blind-ness (the rats), juxtaposed with the serenity of individual memory (the parents). In this scene, again there is an offering of the body of the artist dancing and gazing at the viewer, in a desperate and yet cynical reminder of the violation of the bodies of many women during the war.'
Christina Demaria. 'The Performative Body of Marina Abramovic. P. 303
Abramović's own understanding of the piece revealed how, despite the fact that Balkans Baroque was a response to the war in Bosnian War of 1992, the themes were universal and temporally unfixed: 'The whole idea that by washing bones and trying to scrub the blood, is impossible. You can't wash the blood from your hands as you can't wash the shame from the war. But also it was important to transcend it, that can be used, this image, for any war, anywhere in the world. So to become from personal there can be universal.' Marina Abramović. *Balkan Baroque.* 1997 https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/243/3126 [accessed 27th March 2024]

[606] Maureen Turim. 'The Violence of Desire in Avant-garde Films'. *Women and Experimental Filmmaking.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005, p. 70

with the cultural milieu and the artistic avant-garde of those years.'[607] Despite only being two years into her career as an artist by the end of 1975, Abramović had already planned and staged some remarkable performances that would have elicited the feelings and sensations that Demaria highlights. Other than the pills for catatonia (an abnormality of movement and behaviour arising from a disturbed mental state) that Abramović swallows during *Rhythm 2* (1974) in order to describe the effects that they have on her, there are no explicit references to irrationality in her work. Her early work, however, is in constant discourse with contemporary concepts of rationality and irrationality, specifically in relation to the gendered body, and the non-rational realm of bodily sensation.[608] For example, Abramović describes her two-hour performance *Thomas Lips* (1975) thus:

> 'I slowly eat one kilo of honey with a silver spoon. I slowly drink one litre of red wine out of a crystal glass. I break the glass with my right hand. I cut a five-pointed star on my stomach with a razor blade. I violently whip myself until I no longer feel any pain. I lay down on a cross made of ice blocks. The heat of a suspended heater pointed at my stomach causes the cut star to bleed. The rest of my body begins to freeze. I remain on the ice blocks for thirty minutes until the public interrupts the piece by removing the ice blocks from underneath me.'[609]

In Rhythm 5 (1974) the five-pointed star of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia – where Abramović was born and lived until 1976 – is also present, this time it is large enough to allow the artist space to lay in the centre once it has been set on fire. She only escaped severe burns and loss of consciousness due to lack of oxygen by being removed from the burning star once she had fainted through unscripted audience intervention.[610] *Rhythm 0* (1974) also featured audience participation, although this time it was less compassionate. Abramović stood in front of a table that had 72 objects placed upon it. The items ranged from the potentially pleasure-giving such as feathers, honey and flowers to more harmful items such as an axe, razor blades, a gun and a bullet. The audience were instructed to use

[607] Christina Demaria. 'The Performative Body of Marina Abramović: Rerelating (in) Time and Space'. *European Journal of Women's Studies.* 11:3, 2004, pp. 295–307 (295)
[608] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies. 10:2, 2013, pp. 59-69 (61)
[609] Marina Abramović, Velimir Abramović, Kunstmuseum Bern. *Marina Abramović Artist Body: Performances1969-1998.* Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1998, p. 98
[610] Andrea Mecacci. 'Eating an Onion: Notes on Marina Abramović'. *Aisthesis. Pratiche, Linguaggi e Saperi dell'Estetico.* 12:1, 2019, pp. 107-114 (210)

any of the items on the table on Abramović any way they saw fit. During the six-hour performance audience members cut off her clothes to reveal her naked body, cut her neck and drank the blood from the wound, and loaded and pointed the gun to her head.[611] If works such as *Rhythm 0* were investigations into the relationship between body and psyche, then they were far from prescriptive, rather, they were unrestricted and exploratory: Abramović used her body as a canvas onto which the public could project themselves.[612] Despite the apparent relinquishing of control, however, it is likely that Abramović foresaw that what would be projected by her audience was the deep-rooted violent misogyny of the time, as Lara Shalson observes: 'Abramović's more open-ended experiment seems to have been predestined to produce the gendered and sexualized aggression it did.'[613]

For Abramović the shock her art elicited was not simply for shock's sake, rather it carried layers of meaning that despite being initially elusive revealed itself over time:

> I had come to believe that art must be disturbing, art must ask questions, art must predict the future. If art is just political, it becomes like newspaper. It can be used once, and the next day it's yesterday's news. Only layers of meaning can give long life to art – that way, society takes what it needs from the work over time.[614]

While the disturbing shock of Artaud's theatre of cruelty was intended to be sudden in order to shake his audience out of their stupefied state, the disturbing elements of Abramović's works contains a significance that gradually unfolds as new historical and political contexts

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[611] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. p. 62
Lara Shalson highlights the gendered imbalance of the audience participation during *Rhythm 0*: 'crowd shots show more men than women in the audience, and of sixty-nine photographs from Abramovic's archive, only one captures a woman taking a leading role in engaging with Abramovic'.
Lara Shalson. *Performing Endurance: Art and Politics Since 1960.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 49

[612] Abramović was not alone in using her body as her canvas. See, Vito Acconci, *Rubbing Piece* (1970); Yoko Ono, *Cut piece* (1964); Chris Burden, *Five Day Locker* (1971) and *Shoot* (1971).

[613] Lara Shalson. *Performing Endurance*. p. 50

[614] Marina Abramović. *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*. New York: Crown Archetype, 2016, pp. 79-80
Maureen Turim argues that the context of war trauma in Abramović's work also slowly reveals itself over time: For Abramovic´ this context is one of her attachment to and alienation from her native Yugoslavia, from its history. The resistance struggles against Nazi domination through which Abramović's parents met, the Tito communism of the postwar years, Marina Abramović's Performance and the current bloody history of disintegration into warring ethnic enclaves, emerge as direct references only gradually and then late into her career as an artist.'
Maureen Turim. 'Marina Abramović's Performance: Stresses on the Body and Psyche in Installation Art'. *Camera Obscura 54*. 18:3, 2003, pp. 99-117 (103)

reveal themselves. Furthermore, while the shock of Artaud established a hierarchy – the artist (Artaud) has access to a knowledge his audience lacks and uses violent methods to awaken them from their perceived senselessness – the relationship Abramović's has with her audience is more ambiguous. Shalson argues that in the early to mid-seventies, Abramović's audiences were both 'drawn in and distanced by the performers' object-bodies in ways that refused dialogue'.[615] Abramović's 'object-body' in *Rhythm 0* was shocking because it operated as a mirror to reflect the violence inherent in society, and disturbing because, unlike the 'newspaper' referenced by Abramović, its unyielding passivity denied the audience clear, immediately readable meaning.[616] This differed to how the shock was established by Abramović's in *Freeing the Voice.* Despite it being likely Abramović predicted the troubling gendered violence that played out during her performance of *Rhythm 0*, the possibilities were, at least theoretically, myriad, as Frazer ward points out, 'it is possible, after all, to imagine another version in which Abramovic is tickled or massaged or fed cake for six hours.'[617] This was not the case with the piece *Freeing the voice* where Abramović's intentions were fixed: 'I lie on the floor with my head tilted backwards. I scream until I lose my voice.'[618]

Freeing the voice was first performed at the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade in 1975, a performance that Abramović has claimed lasted for three hours. A video of the performance was made a year later when Abramović performed the piece again in Budapest. The video shows twenty minutes of the performance, which the viewer is informed lasted 45 minutes. The black and white video shows a close up of Abramović's face and upper body as she lies on her back.[619] Her mouth – positioned above her eyes in the video frame because of her pose – opens and closes to omit an (almost) repetitious scream. The scream is, at first, strikingly resonant and deep, and contains an intense dynamism that slowly recedes as the video progresses, not only because Abramović eventually loses her breath – something that begins but is not fully realised in the video – but also because of the repetition: what initially strikes the viewer as an intense release of human emotion

[615] Lara Shalson. *Performing Endurance.* p. 58
[616] Marina Abramović. *Walk Through Walls*. pp. 79-80
[617] Frazer Ward. *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience*. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2012, p. 123
[618] Marina Abramović. *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998*. Milan: Edition Charta, 1998, p. 118
[619] Marina Abramović. *Freeing the Voice*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBVzJI6m72A *[accessed 4th January 2024]*

gradually becomes mechanical and impersonal.[620] This was something that, if not necessarily intended, was identified by Abramović retrospectively: 'when you are screaming in this way, without interruption, at first you recognize your own voice, but later, when you are pushing against your own limits, the voice turns into a sound object'.[621] If, to use a term coined by Shalson, *Rhythm 0* casts Abramović's physical form as an *'object-body',* then *Freeing the Voice* renders her *voice an object*, and in doing so poses questions of the relationship between the two.

For Stephen Connor it is the act of speaking that 'precipitates' the 'quasi-object' of the 'voice-body', which he defines as a 'secondary body' formed through the intricate relationship between the physical form of the speaker and the sounds that they omit with their mouth.[622] Crucially, it is the 'strain', which derives from the 'constraining of the body to produce voice' that entangles the two to form the voice-body:

> The breath is drawn as a bow is drawn, by applying a force against the resistance of the diaphragm and intercostal muscles. The power of the voice is the release of the kinetic energy stored in these muscles as they return to their resting positions. But the voice's energy is not simply given out. For there to be voice, there must be a secondary resistance, the impedance or thwarting of this outflow.[623]

For Connor, the constituent parts of the body responsible for producing speech ('the tongue (the tip of the tongue?) The mouth? The throat? The larynx? The lungs? The diaphragm?') are connected by the strain, specifically the 'straining passage of the air' being pushed through them.[624] Without the strain there is only the passing of air and no voice-body because the voice is absent. In order for the body to successfully produce a voice, and therefore a voice-body as Connor conceptualises it, conditions must be right, both physically and mentally:

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[620] Ibid
[621] Marina Abramović. *Freeing the Voice.* https://mediakunst.net/professional/#!/artwork/ma-1004457 [accessed 9th February 2024]
[622] Steven Connor. *The Strains of the Voice* https://stevenconnor.com/strains.html [accessed 9th April 2024]. First published in German in Brigitte Fel derer *Phonorama: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Stimme als Medium*, trans. Holger Wölfle. Berlin Matthes and Seitz, 2004, pp. 158-72.
[623] *Ibid*
[624] Ibid

> When the mind or body is subject to unbearable stress, the voice may be drawn out into howls and moans, which take the strain all the better for being drawn out, for being, as we say, 'inarticulate', unbroken.[625]

There is plenty of straining in *Freeing the Voice* and Abramović's vocal sounds are certainly 'inarticulate' in the traditional sense and are only broken by the full expulsion of breath before the artist breathes in to begin yet another scream. The site of strain that Connor identifies as necessary for producing voice is inside the body, with the voice being the by-product of a strain that is concealed from view and quotidian to the point that suggesting it is even registered subconsciously by the person listening to a voice is questionable. In *Freeing the Voice*, however, Abramović brings the strain to the forefront of voice production. The air she breathes in to give life to her next vocal emission is sharp and sudden, a seemingly strenuous act that in general lasts less than half a second but one which can launch a scream that can last up to 17 seconds.[626] At certain points when screaming Abramović's torso pushes up towards the ceiling while her shoulders and arms remain fixed to the ground which gives the appearance that she is using them to anchor herself.[627] This gives the effect of Abramović's body toiling and straining in order to push the sound out but ultimately failing in its attempts and mostly happens towards the end of the video as her voice is becoming more strained, or, to use Connor's terminology, when her howls are no longer unbroken.[628].

As Abramović's movements generally become less repetitive and more uncontrolled there is one constant: her mouth remains fixed open in an 'o' shape, even as the scream falters. For Connor, this particular mouth shape signifies a correspondence between the physical body of a vocaliser and the type of vocal sounds that Abramović makes in *Freeing the Voice*: 'the primary sound of the mouth, the sound of the cry, is the oh or the ah, that seems to want to mimic the orb of the mouth.'[629] Despite the notion of a 'primary sound' suggesting a vocal universality, the sounds being made and the body from which they emanate are both registered and interpreted in relation to Abramović's gender. As Michael

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[625] Ibid
[626] Marina Abramović. *Freeing the Voice. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBVzJI6m72A [accessed 1st April 2024]*
[627] Ibid
[628] Ibid
[629] Steven Connor. *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and Other Vocalizations*, London: Reaktion Books, 2014, p. 74

Chion observes, when a man cries it is often registered as a 'structuring […] shout' that denotes authority and outrage, whereas a woman's cry is often registered as a centripetal […] scream' and situates the crying subject as an afflicted victim.[630] Connor argues that an inarticulate cry can 'seem like the neutral passage of air, the gush of the open gullet, mere force without form', yet the air that passes through Abramović's body before being released through her mouth is not fully disentangled from her physical form once it has passed through it; rather than being shrouded by the formlessness of her vocal emissions, her physical form and her cries become the a site for decoding and interpreting in lieu of language.[631]

(Re)sounding Body

Abramović's casting of her voice as an object may seem dispassionate and self-alienating, yet it is in keeping with how she viewed her body when she performed *Freeing the Voice*: it was simply her artistic 'material'.[632] As Abramović states, she used her art to 'push against [her] own limits', an idea that is perhaps only realised through a disassociation from the discomfort and pain inherent in pushing against corporeal limitations.[633] As Sofia Varino observes, 'Abramović actively pursue[d] military aesthetics, repeating torture-based scenes that expose the body's vulnerability and capacity for endurance'.[634] Abramović complicates close readings of her corporeal performances by evoking a sense of a complete loss of control through manifesting what Varino terms the 'hysterical body' in what is essentially an 'extremely controlled, tightly designed situation'.[635] *Freeing the Voice* was, after all, meticulously planned by the artist; the end result – a self-inflicted aphonia – was, despite being a decidedly undesirable state, the predetermined objective. As Varino writes,

> Aphonia has shared a close history with hysteria, traced back all the way to Freud's famous Dora case. As a hysterical symptom, what renders the condition a psychic one is the absence of an apparent physical

[630] Michel Chion. *The Voice in Cinema*. Trans. C. Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 78-79
For more on the gendering of screams see: Marie Thompson. 'Three Screams'. *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*. Ed. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle. London: Bloomsbury, 2013
[631] Ibid; Steven Connor. *Beyond Words.* P. 74
[632] Marina Abramović in Elizabeth Jappe. *Performance, Ritual, Proze*. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1993, p. 160
[633] Ibid
[634] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. pp. 63-64
[635] Ibid

> cause (such as damage or disease of the larynx) for the inability to speak. Therefore, the logic of psychoanalysis goes, the cause must be psychological, articulated for Freud in terms of trauma.[636]

If Abramović's limit-testing endurance art evokes 'military aesthetics' by bringing to mind torture – and it is important to note that at this stage or her career her work relates to militarism on an equivocal aesthetic level rather than an explicit political level – then whether intentionally or not, work such as *Freeing the Voice* will be received by an audience as being in dialogue with trauma, a connotation that will only be augmented by aphonia's intricated 'shared history' with hysteria.[637] Hysteria has long been associated with traumatised femininity, 'the nervous woman, the frigid wife, the indifferent mother —or worse, the mother beset by murderous obsessions', as Foucault observes.[638] Yet, as Olga Taxidou points out, hysteria has also historically evoked connotations of 'histrionics, falseness and theatricality.'[639] The association with theatricality, Juliet Mitchell argues, comes from the movement of the site of enactment of 'mental conflict' from the body to spoken language, specifically mimetic speech.[640] This movement was conceptualised during the psychoanalytical engagement with hysteria in the early 20th century when psychoanalysts were considering how patients can obscure their mental conflict: 'hysteria is not cured by psychoanalysis (although it can be), but rather it becomes camouflaged within linguistic mimesis'. [641] One of the consequences of hysteria being able to conceal itself behind mimesis, claims Mitchell, is that certain traits of the disorder can be 'healthily […] housed' in 'new artistic practices' such as performance art.[642] Yet despite this, hysteria is defined as uncontrollable emotion; it is the culmination of a failure of an individual to exert a rational control of their feelings.[643] In an interview with Nancy Spector in 2006, Abramović recalls a time that the art critic Steven Madoff came to see her perform and was overwhelmed by a the sudden sensation of a loss of emotional control: 'he told me

[636] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. p. 64
[637] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. pp. 63-64
[638] Foucault, Michel. 'An Introduction'. *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981, p. 110
[639] Olga Taxidou. *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univertsity Press, 2004, p. 59
[640] Juliet Mitchell. *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effects of Sibling Relations on the Human Condition*. London: Penguin, 2000, p. 122
[641] Ibid
[642] Juliet Mitchell. *Mad Men and Medusas.* pp. 17,122
[643] 'Hysteria' entry in the Oxford English Dictionary. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/hysteria_n?tab=meaning_and_use#1066968 [accessed 18th April 2024]

afterwards that he wanted to be in control, and then he said he was so emotional he couldn't deal with it.'[644] For Abramović this is not an anomalous response to her work, rather Madoff experienced feelings she was hoping to elicit; in the same interview she states: 'I have always been able to touch people's emotions. A lot of art is really rational; your mind receives it. Here [in the space where Abramović performs] they get totally surprised because it's emotional.'[645] Yet to describe her work as devoid of rationality, hysterical, or purely emotional would be misleading.

Varino observes that in *Freeing the Voice*, 'while Abramovic opens her mouth to scream until she becomes physiologically mute, the morphology of voice as speech/sound replaces the emphasis on rational discourse to return it to the bio-logic of the living body'; it is a form of logic – a bio-logic – that replaces rational discourse, rather than just the surface-level seemingly irrational and inarticulate vocal sounds.[646] Varino makes it clear that by challenging bodily limitations, Abramović also challenges the body/voice dichotomy. *Freeing the Voice*, she argues, 'enunciate[s] the limits of the throat as sound instrument, the physicality of the human voice, and the anatomic, physiological implications of speech, a faculty we often assign to reason, rather than to the living body.'[647]

The loss of emotional control that Madoff felt came through an engagement with Abramović pushing against corporeal limitations and challenging preconceptions about the human body. Witnessing an artist torturing themselves or inviting audience members to inflict bodily harm as Abramović did in *Rhythm 0* puts her spectators in an 'unnerving, destabilizing and […] agonizing situation', where 'norms, rules, securities that had undoubtedly been valid thus far seemed suspended.'[648] The 'agony' of the situation stems

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[644] Marina Abramović. 'Marina Abramović Interviewed by Nancy Spector'. *7 Easy Pieces*. Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007, p. 29

[645] Ibid

[646] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. p. 65
Varino's understanding of Abramović becoming 'physiologically mute' while performing *Freeing the Voice* is not wholeheartedly shared here. *Freeing the Voice* gestures towards an intricate entanglement of physiological and psychological capacities by resulting in aphonia, which, as Freud's Dora case proves, is neither purely physiological nor psychological. Abramović's ultimate inability to produce sound would have been a result of both physiological and psychological exhaustion and agony.

[647] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. p. 64-65

[648] Erika Fischa-Lichte. 'Performance Art – Experiencing Liminality'. *7 Easy Pieces*. Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007, p. 34
Fischer-Lichte observes how Abramović was not alone in pushing bodily limits at the time of performing *Freeing the Voice*: 'In the seventies, a new generation of performance artists appeared on the scene that profoundly shocked and irritated audiences and critics alike. Proclaimed – and partially anticipated – by the Viennese actionists performing in the sixties, both in Europe and in the United States, artists who took to the

from the undefined role that spectators find themselves in; Fischer-Lichte observes when watching Abramović perform in the mid-seventies they are 'left in a state of in-between, in the state of liminality'.[649] The liminality arises from Abramović's apparent self-torture: to successfully perform *Freeing the Voice* as planned, Abramović will experience physical and mental discomfort, she will even suffer. Upon seeing this work, along with her other mid-seventies performances that tested bodily limitations, the audience would, according to Fischer-Lichte, feel an initial sense of duty to help somebody who was clearly in a state of anguish, and therefore, find themselves asking the following questions:

> Did respect for the artist require that she should be allowed to carry out what seemed to be her plan and artistic intention? Would one not run the risk of destroying her work? On the other hand, was it compatible with the laws of humanity, with human sympathy, to observe in silence how she inflicted injuries on herself? Did she intend to force the spectator into the position of voyeur? Or did she want to make an experiment to find out how far she must go until a spectator set out to end her torture? Which rules applied?[650]

Indeterminacy was not limited to the moral obligations of the audience member, or the realm of ethics and morals, however. Abramović's self-torture also troubled the spectator's ability to clearly interpret her physical form visually. As Anthony Bond observes, her work is 'confronting' because the spectators are implicated in her corporeal performance, yet the challenging aspect is down to more than mere adjacency; Abramović's physical presence also has liminal characteristics: the equivocal nature of her body is what disturbs an audience suddenly implicated in her movements.[651]

Abramović's liminality is partly, but certainly not solely, a result of the artist occupying 'the curious position of both victim and perpetrator' as Varino asserts.[652] For Varino, Abramović's liminal position further connects her performance art – already imbued with 'military aesthetics' – with war.[653] The evocation of warfare is a result of Abramović both evoking and frustrating the 'discursive logic of violent conflict' by producing art 'where

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stage poisoned and hurt themselves, inflicted violence on their bodies in various ways, and even exposed themselves to actual risk of death in and through their performances.'
Erika Fischer-Lichte. 'Performance Art – Experiencing Liminality'. p. 33

[649] Erika Fischer-Lichte. 'Performance Art – Experiencing Liminality'. p. 35
[650] Ibid
[651] Anthony Bond. 'Introduction'. *Body*. Melbourne: Bookman Schwartz, 1997, p. 12
[652] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. p. 63
[653] Ibid

there are no clear boundaries between agency and vulnerability and where it becomes nearly impossible to apply an ethical frame to distinguish between the harm inflicted and the (physical) damage suffered', further complexifying her corporeality.[654] It is not just the case that the boundarylessness of Abramović's art reflects the irrationality of the Cold-War era, as Baum suggests, but also that the tension between rationality and irrationality typifies the language of the conflict. The most striking example of such a tension can be found in Richard Nixon's so-called Madman Theory, where he supposedly feigned irrationality in an effort to deter the USSR to provoke him.[655]

As Bojana Pejić makes clear there were a multitude of factors that led to how Abramović – and other 'post-Sixty-eight' women artists who made corporeal performance art against the backdrop of the Cold War – complicated and problematised how their 'culturally-loaded' bodies were received by their audience, and, in a broader sense, the general public.[656] What a body – particularly the body of a woman – represented in art had up until the early seventies been relatively fixed, as art critic Norman Brayson observes.[657] Pejić, therefore, reads Abramović's intentionally equivocal corporeality as a strategy to challenge and undo the many fixed 'myths' that surround women's bodies.[658] Abramović, she argues, used her performance art to cross 'culturally-defined body boundaries' and destabilise prevailing gendered presumptions.[659] One result of this, and of all of Abramović's corporeal equivocality, is a difficulty to categorise her art, her intentions or her body.[660] *Freeing the Voice* thus challenges rational discourse twofold: firstly, and most

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[654] Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. pp. 62-63

[655] Baum points to 'Richard Nixon's so-called Madman Theory' as an example of the rational and the irrational coalescing. The theory suggests that Nixon feigned irrationality and instability in order to deter the USSR from provoking him through fear he may respond erratically. For a detailed description of the theory and an exploration of how it still informs USA's foreign policies see:
James Boys. The unpredictability factor: Nixon, Trump and the application of the Madman Theory in US grand strategy'. Cambridge Review of International Affairs. 34: 3 (2021) pp. 430-451

[656] Bojana Pejić. 'Bodyscenes: an Affair of the Flesh'. *Artists Body.* ed. Marina Abramović. Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1998, p. 28

[657] Norman Brayson. *Vision and Painting.* London: Macmillan. 1983, p. 167

[658] Ibid

[659] Ibid

[660] The extent of the difficulty in categorising Abramović's art is highlighted by Brandan LaBelle's close reading of *Freeing the Voice*, in which he cannot settle on the correct noun to describe the sounds emitted by the artist, which to these ears at least, despite varying over the course of the video, do not oscillate: 'Over the course of the performance, Abramovic exhaled every breath as an extended vocalization, oscillating between a scream and a moan, a cry and a sigh, each breath forming a long, loud exhalation, underscoring the body as breathing vessel.'
Brandon LaBelle. *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art.* Second Edition. New York: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 103

straightforwardly, through being a vocal performance that eschews articulation and conventional verbal communication; secondly, by complicating and resisting the categories inherent in the established discursive frameworks used to perceive and conceptualise works of art and the bodies that make art. In this sense Abramović's corporeal performance registers in a way that evokes the life-as-art practice of the Baroness, who, as Jones points out, performed with an 'unhinged subjectivity' that defied the rules of classification. Jones reads the complexities of the Baroness's body as enacting 'violent dislocations in personal and national identity', by 'embodying the cacophonous clash of races, sexes, sexualities, and classes of people that constituted the population of New York City in the World War I era and that accompanied the massive cultural shifts to which Dada responded and which it helped to promote.'[661] There are crucial differences between the two artists and their unclassifiable corporeality, however. Jones points to the Baroness's 'irrational' corporeal art as 'embodying and enacting a perceived lack of authority or sense of control', whereas Abramović's work has elements of irrationality, while also being produced with highly controlled authoritativeness.[662]

The resistance to categorisation present in *Freeing the Voice* is the result of the open-ended questions posed by the piece: is Abramović the victim or the perpetrator? Is she passive or authoritative? Has she lost control and slipped into a hysterical state, or has she remained in control throughout? Is she offering an alternative form of communication or enacting a breakdown of communication? Should the audience intervene or allow her to induce a state of aphonia? It is this resistance to categorisation that means it is illuminated by the ideas of Schizo-Culture Conference participant Foucault, specifically his conceptualisation of unreason in *Madness and Civilisation*. For Foucault the relationship between unreason and madness has a long and complicated history. However, as Sutherland observes, the history of madness has, since the end of the Enlightenment, been the history of classification and division, whereas, despite persistent attempts to conceptualise it as approximate to madness and in opposition to reason, there is something inherent in unreason that means it has stubbornly resisted overgeneralising classification: 'if madness for Foucault, is defined and periodized through the historical experience of division, unreason is, more nebulously, that excess which lies at the origin of and remains

[661] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism*. pp. 36; 9
[662] Amelia Jones. *Irrational Modernism*. P. 90

unsusceptible to clear and distinct definition.'[663] This is not the only way in which *Freeing The Voice* which, much like Foucault's conception of unreason, 'remains unsusceptible to clear and distinct definition', to borrow Sutherland's term, and interacts with Foucault's ideas from *Madness and Civilisation*.[664] Abramović's spurning of the so-called established language of reason while performing the vocal piece *Freeing the Voice* gestures towards a paradox identified by Foucault: unreason becomes a conceptual 'nothingness' through persistent attempts to clarify and categorise it in opposition to reason using rational language.[665] Foucault, therefore, posited the need for a new form of expression for the experience of madness that is, crucially, divergent from the 'rational' language that has been manifest since the rupture of 'common language' that occurred in the late eighteenth century when the 'language of psychiatry', which silences madness, was established, as Sutherland makes clear: 'Foucault believes we can offer a voice to those domains of experience tarred by the label of madness, without speaking for them or distorting their words via the discursive norms of 'rational' language.' [666] For Foucault unreason contained a truth that was obscured as soon as anybody using the post-enlightenment language of reason attempted to speak it; unreason only appears in the 'enlightened world' – and even then fleetingly so – in those rare moments when poets, playwrights, artists or philosophers found a new distinct form of expression: 'the life of unreason no longer manifests itself except in the lightning flash of works such as those of Höderlin, of Nerval, of Nietzsche, or of Artaud'.[667] As Lynne Huffer succinctly puts it, 'to speak unreason is to speak in the 'merciless' language of reason. To speak unreason is to betray it'.[668]

Freeing the Voice, consciously or otherwise, is therefore in dialogue with Foucault's conceptualisation of unreason and his understanding of madness around the time of his

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[663] Thomas Sutherland. *Speaking Philosophically.* p. 136
[664] Ibid
[665] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* p. 267-268
[666] Michel Foucault. *History of Madness*. trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. xxxii; Thomas Sutherland. *Speaking Philosophically*. p. 137
'there is no common language: or rather, it no longer exists; the constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, bears witness to the fact of a broken dialogue, treats this separation as already a given, and pushes into oblivion all those imperfect words, without fixed syntax, somewhat stammered, in which the exchange between madness and reason took place. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue by reason *about* madness, could only have been established upon such a silence.' *Michel Foucault. History of Madness. p. xxxii*
[667] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* p. 264
[668] Lynne Huffer. 'The Persistence of Unreason: Michel Foucault's Mad Melodrama'. *Criticism: A Dossier of Essays on Melodrama*. 55: 4, 2013, pp. 637-653 (639)

participation in the Schizo-Culture.[669] Understanding her piece, performed the same year as the conference, in relation to the ideas of the seminal French thinker reveals the subversiveness of *Freeing the Voice*: Abramović eschews the language of reason, favouring instead vocalisations that manifest in the form of a scream – which as Thompson observes, is a vocal sound 'set apart from normative, 'reasoned' communicative practices' – but does so, crucially, within a structural framework of great indeterminacy and equivocality.[670] In this sense, much like Hölderlin, Nerval, Nietzsche, and Artaud, Abramović, through producing a work that can be read as 'a meditation on madness' in the Foucauldian sense, 'opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.'[671] That Abramović produced such a work of art at the moment of the Vietnam War and the Cold War, a moment when it was painstakingly clear to many that the world needed 'to question itself' and urgently, further equates *Freeing the Voice* with war beyond simply reproducing the 'military aesthetics' that Varino locates in her work.[672] Foucault states that since the Enlightenment, history has been the 'decisive action that extracts a significative language from the background noise and its continuous monotony', filtering out all that is unintelligible to the language of reason.[673] Perhaps it is through frustrating this process that *Freeing the Voice*

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[669] Foucault's talk at the conference was not only concerned with his conceptions of madness, it hinted at his next philosophical publication *The History of Sexuality* (1976), while also referencing the work he published the same year as the event *Discipline and Punish* (1975).

[670] Marie Thompson. 'Three Screams'. *Sound, Music, Affect.* p. 64-65

[671] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* p. 273
Along with Hölderlin, Nerval, Nietzsche, and Artaud, Foucault also names Goya and Van Gogh as artists that can produce 'lighting flashes' of unreason. He outlines how art works, and texts such as those made by the artists and thinkers he names, can force the 'world to question itself', thus: 'Madness is no longer the space of indecision through which it was possible to glimpse the original truth of the work of art, but the decision beyond which this truth ceases irrevocably, and hangs forever over history. […] This does not mean that madness is the only language common to the work of art and the modern world (dangers of the pathos of malediction, inverse and symmetrical danger of psychoanalyses); but it means that, through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world, to reveal there its non-sense, and to transfigure itself with the features of pathology alone, actually engages within itself the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself. What is necessarily a profanation in the work of art returns to that point, and, in the time of that work swamped in madness, the world is made aware of its guilt. Henceforth, and through the mediation of madness, it is the world that becomes culpable (for the first time in the Western world) in relation to the work of art; it is now arraigned by the work of art, obliged to order itself by its language, compelled by it to a task of recognition, of reparation, to the task of restoring reason *from* that unreason and *to* that unreason.'

[672] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* p. 273; Sofia Varino. 'The Body Present: Performing the Morphological with Marina Abramovic'. pp. 63-64

[673] Michel Foucault. *History of Madness.* p. xxxii

'opens a void' and 'provokes a breach without reconciliation'; it functions as the inverse of Foucault's conception of history by beginning with unintelligible vocals sounds that are extracted from the piece until all that is left is Abramović's mute body and the background noise that surrounds it.[674] Abramović's *Freeing the Voice* uses a new form of expression: she performs the embodiment of the condition of a madness rooted in the delirium of the historical context in which she worked, an embodiment that resolutely refuses the 'language of reason' to signify, pathologise or reconcile.

Composed Demilitarization

Through his programming of the Schizo-Culture conference, Lotringer posits that comprehensive inquiries into madness and the irrational require contributions by both theorists and practitioners; as Jason Demers argues, 'William S. Burroughs's cut-ups and Kathy Acker's plagiarisms are revealing in diverging, but no less vital, ways to the concepts of theorists such as Deleuze and Foucault'.[675] Yet there was another practitioner at the conference whose practice operates as a insightful counterpoint to Abramović's. John Cage, who was described by Lotringer as 'the bridge' between theory and art, also participated in the event.[676] Cage performed his piece *Empty Words (1973-1974)* at the conference and published the piece in the *Semiotext(e)* edition on the event. Much like *Freeing the Voice, Empty Words* was notable for its duration, with some performances of the piece lasting over twelve hours. Another similarity between *Freeing the Voice* and *Empty Words* was that, although they were essentially vocal works, they are notable for their breakdown of conventional communication: in Cage's work syntax slowly unravels until all that is left is 'nothing but a virtual lullaby of letters and sounds', whereas Abramović's work begins with emotive non-linguistic howls and ends with a striking absence of verbal sound.[677]

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[674] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization.* p. 273

[675] Jason Demers. 'Collecting Intensities: On *Semiotext(e)* and Schizo-Culture'. *L'arte Orale: Poesia, Musica, Performance.* ed. Lorenzo Cardilli et Stefano Lombardi Vallauri. Torino: Accademia University Press, Mimesis Journal Books, 2020, pp. 416-418

[676] Sylvère Lotringer. *Schizo-Culture: The Event*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer and David Morris. New York: Semiotext(e), 2014, p. 17

[677] John Cage. *Empty Words. https://www.johncage.org/empty.html [accessed 22nd November 2023]* Cage describes *Empty Words* thus: 'It's a transition from language to music certainly. It's bewildering at first, but it's extremely pleasurable as time goes on. And that's what I'm up to. *Empty Words* begins by omitting sentences, has only phrase, words, syllables and letters. The second part omits the phrases, has only words, syllables and letters. The third part omits the words, has only syllables and letters. And the last part...has nothing but letters and sounds.

For Theda Weber-Lucks, the negation of explicit dialogue in performance art of this time is rooted in a lack of trust in the governing structures and the non-conformist politics of the 60s and 70s, often termed 'the new left'.[678] She argues that such art from this period where a breakdown of clear communication is a feature, especially when the artist was a woman, grew out of the violent backdrop of:

> Cold war, the assassination of Kennedy in 1963, the Vietnam War and civil unrest (Vietnam war protests, the equal-rights movement, the women's emancipation movement, the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, the uprising black power movement – and not at least the Watergate scandal) [which] caused a huge crisis of confidence and trust in the empowered government.[679]

Such events, according to Weber-Lucks, gave rise to a number of artists who 'investigated and explored new artistic forms of non-verbal vocal expression'. Yet it is precisely the non-verbal vocal expression, which for Weber-Lucks helps situate it historically, that allows *Freeing the Voice* to continue to develop layers of meaning beyond the political and cultural context in which it was produced.[680] Weber-Lucks hints at the transcendental quality of non-linguistic verbal speech when she says that 'vocal performance artists […] through the body voice, or voice of the body', would enable a 'direct connection to a non-verbal universal language that wouldn't need any translation'.[681] Crucially, through the use of non-linguistic forms of expression, artists such as Abramović are able to challenge spatial-temporal constraints, not only transcending any barriers created by the potential different national

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Ibid

[678] The New Left is a term used collectively for a broad countercultural and non-conformist political movements that emerged out of the late-fifties and peaked in the sixties. Douglas Kellner defines the New Left as being, 'at its best united spontaneity with organization, combining strong anti-authoritarian and liberatory tendencies with the development of new forms of political struggle and organization. The New Left sought to join change of consciousness with the change of society, the personal with sociopolitical liberation. The New Left, in Marcuse's view, provided important emphases on the subjective conditions of radical social change and sought new and more humane values, institutions, and ways of life.
Douglas Kellner. 'Radical Politics, Marcuse, and the New Left'. The New Left and the 1960s. London: Routledge, 2005, p. 2

[679] Theda Weber-Lucks. ''The body of the voice / the voice of the body'. Vocal Performance Art and its Connection to the Cognitive Unconscious'. *L'arte orale: Poesia, Musica, Performance.* ed. Lorenzo Cardilli and Stefano Lombardi Vallauri. Turin: Accademia University Press, 2020, p. 246

[680] Theda Weber-Lucks. ''The body of the voice / the voice of the body' p. 245

[681] Ibid

languages spoken by the audience members, but also any limitations manifest in language itself.[682]

As Brendan LaBelle observes, Abramović's ability to defy limitations is due, largely, to a commitment to dematerialisation, a commitment that was shared by other like-minded artists of the nineteen sixties and seventies:

> Abramovic fulfils certain traits indicative of the 1960s' artistic scene by following on the dematerialization of the art object, the fusion of the representational (art) with the real (life), and by performing one's own body as a medium for tracing and erasing the lines of cultural limitations as to how sexuality, relations, and social standing situates the self.[683]

Cage was also interested in dematerialisation, yet unlike Abramović, his performances were less strikingly corporeal (perhaps because his body was not as 'culturally loaded' as Abramović's, to use Pejić's term); Cage's dematerialisation was unambiguously concerned with language and sound.[684] Cage states as much at the start of his essay 'Empty Words' (1978) published in the *Semiotext(e)* Schizo-Culture edition, where he asks his reader in the first paragraph (then providing them with an answer): 'What can be done with the English language? Use it as material.'[685] There is a playfulness in Cage's answer here: he conceptualises language as 'material' in order for it to be dematerialised in his music. Cage

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[682] The idea of creating a dialogue without conventional verbal language that transcends place and time was something Abramović said she intends to achieve: 'Everything […] has to be an energy dialogue with no object. This is the main thing: no object in between. You know, once I was in Dharamsala seated next to a man who just came out after ten years in a cave meditating. They made a big celebration and because I was a foreigner they gave me the honour of sitting next to him. I didn't speak the language, I didn't understand one fucking word. But I developed a temperature of 45 degrees and was red like a strawberry. And that was it. I didn't do any thinking, I wasn't aware of space and time, everything disappeared, and I was just there and that was it. This is something close to what I want to achieve.
Marina Abramović quoted in Thomas Mcevilley. 'States of Energy: Performance Art Ground Zero'. Artist Body: Perfomances 1969-1998. ed. Marina Abramović. Milan: Edition Charta, 1998

[683] Brandon LaBelle. *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art.* p. 103-104
'Dematerilisation' is a phrase coined by Lucy Lippard in her text: *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (1973). The term is used to refer to a reprioritisation that Lippard identified as fundamental to the conceptual art made between 1966 and 1972: the primary emphasis and foregrounding of the idea behind the artwork rather than its material form. For Lippard the dematerialisation of conceptual art was inextricable linked with the political climate of the Vietnam War era: 'The era of conceptual art – which was also the era of the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, The Woman's Liberation Movement, and the Counterculture – was a real free-for-all, and the democratic implications of that phrase, are fully appropriate, if never realised.'
Lucy Lippard. Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972. Berkely: The University of California Press, 1997 (first published 1973)

[684] Bojana Pejić. 'Bodyscenes: an Affair of the Flesh'. p. 28

[685] John Cage. 'Empty Words'. *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvère Lotringer. 3:2, 1978, pp.165-175 (165)

introduces a vital term to open the essay: 'Syntax: arrangement of the army (Norman Brown). Language free of syntax: demilitarization of language.'[686] Cage's concept of demilitarisation was the product of a discussion he had with his friend Norman O. Brown. After the two had discussed their shared observation of how 'understandable' English language inevitably leads to both 'people controlling one another' and the disappearance of poetry, Brown remarked, 'Syntax is the army, it is the arrangement of the army.'[687] The breakdown of conventional syntactical structures was, therefore, thus conceptualised as an act of demilitarisation by Cage, and it would become the fundamental political and aesthetic impetus for much of Cage's work he made after his discussion with Brown. Cage's demilitarisation was not straightforwardly or radically agitational however, there was also a retrogressive element behind the approach:

> Since words, when they communicate, have no effect, it dawns on us that we need a society in which communication is not practiced, in which words become nonsense as they do between lovers, in which words become what they originally were: trees and stars and the rest of primeval environment. The demilitarization of language: a serious musical concern.[688]

Cage's understanding of the movement from words being carriers of a stable meaning towards being facilitators of 'nonsense' as 'a musical concern' is perhaps misleading as implications of such an act are political as well as musical.[689] The political element, however, was the degradation of his speech to a point where it no longer could be identified as a conventional carrier of semantic meaning; it was only once this happened that Cage felt he succeeded in his aim: 'a transition from language to music.'[690] As Lynley Edmeades

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[686] Ibid

[687] John Cage on *Empty Words* and the demilitarization of language, in a radio interview, August 8, 1974 https://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/cage-radio.html [accessed 24th November 2023]
Empty Words was described by Cage a his 'most sustained and elaborate move toward the demilitarization of language'.
Ibid

[688]John Cage. *Empty Words: Writings '73-'78*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1979, p. 184
Interestingly, Cage's sentiment here is remarkably similar to an idea Deleuze shared with Italian political philosopher Antonio Negri, and one that was published in a book he read from at the Schizo-Culture conference while onstage with Deleuze: 'Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They're thoroughly permeated by money—and not by accident but by their very nature. We've got to hijack speech. Creating has always been something different from communicating.'
Gilles Deleuze. 'Control and Becoming'. Negotiations:1972-1990. trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995 P. 175

[689] John Cage. *Empty Words*. P. 184

[690] John Cage. *Empty Words.* P. 65

observes, *Empty Words* 'relies upon our knowledge of semiotic structures and uses that as the platform from which to break that architecture down.'[691] Crucially, for Cage, this breakdown was explicitly a move that was analogous to the dismantling of an army.[692]

Cage's demilitarisation of language, however, does not entirely do away with the linguistic structures that it dismantles, as Lynda Goehr argues, *Empty Words* is 'paradoxically situated in a practice that is regulated by the very concept [it] wants to challenge': the breakdown of semantic meaning does not create a meaningless void, rather it allows for manifold new meanings to be generated.[693] Edmeades conceptualises this process as a movement from fixed meaning to polysemes meaning:

> By reducing the sense of conventional syntax as we move through "Empty Words," Cage brings our attention to the sound of each letter and increases the polysemy of the text. There is no secure or fixed meaning for us to turn to when we read it; instead, he invites us to find our way through the piece through what we can understand or interpret: sound. Here, one can see once again Cage's concurrent dependence on, and disruption of, frameworks: in one sense he attempts to open the text in order to disrupt our regular systems of meaning; in another, by opening the text to indeterminate interpretations, he relies on our understanding of regular codes, in this case phonetics.[694]

Unlike *Freeing the Voice*, in which spoken language is broken down until an alternative form of language to conventional verbal language – a corporeal language – materialises, *Empty Words* is successful precisely because it operates within the framework it makes new demands of. The two relative positions in relation to semantic structures are resonant with the ideas put forward at the Schizo-culture conference by Lyotard. Lyotard used his platform to argue that the fate of subversive activists or artists that assume a position of 'exteriority' to dominant discursive structures is, paradoxically, to create a 'complement to be conquered' by the dominant structure rather than disrupt it, and, ultimately, extend and reinforce the structure by creating a new territory that will be 'sucked into [the dominant]

[691] Lynley Edmeades. 'Affect and the Musication of Language in John Cage's *Empty Words'*. *Comparative Literature*. 68:2, 2016, pp. 218-234 (224)
[692] John Cage. *M: Writings '67–'72*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973, p. ii
[693] Lydia Goehr. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 280
[694] Lynley Edmeades. 'Affect and the Musication of Language in John Cage's *Empty Wor*ds'. p. 224

system.'[695] Lyotard argued that anybody that has the desire to challenge the status quo 'should devise […] a strategy which can dispense with exteriority, which, as far as language is concerned, would not place itself outside the rules of the discourse of Truth, that is of the discourse of power, but inside those rules.'[696] So rather than creating a new language that is intent on 'excluding itself under the name of delirium, or madness, or pathos in general', Lyotard instead posits that a truly disruptive language should disrupt from within by using the 'rules' (or 'the Rule of all these rules') of the dominant discursive structures against the structure itself.[697] While it is likely that Cage took language further than Lyotard advocated at the Schizo-culture conference, in relation to *Freeing the Voice* his piece is playfully entangled with dominant language structures (it is even dependent on them, to use Edmeades terms) to the extent that the audience of *Empty Words* are 'drawn to produce some kind of pattern through which [they] can create some understanding or organize the words into some kind of structure.'[698] Perhaps the relationship between the language of *Empty Words* and the dominant language structure is reflected in Cage's choice of source material for the piece: the writing of American naturalist and essayist Henry David Thoreau. By reworking the written words of a canonical writer that Cage had previously reverently described as an influence on his own practice, Cage positions himself as an innovative protégé rather than an iconoclast: *Empty Words* is not a demolition job, it is a work of careful reimagining.[699]

Taking inspiration from Thoreau's ability to find constant entertainment and pleasurable sensory experiences in the rural world in which he lived, Cage described music

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[695] Jean-François Lyotard. 'On the Strength of the Weak'. *Semiotext(e): Schizo Culture*. ed. Sylvère Lotringcr. 3:2, 1978, pp. 204-214 (206-207)

[696] Jean-François Lyotard. 'On the Strength of the Weak'. p. 207

[697] Ibid

Lyotard outlined his 'device' that challenges conventional discourse at the conference thus: 'The device is very simple, it consists in making exteriority the necessary complement of that discourse. And, I may add, a complement to be conquered, an opaque zone in which that discourse must penetrate in its tum. When one externalizes oneself in order to avoid the magisterial discourse, one is just extending that position, nourishing it. I think this is true of any critique since it always implies
the externalization of the criticizing position in relation to the criticized position, which will allow the latter to include the former as its necessary complement. All sorts of transpositions can be made and you should have no difficulty in making them on the political level.'
Jean-François Lyotard. 'On the Strength of the Weak'. pp. 206-207

[698] Lynley Edmeades. 'Affect and the Musication of Language in John Cage's 'Empty Words''. p. 231

[699] For a detailed exploration of the influence Cage took from Thoreau see Jannika Bock. *Concord in Massachusetts, Discord in the World: The Writings of Henry Thoreau and John Cage*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008

thus: ‘music is sounds, sounds around us whether we’re in or out of concert halls: cf. Thoreau’.[700] Yet one of the most striking things about *Empty Words*, especially in relation to *Freeing the Voice*, is that Cage is on stage in a concert hall as he performs, sitting comfortably, performing a piece that would be significantly different if it were to be performed in another, less hierarchical, context. The conventional staging for *Empty Words* is particularly surprising seeing as in his text *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78* (1979), Cage declared, ‘for many years I've noticed that music—as an activity separated from the rest of life—doesn't enter my mind.’[701] The concert hall is a space where experiencing musical sounds ‘as an activity’ is precisely predicated on the separation of the sounds inside the hall to the quotidian sounds outside, or ‘the rest of life’ to use Cage’s term.[702] It is also a space, where, as Amelia Groom observes, there is an ‘etiquette that requires audiences to sit quietly and attentively for the duration of a performance, until it’s time for them to applaud.’[703] The concert hall is a space that belongs to a long established set of cultural traditions and therefore it is an awkward fit for an artist purporting to unravel any kind of conformism through challenging established codes, whether they be cultural, musical, linguistic or political.

The Negation of Selfhood?

It was at the Schizo-culture conference where the term ‘rhizomatic’ was first used in Deleuze’s writing.[704] The rhizome would become a key concept for Deleuze and Guattari in the years following the Schizo-culture conference and was primarily used in order to attempt to explode beyond the traditional hierarchical individualist model of thought, which was conceptualised as arborescent by the thinkers.[705] Counter to a arborescent hierarchical system, where ‘an individual has only one active neighbour, ‘his or her hierarchical superior’, rhizomes, crucially, do not have a centre: they are vast networks that proliferate

[700] John Cage quoted in Murray Schafer. *The Tuning of The World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1977, p. 5
[701] John. Cage. *Empty Words.* P. 177
[702] Ibid
[703] Amelia Groom. ‘A silence other than the one that is imposed’. https://ameliagroom.com/a-silence-other-than-the-one-that-is-imposed/ [accessed 16th June 2024 and first published as a shorter script in *Masters of Voice.* ed. Lisette Smit. Amsterdam: Stenberg Press, 2020]
[704] Gilles Deleuze. ‘Politics’. p. 156
[705] Brent Adkins. *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015, p. 27

in unexpectable directions.[706] Guattari and Deleuze's rhizomatic model promotes, therefore, interactions not based on hierarchy, but rather abundant, perhaps unexpected, heterogeneous connections that in turn cause further connections to occur.[707] For Deleuze and Guattari there is no such thing as oneness; everything, even a human body, is made of multiplicities, which they define 'by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities'.[708] In this sense the rhizome can also be used to critique and counter post-Enlightenment individualistic thinking that conceptualises the individual as independent and autonomous, because, fundamentally, it propagates the idea that not only is human experience shaped by social relationships but also connections and multiplicities of every manifestation, even those imperceivable, mutable and molecular.[709]

We can, therefore, draw a parallel between Cage's self-proclaimed musical ambition of the 'negation of selfhood' with the philosophical thought of Deleuze and Guattari. How successful Cage was in his ambition is another matter. While Nelson Goodman's criticism of the composer, namely that 'the lack of semantic and syntactic detail at the level of the score may lead us to performances which have no evident character of unity as a work, no clear point of resemblance conjoining them to the notational form' suggests Cage found some success, the video of the performance of *Empty Words* shows that Cage was not wholly successful.[710] Three years prior to the Schizo-culture conference, Deleuze and Guattari had identified Cage as a schizorevolutionary, and suggested that their readers see 'all of John Cage's work, and his book *Silence* (1961)'.[711] While the thinkers do not explicitly make it clear why they view Cage as a schizorevolutionary, they do hint that it is his breakdown – or deterritorialization – of preestablished musical codes that merits this identification, and

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[706] [706] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus.* p. 16

[707] Ibid

[708] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus.* p. 9

[709] Deleuze and Guattari use the rhizomatic way of thinking and being to explore language and linguistics and identify that there is a rupture between verbal expression and political realities: 'Our criticism of these linguistic models is not that they are too abstract but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough, that they do not reach the abstract machine that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field.'

[710] Iain Campbell. 'John Cage, Gilles Deleuze, and the Idea of Sound'. *Parallax*, 23:3. 2017, pp. 361-378 (364) Cage's response to Goodman reveals that the critic had been correct in his assessment but missed the point entirely: 'writing is one thing, performing another, and listening a third; and there is no reason for these three operations to be linked'.
John Cage. For the Birds: In Conversation with Daniel Charles. London: Marion Boyars, 1976 p. 129

[711] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. p. 371

refer to a discussion on Cage in 1971 facilitated by musicologist and philosopher Daniel Charles where there was 'violent anger on the part of some participants in the discussion, reacting to the idea that there is no longer any code.'[712] This is the point where Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of both the rhizomatic and Cage connect; the thinkers remind us that 'the point is that a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded', much like Cage's music.[713] For work that is capable of eliciting 'violent anger', made by somebody identified as a schizorevolutionary, it is perhaps surprising that *Empty Words* is characterised by a sense of tranquillity. The video of the performance shows Cage – already a canonical figure within experimental music at the time of the conference – in control, his demeanour composed, his voice mellifluous, in spite of the syntactical breakdown. Rather than enacting Deleuze and Guattari's contemporary concept of deterritorialization, *Empty Words* seems to draw more from Cage's interest in Zen Buddhism.

As Kahn points out, it was Cage's engagement with non-Western philosophies that helped develop his 'mode of being within the world based on listening, through hearing the sounds of the world as music'.[714] In order for this to be possible Cage had to not only reconceptualise how he engaged with his immediate surroundings but also relinquish an element of control in the process in order to find what he described as 'an enjoyment of things as they come, as they happen, rather than as they are possessed or kept or forced to be.'[715] Such an approach was rooted in Cage's committed study of Zen Buddhism, which was partly shaped through attending the lectures of Japanese American monk and essayist D.T. Suzuki, who would also introduce Cage to classical philosophical Taoism.[716] In his practice Cage utilised Zen and in a more general sense non-Western philosophical doctrines so that the ego 'could free itself from its likes and dislikes, taste and memory'.[717] As R. Haskins

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[712] Ibid

[713] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus.* p. 9

[714] Douglas Kahn. *Noise, Water, Meat.* p.161
For Kahn, if Cage's life and work is critically evaluated with Cage as theorist and practitioner of sounds rather than a musician, then his ambitions are unrealised: 'What becomes apparent in general is that while venturing to the sounds outside music, his ideas did not adequately make the trip. The world he wanted for music was a select one, where most of the social and ecological noise was muted along with other more proximal noises.' *Ibid*

[715] John Cage. *Empty Words: Writings '73-'78*. p. 8

[716] Mădălina Dana Rucsanda and Noémi Karácsonyi. 'Compositional Particularities and Asian Influences in the Musical Conception and Works of John Cage. Studia UBB Musica, 67:1, 2022, pp. 139 – 154 (149-150)

[717] John Cage. 'Tokyo Lecture and Three Mesostics'. *John Cage Writer: Selected Texts*. ed. R. Cooper Kostelanetz. New York: Square Press, 1983, pp. 177–197 (177)

observes, Cage 'wanted to listen to sounds in themselves, disregarding their possible relationships to each other', a position that 'manifested his particular interest in Zen Buddhism, which claims that each individual phenomenon in the universe is equally important.'[718] Crucially, through his Buddhist-informed aesthetic, Cage not only hoped to erode the boundary between intentional musical sounds and quotidian sounds, but sound maker(s) and listener, and, ultimately, the sound itself and the listener.[719] Yet the boundaries were not fully eroded in *Empty Words*: Cage's positioning on stage, along with the setting of music hall and his reputation as a leading avant-garde composer, meant that the boundary between sound maker and listener is immediately perceivable. Despite the manifest subversive elements of *Empty Words* – primarily the degradation and musication of language – preestablished codes remain: Cage – Deleuze and Guattari's 'schizorevolutionary' – produces a performance that is heterodoxic rather than heretical.[720]

Yet perhaps the perceived disjuncture between Cage's calming heterodox performance and his identification as a schizorevolutionary by Deleuze and Guattari is not as straightforward as it may initially seem. While the two are inspired by Cage's ability to make music that resists codification, they also use his prepared piano pieces as an example of works of art that can sometimes be too 'scrambled' in order to successfully deterritorialize:

> sometimes one overdoes it, puts too much in, works with a jumble of lines and sounds; then instead of producing a cosmic machine capable of "rendering sonorous," one lapses back to a machine of reproduction that ends up reproducing nothing but a scribble effacing all lines, a scramble effacing all sounds. The claim is that one is opening music to all events, all irruptions, but one ends up reproducing a scrambling that prevents any event from happening.[721]

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[718] R. Haskins. 'Aspects of Zen Buddhism as an analytical context for John Cage's chance music'. *Contemporary Music Review*, 33:5–6, 2014, pp. 616–629 (616)

[719] Nathaniel Woodward. 'John Cage and the Aesthetic Pedagogy of Chance & Silence'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 56:6, 2024, pp. 547–556 (548)

[720] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. p. 371

[721] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus.* p. 343-344

Deleuze and Guattari expand on this idea through a comparison between the scribbles of a child – which lacks the necessary 'sobriety' – and the simplistic yet cosmic artworks of Paul Klee, who, according to the thinkers, resented critics using the term 'childishness' to describe his art: According to Klee, what is needed in order to "render visible" or harness the Cosmos is a pure and simple line accompanied by the idea of an object, and nothing more: if you multiply the lines and take the whole object, you get nothing but a scramble, and visual sound effects.'

Ibid, quoting Paul Klee in Paul Klee. On Modern Art. trans. Paul Findlay. London: Faber, 1966, p. 53

This position, that there must be 'a certain simplicity in the non-uniform material: a maximum of calculated sobriety in relation to the disparate elements' in artworks that deterritorialise, is a useful framework to interpret *Empty Words*, and to understand why the piece was performed with Deleuze present on stage with Cage as he performed the piece.[722] Cage utilised 'chance operations', a concept he had already applied to music, to Thoreau's text *Journal of Henry David Thoreau (1906)* in order to extirpate meaning from the American Transcendentalist's text and render the resulting vocal emissions purely musical. For Blake Stricklin, this already has political implications by posing a question to the audience of *Empty Words* that they will be familiar with from trying to decipher the cold-war infested biopolitical discourse of the time: 'how can one manage and administer a text that remains illegible and fails to communicate?'[723] This political dimension that Stricklin's identifies in *Empty Words* could potentially be harder to locate in the piece if the setting, like Thoreau's words, were radically reformed: perhaps it is the relatively stabilised setting of the piece that allows for the political dimension to remain 'unscrambled' by a 'jumble of lines and sounds' to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology.[724] Afterall, as Marc Jenson maintains, in all of his chance operations, Cage 'sought a balance between the rational and the irrational by allowing random events to function within the context of a controlled system.'[725] It was

[722] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus.* p. 344; Raymond Blake Stricklin. '"I Have Nothing to Say": John Cage, Biopower, and the Demilitarization of Language'. p. 99
Cage and Deleuze were one of Lotringer's many 'pairings' chosen to cohabit the stage as they presented their work.

[723] Raymond Blake Stricklin. '"I Have Nothing to Say": John Cage, Biopower, and the Demilitarization of Language'. p. 100

[724] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus.* p. 343-344

[725] Marc G. Jenson. 'John Cage, Chance Operations, and the Chaos Game: Cage and the "I Ching'. *The Musical Times*. 150: 1907, 2009, pp. 97- 102 (97-98)
James Pritchett definition of Cage's chance operations further connects his ideas with those of Deleuze and Guattari: 'Chance in music cannot simply 'happen': it is necessary to provide some mechanism within which it will operate. Therefore, the composer of a chance work must first design some system in which chance has a role to play. Such a system typically provides for some sort of 'givens' or fixed elements: collections of musical materials to be manipulated, for example, or an overall structure. The system also has a collection of rules or procedures to be followed in order to produce the final score. These rules draw upon the given materials and structures and make decisions based on some random factor, such as the toss of a coin or a computer-generated random number. Finally it is the execution of this compositional system that then produces the musical score we see, a score thus dependant in part on the design decisions of the composer, and in part on purely random events.'
James Pritchett. 'Understanding John Cage's Chance Music: An Analytical Approach'. The Bucknell Review. 32:2 1989, pp. 249-261 (251-252)

not, therefore, in Cage's interest to deterritorialize all preestablished codes, precisely because the more radical elements of his work depended on them, as Edmeades observes:

> Because we arrive at a setting of non-sense from a place of relative semiotic formation — either in our reading of *Empty Words* or through our existence as literate beings (assuming our knowledge of the English language) — the reduced framework is based upon the configuration that was there to begin with.'[726]

In the video of *Empty Words,* a stopwatch appears on the screen to the left of Cage. As he begins the performance, the stopwatch tracks the duration of the performance, and can be used by the viewer to time the gaps between his vocal emissions. For example, Cage does not speak between the minutes 42:31 and 45:24. This period of speechlessness, perhaps counterintuitively, disrupts rather than contributes to the general sense of tranquillity evoked by Cage's performance of *Empty Words.* The root of the disruption is due to a striking tension between Cage's stated mutinous objective of demilitarisation and an acquiescence perceivable in muteness. Cage's legacy as an artist is synonymous with a reconception of silence however, so to straightforwardly perceive his speechlessness as being symbolic of obedience is misleading, even if the spectacle of Cage sitting comfortably and quietly on stage is markedly less stirring than the palpable anguish, despair and rage that define the works of other artists who use non-linguistic verbal sounds as an anti-militaristic tool such as the Baroness, Artaud, Isou and Abramović. As Moira Roth argues, however, the Cagian tight-lipped reticence, which took inspiration from a very different aesthetic to emerge from New York Dada than the art of the Baroness, namely the Duchampian 'aesthetic of indifference', should not be dismissed as acquiescence, rather it can be read as antithetical to the metaphorical 'heat' that typified the Cold War discourse and the 'hysterical patriotism' that it stirred up.[727] Roth argues that it is precisely because of Cage's guarded indifference that the political contexts in which he worked are often dismissed when critics have analysed his artistic output.[728] Roth maintains that when it comes to Cage, and his friends and peers Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns and Robert

[726] Lynley Edmeades. 'Affect and the Musication of Language in John Cage's 'Empty Words''. p. 231
[727] Moira Roth. 'The Aesthetic of Indifference'. *Difference/Indifference: Musings on Postmodernism, Marcel Duchamp and John Cage*. Amsterdam: G+B Arts International Publishing, 1998, pp. 33-36
[728] Moira Roth. 'The Aesthetic of Indifference'. p. 4

Rauschenberg, 'such aloofness from political events of the time was part of these artists' general indifference, but now, today […] it is part of their self-image which should be questioned.'[729]

As Groom makes clear, however, Cage's 'aesthetics of indifference' continued to be perceived as problematically non-political long after his performance at the Schizo-culture conference, particularly during the AIDS crisis, when the lack of open discourse concerning the global pandemic – often conceived of and described as 'silence' – was seen as a deliberate and systematic attempt to instil fear and shame, obfuscate queer struggles and histories, and kill sufferers of the illness:

> Cage, evidently unwavering in his commitment to the "aesthetic of indifference", wanted nothing to do with this explicit politicization of silence. When he was confronted by a protestor chanting "silence equals death" during a public symposium on his work, not long before he died in 1992, his response was to say, airily, "in Zen, life equals death."[730]

It is not hard to understand the position of the protesters from this anecdote, regardless of the heckler's apparent misunderstanding on the Cagian conception of silence: Cage was wealthy, considerably influential within his artistic field, and, crucially, seemingly detached from pressingly urgent contemporary political issues. But perhaps it was inevitable that Cage, who turned eighty in 1992, was to play the role of sitting duck for the younger politically engaged artists of the late twentieth century. While the values and standards he had come to represent – indifference, detachment, coolness – seemed strikingly outdated during the AIDS crisis, they seem far less apolitical when read against another historical crises: the rising fear of nuclear genocide in the nineteen fifties.

As Roth observes, Cage, Cunningham, Johns and Rauschenberg were not the only artists and writers who adopted a stance of cool detachment in this period; it could also be observed in the 'blend of passion and indifference' that typified the writing of the Beat

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[729] Ibid

[730] Amelia Groom. 'A silence other than the one that is imposed'. https://ameliagroom.com/a-silence-other-than-the-one-that-is-imposed/ [accessed 16th June 2024]
It is worth remembering that for Cage there was no such thing as silence, an understanding the composer came to after visiting a (so called) soundless anechoic chamber. After entering, Cage heard two sounds: the low frequency sound of his blood in circulation and the higher frequency sound of his nervous system in operation. Reflecting on this experience, Cage claimed that 'until I die there will be sounds'
John Cage. Silence. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1961, p. 8

Generation, in the 'cool […] nonjudgemental stance' of Malcom McLuhan's writing style, especially in his text *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), and in the scripts of movies such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955).[731] While this argument is convincing, Roth's assertion that such texts and artworks resulted in the development of a collective 'language of neutrality' is less so. Roth develops this line of argument by giving examples of such a language from Duchamp, who described politics as 'a stupid activity that leads to nothing', and Cage, who envisioned a future where 'economics and politics as we know them would disappear and people would be in a position to live anarchistically.'[732] Rather than neutrality, however, Cage's vision for the future as espoused here is concerned with quite radical – indeed anarchistic – change, revealing that, crucially, the content of Cage's artistic language often contrasted with the cool style in which it was delivered.

Bradnock reads Cage's anarchistic inclinations as being informed through the composer's close readings of Artaud and manifesting in his relationship with space; for Bradnock, Cage operates in a 'space of anarchy that deploys cacophony, dispersal and imbalance as a means to disrupt social order.'[733] Bradnock's description of the disruptive and anarchistic spatial aspects of Cage's performances are far removed from the picture of cool indifference that Roth paints, or the meditative Zen-inspired aesthetic that Cage is associated with. Yet Bradnock also argues that it was Cage's engagement with Zen Buddhism that developed the composer's interest in indeterminacy by helping him conceptualise the art space his performance engenders as 'at once immediate and infinite, one in which the absence of routine permits unexpected and unintended outcomes'.[734] Bradnock understands the spaces created by an Artaud play or performance as being analogous to the Cagian space in this sense, despite being aesthetically very different.[735] Alongside indeterminacy, Zen also taught Cage acceptance and open-mindedness, so while

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[731] Moira Roth. 'The Aesthetic of Indifference'. pp. 34-36

[732] Pierre Cabanne. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. trans. Ron Padgett. New York: Viking Press, 1971. p. 8; John Cage. *Kostelanetz*. ed. John Cage. New York: Praeger, 1970, p. 8. Both texts quoted in Moira Roth. 'The Aesthetic of Indifference'. p 36

[733] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces*. pp. 54-55

[734] Ibid

Bradnock stresses that Cage's Zen Buddhism should not be considered unmediated or 'authentic' because it was formed in a mid-twentieth century moment when 'orientalising trends' were in 'fashion' and, crucially, were reshaped by incorporating other fashionable trends of the moment such as 'transcendentalism and the politics of individualism'.

Lucy Bradnock. No More Masterpieces. p. 54

[735] Ibid

Artaud's stage presence, especially in his later works, makes him the unmistakable vector of the 'anarchy' and 'cacophony' of the spaces he inhabits, Cage coolly observes, and ultimately submits himself to, the anarchic elements of his performances.[736]

For Cage the appeal of Zen Buddhism lay in its 'insistence on experience and the irrational rather than on logic and understanding'.[737] Cage's engagement with Zen Buddhism, therefore, both seemingly separated him from artists such as Abramović, Artaud and Isou by informing his cool dispassionate presence, and brought his artistic objectives closer to theirs by encouraging him to eschew rationality and challenge accepted boundaries. This Zen-informed objective would be the foundation for Cage's highly idiosyncratic aesthetic, as Helen Westgeest observes in her book *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art Between East and West* (1997):

> Cage began applying the ideas propounded in Zen in his music. He experimented with 'shaking up the public', by turning them into active participants rather than passive listeners. From Suzuki he learned that the task of art was to 'wake people up'. And, under the influence of those views Cage formulated his aim for art: 'waking up to the very life we're living.'[738]

Westgeest's description draws another parallel between Artaud and Cage: the desire to shake their audience out of their stupor. A key difference between Cage's desire to 'wake up' his audience and Artaud's, however, is the disparity in the respective understanding of what should happen once the audience were appropriately wakened: while Artaud's plans were universal and revolutionary, as discussed in Chapter Two, Cage's were much more concerned with the everyday, or, to use Westgeest's expression, 'ordinary things.'[739] The Cage work where the merging of ordinary things and an anarchic space is most keenly felt is his famous piece *4'33* (1952), with its elemental coalescence of indeterminacy and the quotidian. In the piece, in which the performing musicians are instructed not to play their instruments for its four minutes thirty-three second duration, Cage pushes the boundaries of what a musical performance consists of not only to interrogate preconceived

[736] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces*. pp. 54-55
[737] Helen Westgeest. *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art Between East and West.* London: Reaktion Books, 1997, p. 55
[738] Helen Westgeest. *Zen in the Fifties*. p. 57 quoting Cage. *Silence*. p. 12
[739] Helen Westgeest. *Zen in the Fifties*. p. 74

conceptualisations of music and the spaces in which music is performed, but, crucially, to make a fundamental inquiry about the nature of everyday experience. While the absence of sound from the performers is filled with the incidental sounds of the space in which it is performed, it is not a straightforward exchange: the ambient sounds do not unambiguously become music. As Eldritch Priest observes, in lieu of a conventional musical performance from the performers, 'the idea of listening becomes content' and listening to incidental sounds, in turn, becomes a means 'to experience'.[740]

The ideas that Cage would take from Zen and implemented in pieces such as *4'33* help explain why, by the year 1975 when he performed *Empty Words* at the Schizo-culture Conference, he would inhabit space in a markedly contrasting way to Abramović when she performed *Freeing the Voice*, a piece performed in the same year with a remarkably similar objective: the breakdown of conventional language.[741] Marjorie Perloff identifies the soporific meditative elements of Cage's performances of *Empty Words* as deriving from the interplay between sound and silence:

> language is, in his words, "demilitarized" linguistic units are broken down and become increasingly nonsensical, until, in the long fourth part, the audience hears only sounds in all possible combinations. Silence now becomes an obsessive element, the effect of the sound/silence pattern being wholly hypnotic.[742]

It is striking that it is the relationship between indeterminacy of sound ('sound in all possible combinations') and 'silence' that creates the 'hypnotic' effect of the piece: the uncertainty inherent in indeterminacy is not the most likely sensation to induce the mesmerising effect

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[740] Eldritch Priest. 'Felt as thought (or, musical abstraction and the semblance of affect)'. *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*. Ed. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 61-62 Priest's understanding is supported by David Tudor, the first musician to perform 4'33. Tudor, the first musician to perform 4'33, described it as 'one of the most intense listening experiences one can have. You really listen. You're hearing everything there is. Audience noises play a part in it. It is cathartic — four minutes and thirty-three seconds of meditation, in effect.' David Tudor in William Fetterman. *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances*. Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996, p. 75

[741] There are many themes that are consistent throughout the impressively long career of Cage, and many specific ideas are continually returned to and developed in subsequent works, to the extent that even a piece as supposedly groundbreaking as *4'33* might be, to use the words of the biographer of Cage and Tudor, Martin Iddon, better 'viewed as a consolidation of what has preceded, a summation rather than a development.' Martin Iddon. *John Cage and David Tudor: Correspondence on Interpretation and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 44

[742] Marjorie Perloff. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: From Rimbaud to Cage*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 336

of hypnosis.[743] The hypnotic element, however, is achieved by the audience seeing and hearing their surroundings anew. As Perloff observes, despite the 'endless patterning' in the piece, no two 'phrases' are the same in *Empty Words*: once the recognisable linguistic phrases that Cage has taken from Thoreau begin to breakdown, the audience are encouraged to open their ears to endless combinations of sounds. This mode of listening does not stop in the spaces between Cage's sounds, especially if the audience are aware of his previous works or have taken up Deleuze's advice and engaged with his text *Silence* (1961). The possibility to hear 'sound in all possible combinations' is extended beyond the written score performed by Cage and into the space of the lecture or concert hall. This is where the radicality of *Empty Words* resides: it challenges the idea that a breakdown of conventional linguistic speech inherently indicates a breakdown of meaning. As Perloff observes, the 'demilitarisation' of language encourages readers to attune themselves to meaningful experiences that may otherwise pass them by: '*Empty Words* is Cage's way of making us look at the world we actually inhabit, the sights and sounds we really see.'[744]

Much like *Empty Words*, *Freeing the Voice* also challenges the preconceived association between a breakdown of language and an impediment to an individual's ability to express themselves in a meaningful way.[745] Yet there is a fundamental difference between *Empty Words* and *Freeing the Voice:* once conventional language is removed in Abramović's performance the locus for new meanings is shifted to the performing body

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[743] Ibid
Despite describing them as existing 'in all possible combinations', Perloff does give an exhaustive list of the sounds made by Cage: '(1) guttural animal sounds, (2) exercises in the use of voiced and voiceless stops, (3) spirant series, (4) a "French" network exploiting sounds like "ce" and "ton," (5) sound units made up of the ending of one word and the beginning of another, (6) crescendos and diminuendos, (7) miniature chants.' *Marjorie Perloff. The Poetics of Indeterminacy. p. 337*

[744] Marjorie Perloff*. The Poetics of Indeterminacy. p. 338*

[745] The equation between a breakdown of language and an impediment to an individual's ability to express themselves can be traced back to Austrian physician Josef Breuer and his protégé Sigmund Freud's book *Studies on Hysteria (1895)*. *Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer. 'Studies on Hysteria'. Vol. 2 of Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works. trans. J. Strachey et al. London: Hogarth, 1955*
For an in-depth exploration of how Freud and Breuer's belief that without coherent language the voice lacked the power to create meaningful expression, see Clara Latham's's essay 'Listening to the Talking Cure: Sprechstimme, Hypnosis, and the Sonic Organization of Affect' (2013), in which Latham also interrogates Freud and Breuer's diagnosis of the breakdown of language as hysterical and analyses the implications that this has for music's affective potential: *'According to Freud and Breuer, hysterical speech and vocal sound were devoid of meaning. Hysterical speech was mad, and it was the task of the analyst to decode this speech and make it legible.'*
Clara Latham. 'Listening to the Talking Cure: Sprechstimme, Hypnosis, and the Sonic Organization of Affect'. Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience. Ed. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle. London: Bloomsbury, 2013

rather than the audience's physical surroundings. In a chapter titled the 'The Control of Activity' in his seminal text published the year of the Schizo-culture conference, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault states that '[a] disciplined body is the prerequisite of an efficient gesture', before following this statement with a meticulously detailed description of a soldier firing a rifle.[746] This is just one example Foucault gives of an efficient 'assigned movement' which is the result of a 'set of constraints […,] imposed from the outside', another is the act of regimented 'soldiers marching in file'.[747] In order for the bodies to be manipulated into performing such acts, they must first be rendered docile:

> This new object is the natural body, the bearer of forces and the seat of duration; it is the body susceptible to specified operations, which have their order, their stages, their internal conditions, their constituent elements. In becoming the target for new mechanisms of power, the body is offered up to new forms of knowledge […] A body manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits.'[748]

In order for the disciplined subjects to behave as the controlling power desires, the 'teaching or imposing a series of particular gestures' is important as is 'a correct use of time'.[749] In the effort to control the movement of bodies, time becomes something that needs to be rigorously regulated: 'each movement [is] assigned a direction, an aptitude, a duration; their order of succession is prescribed. Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power.'[750] Yet, as Foucault observes, bodies resisting the 'meticulous controls of power' have a temporality of their own, because if resistance to such forms of control is to be successful then 'the indefinite governmentality of the state will be

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[746] Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. trans Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin, 2019, pp. 146-148
'The Control of Activity' is a sub-chapter of a chapter titled 'Docile Bodies', which is concerned with how, specifically since the Seventeenth Century, controlling powers have manipulated and regulated human bodies and the movements that they make: 'The classical age discovered the body as object and target of power. It is easy enough to find signs of the attention then paid to the body – to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces.'
Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 2019, p. 131
[747] Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. pp. 146-147
[748] Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. pp. 148-149
[749] Ibid
[750] Ibid

brought to an end and halted', and, therefore, 'time, the time if not of history then at least of politics, of the state, will come to an end as a result'.[751]

The temporality constructed and imposed in order to control bodies requires, of course, clarity of communication in addition to bodies that are docile. Therefore, according to Foucault, both bodies of nonacquiescence and deliberate breakdown of conventional language – two features of *Freeing the Voice* – can become 'points of resistance' that can test the robustness of this specific temporal construction and can even rupture time as the controlling power manufactures it, as Mona Lilja observes:[752]

> according to Foucault, resistance works through the strategic codification of the swarm of 'points of resistance'. The web of power and resistance seems to occur in longer processes that rely upon a specific form of temporality that rests on long-term and discursive processes. These processes can be viewed as non-synchronised time sequences, which are not occurring at predetermined or regular intervals and which, through time, can 'wrench' the 'script' out of order and open up opportunities for other ways of being.[753]

If the bodies of Cage and Abramović as they performed *Empty Words* and *Freeing the Voice* respectively were to be analysed, it would be the demonstrably composed Cage who at first sight would seem the more corporeally disciplined performer. Yet in order to successfully perform the physically gruelling repetitive cries of *Freeing the Voice*, Abramović would have to be remarkably disciplined: screaming until you no longer have the physical capacity to do so is an impressive and demanding bodily feat that not everybody would be able to accomplish. Despite this, it is not a performance likely to compel an army general to put a rifle in her hand. The function of Abramović's corporeal discipline, unlike the soldier that holds the rifle, is to (re)focus attention to the human body, specifically the body 'imbued with an animal spirit' that resists becoming a target 'for new mechanisms of

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[751] Michel Foucault. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*. London: Picador Pan Macmillan, 2009, p. 356

[752] Michel *Foucault. The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: an Introduction.* trans. R. Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990, p. 96

[753] Mona Lilja. 'The politics of Time and Temporality in Foucault's Theorisation of Resistance: Ruptures, Time-lags and Decelerations'. *Journal of Political Power*. 11:3, 2018, pp. 419-432 (425), which includes a quotation from Michel *Foucault. The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: an Introduction. p. 96*
Foucault's idea here is redolent of the temporally disruptive force of Benjamin's revolutionary messianic time, which operates simultaneously yet divergently to construction of homogenous linear progressive history. Benjamin. 'On the Concept of History'. pp. 390,396

power'.[754] It is inhabiting such a body – one that refuses to be docile and to emit vocal communication required for 'discursive processes' – that allows artists and protesters to challenge the homogenous regimented time that is indispensable to controlling powers. Much like the anti-nuclear activists confusing and angering (and in all likelihood scaring) the police trying to remove them from RAF Greenham Common by keening in fierce unison, and the Baroness performing her meticulously scripted death wail to mourn her husband Leopold's suicide, Abramović uses her highly disciplined body to execute an act that is both disturbing and nonconforming. As Theda-Lucks observes, such corporeal vocal performances require an approach that is both disciplined and open-ended, and ultimately transcendent:

> The kind of mimetic or creational process that is on demand in Vocal Performance Art is […] based on a special kind of awareness or concentration which is "tight and lose – totally concentrated and totally open at the same time" – and which sometimes feels like being not oneself, but a medium.[755]

As Lilja observes, Foucault conceptualised moments of resistance to dominant structures as 'repetitions of signs across time and space […] as rhizomatic movements between now, then and the future.'[756] It is in this sense that it is Abramović's *Freeing the Voice,* rather than Cage's *Empty Words,* that elucidates the ideas of the Schizo-Culture conference. A close reading of *Freeing the Voice* challenges the idea that history – which Foucault terms 'the ruse of reason' – is reducible to a simple linear model of temporal succession by reanimating the radical potentiality of other similar acts of nonacquiescence from both before and after she performed it: it is a work that makes both the past and the future seem alive and full of potentiality rather than calcified or dead.

[754] Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. pp. 148-149
[755] Theda Weber-Lucks. ''The body of the voice / the voice of the body' p. 261
[756] Mona Lilja. 'The politics of Time and Temporality in Foucault's Theorisation of Resistance.' p. 420



Fig. 8. Detail form *Thomas Lips.* 1975



Fig. 9. Detail form *Freeing the Voice.* 1975

V

Åke Hodell: Act like a soldier dammit!

In the summer of 1941, Åke Hodell, who was serving as a fighter pilot in the Swedish Air Force was making a routine flight over southern Sweden when his plane crashed. Hodell survived but was badly injured and he spent almost two years convalescing in a military hospital. During this time, he became a 'fervent antimilitarist' and also began to read 'serious literature', including the sound poetry of Dada.[757] Hodell, who would go on to be a pivotal member of the Swedish avant-garde through his work as an artist, text-sound composer, publisher and writer, began to produce poetry during his time in hospital. It was not only the experimentalism of the sound compositions of Dada that helped shape his poetry and his art; the radical pacifism that helped him through his recouperation would also inform his artistic output right up until his death fifty-nine years after his plane went down, as Torsten Ekbom observes:

> The military drill, the brainwash that transforms humans into robots, the technological systems that outgrow the human being, the anonymity of dying in the total war – the ethical perspective will always be in focus for Hodell.[758]

Hodell used language in a way that calls into question the idea of clear verbal expression in many of his anti-militaristic artworks, with a prime example of this approach is *Lågsniff* (1963). The title, which translates as Lowsniff in English, is used by Swedish pilots to mean 'low flying range'.[759] Hodell first performed *Lågsniff* as a play at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm on the 4th of November, 1964, and then again in a reworked version at the Pistolteatern venue in Stockholm in January 1965, when it was filmed to be broadcast as a TV-film on Swedish television in December of the same year. The piece, which Hodell said

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[757] Fred Anderson. 'Åke Hodell's Kerberos – A Case Study'. p. 142
Anti-militarism was not completely new to Hodell; he had showed signs of resistance to militarism and patriotism before his crash as his diaristic writing reveals. After stuffing his ears with cotton wool balls so he didn't have to hear the nationalistic rhetoric of his commanding officer ('Major S') or the military band, Hodell claims that, 'Major S discovered the balls, and took it upon himself to poke them out of my ears as he yelled that in these dark times I had shown an outrageous lack of patriotism.' After this event Hodell would instead sing 'resistance songs' to himself to drown out the undesirable sounds.
Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. 10
[758] Torsten Ekbom. *Bildstorm*. [Image Storm]. trans Per Bäckström. Stockholm: Bonnier, 1995, p. 225
[759] Per Bäckström. 'The Intermedial Cluster: Åke Hodell's *Lågsniff'. Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Film and Media Studies*. 10:1, 2015, pp.47-60 (51)

was ‘based on NATO’s ciphers and codes’, sonically consists of ‘noise, white noise, coded languages, onomatopoetical renderings of technological sounds and the Morse code’, and depicts the absurdist transformation of a commercial tourist flight to Mallorca (that the destination was in Franco’s Spain is not happenstantial) suddenly and unexpectedly turning into a military bombing mission before safely landing in the plane’s original destination.[760]

The TV-film version of 1965 starts by showing members of the audience as they mingle with each other before taking their seats in a reasonably small dark room. It only becomes clear that the room has been reimagined as the interior of a plane once the first voice – that of the pilot of the plane, ‘Captain Johnson’ – sounds to introduce the audience to the rest of the plane’s crew (‘your radio operator is Mr Ekbom…’).[761] The first sign that this is not a conventional flight being staged is when the ‘cabin attendants Mrs Nilsson and Mrs Nylén’, who move in and out of the audience in order to hand out chewing gum, are introduced wearing the uniforms of Swedish military nurses from World War II.[762] The TV-film then shows close ups of the audience members chewing the gum as the sound of a plane taking off fills the room.[763] The screen darkens and the plane sounds recede in order to be replaced with the sound of both Morse code and a coded spoken language. When the screen lightens and the sounds stop, Hodell is sitting at a desk wearing a pair of dark circular sunglasses as he attempts to read the poetry of Spanish author and political prisoner under the Franco regime Carlos Álvarez Cruz into a transistor radio.[764] His attempts are repeatedly thwarted as static noise – presumably generated by the electrical signals from the radio that the controlling forces in *Lågsniff* will soon use to make their militaristic commands – rather abruptly drowns out his voice each time he begins to read.[765]

There is a straightforward reading here: dissident voices – signified by the anti-Franco and anti-Fascist poetry of Cruz – are inevitably silenced by the militarised authoritarian states that they oppose. Yet as the TV-film develops it is made clear that there is more to this scene than this unequivocal reading: technological advancement is evoked not in order to silence the human voice but to call into question what a human voice is and

[760] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. 49; Per Bäckström. ‘The Intermedial Cluster: Åke Hodell’s *Lågsniff*’. p. 50
[761] Åke Hodell. *Lågsniff* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLM3UWCC6O8&t=11s [accessed 16th September 2024]
[762] Ibid
[763] Ibid
[764] Ibid
[765] Ibid

how it functions. One way that this is achieved in *Lågsniff* is through a blurring of the machinic with the human, particularly in the parts of the play that deal with communication. This blurring, evident in, amongst other things, the telegraphist using Morse code to transmit the Cruz poem that Hodell fails to recite due to continued interruptions, suggests a complex understanding of the role of technology in the contemporary life: While modern technology is certainly not presented as a wholly positive phenomena in *Lågsniff,* it is also not portrayed as solely insidious and dangerous.[766]

In his text 'Kneaded Language: Concrete Poetry and New Media in the Swedish 1960s' (2011), Jesper Olsson argues that Hodell portrayed modern technological developments as both anti-human, and as catalysts for the forging of new experiences by mediating how people communicate and, therefore, fundamentally shaping what it means to be human: 'modern technology was frequently evoked as formative for human identity and experience – and, of course, for reading and writing – while also being criticized for its potentially dehumanising effects.'[767] While these two portrayals may initially seem contradictory, the dehumanising element of technology perceived by Hodell must be contextualised: Hodell began writing the manuscript for *Lågsniff* just one year after the Cuban Missile Crisis, an event that made nuclear war a genuine and imminent possibility, resulting in human life suddenly appearing to be perilous and capricious. For Hodell, it was likely to be a breakdown or a failure of language that led to total destruction, rather than just technological developments in weapons of warfare:

> Our world consists of errors in language and thought. The same word means different things in East and West. The technology of Gutenberg still dominates all political struggles for power and buttons in robot bases. I claim that if the world vanishes, it does so because of a language and thought error.[768]

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[766] Per Bäckström argues that *Lågsniff* reveals an equivocal relationship between author and technology: 'Hodell was ambivalent about technology. He disliked commodification and commercialism, which he saw as means of power. He was aware of the fact that new technology penetrated every possible part of human life, which then could not be undone. And at the same time he was fascinated by the technology that gave him the means of experimenting.'
Per Bäckström. 'The Intermedial Cluster: Åke Hodell's Lågsniff'. p. 52

[767] Jesper Olsson. 'Kneaded Language: Concrete Poetry and New Media in the Swedish 1960s'. *Modernism/modernity*. 18:2. 2011, pp. 273-288. (285)

[768] Åke Hodell. *ta' no.* 1. trans Per Bäckström. Stockholm: Kerberos, 1967, p. 18
Although not explicitly expressed here, it is not difficult to read in Hodell's quote fears about how language is situated vis a vis the rapidly evolving human-technology relation.

The intricate relationship between technology and mid-twentieth century human existence perceived by Hodell finds expression in his frequent incorporation of voiced sounds of modern technology in his artworks. One of the most frequently reoccurring sounds, and one that plays a central role in *Lågsniff,* is the sound of planes, specifically planes malfunctioning, which is, of course, particularly pertinent to Hodell's own experience of war trauma. It would be more than twenty years after his crash that Hodell began to use the sounds he would have heard when he was a fighter pilot, however. In 1963 he came to the realisation that:

> The radar display and the dashboard speak a different language, in fact multiple languages other than the one I have access to as a poet. in this – however extreme – reality of electronic equipment, code signals, engine sounds, radio calls, sits a bomber pilot examined and well-adjusted to his mission – though not yet brainwashed so that his personal and emotional worlds are out of order. I ask myself if, for example, the language of the dashboard could be used poetically, if it could offer something more than pure data. Yes, if it even at times could stand in for the conventional language of poetry.[769]

It is not hard to imagine the experience of being the 'not yet brainwashed' pilot being alienated – to use the parlance of Hodell's times – by the 'reality' of the highly mechanised and coded sonic environment of the cockpit.[770] Yet Hodell sees the possibility for poetry in the 'code signals, engine sounds [and] radio calls' and the 'different language' that they speak. It is important that Hodell sees the sounds of the cockpit as being able to 'stand in for the conventional language of poetry' […] *at times'* [italics are from Hodell's original text], rather than replacing them as a fundamental paradigmatic transposition: in order for the 'reality of electronic equipment' to speak poetically, it must do so as a point of contradistinction with human language, even if *Lågsniff*, as well as other works by Hodell, ultimately posits a sonic concrescence of the two as being a fitting aural representation of the highly mechanised and militarised mid-twentieth century existence.[771] It was, after all, experiencing the merging of mechanic and more organic sounds that Hodell claims lead him to 'satori', which he defines as 'wordless insight' but is more accurately translated as a sudden awakening or enlightenment:

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[769] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. 48
[770] Ibid
[771] Ibid

> On a July Morning, I am sitting in thew grass in an airfield in Skåne, listening to the engine sound of the airspace. I try to distinguish each engine sound to determine which airplane types produce each of them. I take phonetic notes in my flight log to learn to distinguish different sounds. The sound-texts criss-cross the pages and perform peculiar patterns. Right next to me I hear a bumblebee. In the distance the fading sound from a J9. The two sounds collide, creating a new one. Somewhere, either during the collision itself or immediately after, I reach satori.[772]

The 'language of the dashboard' colliding with earthly sounds to create new sonic components is a key feature of *Lågsniff.*[773] When the plane first takes off an audio recording of an aircraft in flight is used to signify events, but when the sound of a plane returns later on in the TV-film it is being made by a human voice. The voiced plane sounds soon become part of a sound collage as two other voices begin to make machinic noises (one repeating numbers and letters in the form of a coded language interspersed with the sound of radio static, the other mimicking what sounds like a stuttering engine); the incessant sound of morse code completes the collage.[774] The fragmented coded language continues until the commands from the military are given and the sounds of planes soaring, bombs going off, a high pitched constant droning tone and people screaming fills the room. Amongst the cacophony of conflict is the spoken phrase 'out of space', which is repeated throughout the whole bombing mission sequence creating a strange juxtaposition with the sounds of explosions and machines.[775] The films ends with stills of famous cityscapes – New York, Paris, London, Rome, Berlin and Kyoto are all recognisable – interspersed with quick flashes of photographs of war scenes such as a Nazi death camp, a military tank and a soldier on the beach with warships in the background; the stills are soundtracked by wild laughter, seemingly from an audience of roughly twenty or thirty people, the number of people that were passengers in Hodell's imagined flight. This closing scene seemingly supports Sanne Krogh Groth's argument that Hodell evoked the past, in order to present a 'dystopian image of technological development and its consequences for the future.'[776] However, while the

[772] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet.* p. 46
[773] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet.* p. 48
[774] Ibid
[775] Åke Hodell. *Lågsniff.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLM3UWCC6O8&t=11s [accessed 16th September 2024]
[776] Sanne Krogh Groth. 'The Fylkingen Concert Society, 1950– 1975'. *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975. ed. Geert Buelens. Leiden: BRILL,* 2016, pp.131-132

images of war that close the TV-film are certainly sombre the form that Hodell used to present them – a collage alongside the kind of photographs of cities that tourists boards would use and a soundtrack of laughter – suggest that Groth's reading that Hodell is warning his audience of a dystopian future is too categorical. Hodell revealed three years after conceiving of *Lågsniff* that the 'secret' of how his works that deal with such catastrophically monumental subjects such as nuclear war and genocide function morally was 'in the formulation: a moral standpoint can exist in a form'.[777] While there is certainly a moral dimension to Hodell's art, rather than producing dogmatic works where political messages are clearly communicated, he presents striking juxtapositions and jarring contradictions that encourage a dialectical response from his audience. This is unsurprising, because, as Olsson reveals, for Hodell 'human identity as such is to be considered a montage, or a constantly shifting aggregate of body, mind, and various representations': the responses he elicited in his audience were in line with how he believed they perceived the world.[778]

The incongruous aspects of Hodell's work – along with his dedication to experimentalism – mean that it was, unsurprisingly, not universally well-received. Poet and Swedish Academy member Artur Lundkvist, was affronted by the transgressive elements of Hodell's art and the ways in which he used his small press Kerberos to disseminate it, claiming that 'the border […] between poetry and visual art' has been eroded, leading to nothing but 'chaos and anarchy'.[779] Hodell was interested in the 'cross-fertilisation between literature and other technologies', which, as Jonas Ingvarsson observes, was a defining characteristic of the Swedish avant-garde of the sixties.[780] The 'chaos and anarchy' that Lundkvist refers to was not only perceivable in the content of Hodell's works such as *Lågsniff*, but also the multiple forms of media in which he transmitted work to his audience. In the years since its conception, *Lågsniff* has been published in the form of a theatrical play, a TV film, a book and vinyl multimedia release, a visual poem and a DVD. Each distinct iteration of *Lågsniff* would change how the reader/audience experiences it, and also,

[777] Hodell et al. 'Enkät om den konkreta lyriken'. *Lyrikvännen.* 5: 1, 1966, pp. 6–9 (6)
[778] *Jesper Olsson. 'Kneaded Language.' p. 28*
[779] Artur Lundkvist. 'Skrift, bild, Banalitet'. *BLM (Bonniers Litterära Magasin)*. 32:10, 1963, pp. 808–812 (810-811)
[780] Jonas Ingvarsson translated by and quoted in: *Per Bäckström. 'The Intermedial Cluster: Åke Hodell's Lågsniff'. p. 49*

therefore, challenges the notion of an original artwork by forming what Per Bäckström has termed an 'intermedial cluster': he produced anarchic assemblage rather than a single pieces of art. While twenty first century art audiences may be familiar with such an approach, the multimedia process adopted by Hodell for his small press Kerberos was groundbreaking, as Fred Anderson argues: 'by publishing works that challenged established notions of what a poem or even a book was, Kerberos paved the way for concrete poetry and for what Dick Higgins has termed 'intermedia'.'[781]

It was not only in *Lågsniff* that Hodell explored undecipherable language in relation to the horrors of war, it was also something that he had explored in many works and across multiple medias. For example, his mid-sixties text *CA 36715 (J)* (1966), is presented in the form of a diary of an anonymous protagonist. On the first page of the diary there is a photograph of what appears to be a young man with his face crossed out. Below the photo is a stamp, which reads 'CA 36715 (J)' (Fig.10.). Both the defacing of the image and the coded name written under it with a stamp implies that *CA 36715 (J)* is named after the dehumanising codename given to the man in the photo – most likely a prisoner in a Nazi death camp during World War II – by the controlling forces that run the camp.[782]

CA 36715 (J) does not function like a conventional diary, as art historian Thomas Hvid Kromann observes, the prisoner's script is indecipherable and, therefore, conventional communication is thwarted:

> The book purports to be the prisoner's handwritten diary, but the handwriting is completely illegible, not because the writing is hard to decipher but because there seems to be nothing to interpret in this dehumanised handwriting, which becomes more and more shapeless and finally blackens the page completely. (Fig.11.)[783]

However, while at first there may indeed 'seem to be nothing to interpret' in the diaristic writing, *CA 36715 (J)* is a remarkable work precisely because while it may frustrate, it does

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[781] Fred Anderson. 'Åke Hodell's Kerberos – A Case Study'. p. 151
In addition to Kerberos (which he used to Publish *Lågsniff*) being an early proponent of multimedia art works, Hodell also presented what he termed 'text and sound compositions' for the first time in 1967, which art historian Teddy Hultberg describes as 'an innovation that created another kind of space for the composer/poet to work with.'
Teddy Hultberg. 'Fylkingen's Text-Sound Festivals 1968–1974'. A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975. ed. Geert Buelens. Leiden: BRILL, 2016, p. 45
[782] Åke Hodell. *CA 36715 (J).* Stockholm: Kerberos, 1966, p. 151
[783] Thomas Hvid Kromann. *'Artists Books of the 1960s'*. Leiden: BRILL, 2016. p. 448

not completely deny the reader the potential for interpretation.[784] Before the ink of Hodell's protagonist 'blackens the page' it resembles asemic writing, which, despite not being legible in a conventional manner, does not close off the sense that some transference of meaning can occur from page to reader, as Tim Gaze and Michael Jacobson observe in their introduction to *An Anthology of Asemic Handwriting* (2013): 'these writings are not completely 'meaningless' or 'illegible,' but challenge our common notions of reading, writing, and the meaningfulness of language.'[785] In this sense, much like *Lågsniff*, *CA 36715 (J)* brings the validity of clear unambiguous communication into contention and opens up new communicative avenues for the reader to explore. Hodell's assertion that the morality of his artworks reveals itself in their formulation rather than their content is perhaps most clearly expressed in *CA 36715 (J).* Literary critic Hans-Jørgen Nielsen has described the work as a 'diary like that of Anne Frank, but perhaps even more chilling. The slow disintegration of a human being.'[786] Yet, as he observes 'it is the handwriting itself that tells the story' of the chilling disintegration rather than the content.[787] Hodell achieves this by presenting a work that encourages reading (a handwritten diary entry) whilst simultaneously frustrating the possibility of reading. With the conventional route to information obstructed, the reader of *CA 36715 (J)* will look elsewhere, a movement that Tim Gaze argues is part of the process of reading asemic writing:

> Writing does not just contain semantic information. It also contains aesthetic information (when seen as a shape or image) and emotional information (such as a graphologist would analyse). Because it eliminates the semantic information, asemic writing brings the emotional and aesthetic content to the foreground.[788]

Commenting on Gaze's argument above, literary critic Geof Hugh sees this shift from semantic information to aesthetic and emotional as being akin to the Lettrists 'revolting against the dominance of the word'. But while for Isou, meaning was 'never present, but to

[784] Ibid
[785]Ibid; Tim Gaze and Michael Jacobson. *An Anthology of Asemic Handwriting*. Den Haag: Uitgeverij, Punctum Books, 2013, p. 5
[786] Hans-Jørgen Nielsen. *Nielsen og den Hvide Verden*. trans. Charles Berstein. Copenhagen: Borgens Forlag, 1968, pp.125-129.
[787] Ibid
[788] Tim Gaze quoted in Geof Hugh. 'Asemia Becomes You'. *Asemic Writing: Definitions & Contexts: 1998–2016*, ed. Jim Leftwich. Roanoke: TLPress, 2016, p. 11

come' as his work 'stuttered towards a future language', *CA 36715 (J)* generated meaning from the closing off of meaning: there is a finality to the work not present in the work of the Lettrists. [789]

There is a similar difference between *CA 36715 (J)* and other works of asemic writing. Like the majority of asemic writing, *CA 36715 (J)* functions by transferring the focus of the reader from the semantics of the text to the emotional and aesthetic dimensions, yet while this is a movement that opens up the text to the reader of asemic writing, Hodell deliberately manufactures another obstacle to readers of *CA 36715 (J)*. Finnish artist Satu Kaikkonen has claimed that asemic writing:

> represents a kind of language that's universal and lodged deep within our unconscious minds. Regardless of language identity, each human's initial attempts to create written language look very similar and, often, quite asemic. In this way, asemic art can serve as a sort of common language – albeit an abstract, post literate one – that we can use to understand one another regardless of background or nationality.[790]

It is this aspect of asemic writing that makes *CA 36715 (J)* both heartbreaking and frustrating. The decidedly human quality of the script does initially suggest a 'common language' – as Kaikkonen would have it – that we may understand 'regardless of background or nationality', yet the limited information that the reader can ascertain about Hodell's protagonist also gives the impression that an attempt to try to glean an understanding from the handwritten script is futile. He is a prisoner, who we are told in *Orderbuch* (1965) – the companion text to *CA 36715 (J)*, which 'seems to be a concentration camp guard's long inventory of the usability of the dead prisoners' – is facing his imminent murder after which his remains will either be used for soap or engine oil, unless deemed useless ('Seife, Motoröl", Unbrauchbar').[791] The diary entry is not asemic because Hodell is simply concerned with moving from the semantic to the emotional and aesthetic, it is a visual expression of the ineffability and inconceivability of his protagonist's predicament. This is not to say that *CA 36715 (J)* does not contain meaning – it is certainly there – it is just that it

[789] Isidore Isou. *Oeuvres de Spectacle*. p. 129
[790] Satu Kaikkonen and Quimby Melton. 'Satu Kaikkonen'. *SCRIPTjr.nl*. https://scriptjr.nl/texts/asemic/satu-kaikkonen [accessed 15 October 2024]
[791] Åke Hodell. *Orderbuch*. Stockholm: Kerberos, 1965. pp. 2-4

is generated by the reader being confronted with the realisation that they do not have the capacity or requisite understanding to decode the emotional content of the work: the notion that there is 'a language that's universal and lodged deep within our unconscious' is shattered. Even if Hodell's protagonist could formulate sentences from legible words to describe the enormity of the dehumanising horror that he faced, how could the reader possibly understand them?

In their text, 'The productive embrace of uncertainty: Asemic writing, drawing, Translation', Ricarda Vidal and Harriet Carter claim that that the resulting sensation for the reader of asemic writing is the 'estrangement of things we thought of as familiar', an estrangement that rises from things the readers took for granted, such as reading comprehension, suddenly being uncertain.[792] This uncertainty rises from what they view as a fundamental difference between conventional writing and asemic writing: conventional writing is the result of a process from thought to meaning, whereas asemic writing reveals unformed meaning; it is a representation of an unfinished process that typically results in conventional writing:

> Conventional alphabetical writing gives structure, form and meaning to thought. Though asemic writing likewise offers structure and form, it closes itself off against any simple readings of meaning, drawing attention instead to the processes within the construction and making of meaning.[793]

CA 36715 (J) differs from Vidal and Carter's understanding of asemic writing in that it does not reveal a stage of the process towards a formulation of thought into meaning; it is the end of the process – both the form (diary entry) and the crossed-out photo of the prisoner reveal this.[794]

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[792] Ricarda Vidal and Harriet Carter. 'The productive embrace of uncertainty: Asemic writing, drawing, Translation'. *The Experience of Translation: Materiality and Play in Experimental Translation.* ed. Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal. London: Routledge, 2024, p. 80

[793] Ricarda Vidal and Harriet Carter. 'The productive embrace of uncertainty: Asemic writing, drawing, Translation'. p. 82

[794] There are critical understandings of asemic writing that resonate with *CA 36715 (J)* more than those of Satu Kaikkonen's and Vidal and Carter's. Law Alsobrook has stated that for the most part 'asemic writing asserts that the emotional and aesthetic content are enough' and that through an engagement with it, we are 'given pause to contemplate the significance of meaninglessness as a meaningful pursuit.' Alsobrook does reference one context in which asemic writing appears where this is not the case, when it is used to 'bolster the portrayal of the 'other'', usually in 'science fiction and fantasy media'. When this happens, the reader is required to 'accept the visual manifestation of language as demonstration of meaning above and beyond our

Presentaaaaaaarms!

Hodell's deliberate disruption and distortion of conventional language as a tool for his anti-militarism is perhaps most explicit in his two companion works *igevär* [present arms] (1963) and *General Bussig* [General Buddy-Buddy] (1964). 1963 – the year that both poems were written and extensively performed by Hodell, although *General Bussig* was not published until the following year – has been described by Anderson as the year he 'finally arrived at a radically reduced rendering of the de-humanising agency of military and technological language.'[795] The dehumanising consequences of militarised bodies and language was under attack in both poems, which were often performed one after the other, such as in 1963 at the Z-Hall in a new building built for The Workers' Educational Association, Stockholm, and both are concerned with the fantastical genesis story Hodell told regarding his press Kerberos:

> As I arrived at the gates of Hell […] four soldiers immediately took me to a military tribunal. The judge was General Buddy-Buddy. 'What is the reason for Hodell's deep dislike of war and militaries?' asked General Buddy-Buddy, his gaze stern on me. 'I am a radical pacifist' I responded. Is that the reason for my punishment?' Annoyed General Buddy-Buddy struck the table with his baton and yelled 'Does Hodell not realise the world would collapse without wars and militaries! Hodell is a saboteur of earthly existence! I sentence Hodell to present arms around the clock. Every hour in summer! Every four hours in winter!'[796]

Despite this being a deliberately humorous story, Hodell uses it to establish a real-life basis and motivation for his radical pacifism. The person supposedly in control of meting out law and order in the world of the story – General Buddy-Buddy – operates under the false reason that Kelly Baum identified in her essay 'Think Crazy', and artists such as Isou and Artaud also rebelled against: the weaponisation of reason in an attempt to rationalise the

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own understanding.' While *CA 36715 (J)* is unfortunately not in the realm of fantasy it does portray a protagonist that has been othered to the point of being dehumanised.
Law Alsobrook. 'The Title of This Paper Is ₒₒ○ₒ𝅘𝅥.○ₒ𝅘𝅥𝅘𝅥:On Asemic Writing and the Absence of Meaning'. *IAFOR Journal of Arts & Humanities.* 4:2, 2017, pp 5-12 (12)
While the crossed out face on the opening page of *CA 36715 (J)* suggests that, like the majority of prisoners in Nazi death camps, the protagonist died, it is worth noting that In *Självbiografi* (1967), which was published the year after, a self-portrait of Hodell dressed as a fighter pilot has been given a similar treatment.

[795] Fred Anderson. 'Åke Hodell's Kerberos – A Case Study'. p. 143
[796] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. 56

irrational 'militarised delirium' of the mid-twentieth century.[797] In calling Hodell a saboteur for his anti-war beliefs, General Buddy-Buddy foreshadows Nixon's rhetoric during the Vietnam War. The 37th president of the United States of America would also proffer flawed reasoning when denouncing domestic anti-war protest as a threat to the established way of life. In his speech 'Vietnamization—The Great Silent Majority' given on the 3rd of November, 1969 he implored Americans to be 'be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.'[798] Much like General Buddy-Buddy, Nixon would insist that reason was on his side in his very personal battle against anti-war activists: 'If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this Nation has no future as a free society.'[799]

Ultimately however, the main purpose of the story is to lay the foundations for Hodell to mangle and mutilate militarised speech: his quite literal act of demilitarisation. Although Hodell frames the tale as an origin story for his press Kerberos, it could equally be read as the genesis for his work *igevär*, which, simply put, consists of Hodell saying 'present arms' in his native tongue ('igevär'). It is a military call that Hodell was familiar with, not just from his time in the military but also from a period spent living in 'Stockholm's Old Town, right next to the Royal Palace' when 'during each changing of the guard, a soldier in the bailey of the palace shouts: 'Presentaaaaaaarms!' This happens twelve times a day in summer.'[800] The stretching out of the command by the soldiers of the palace, something associated with military commands, would, ironically, influence the demilitarisation in Hodell's *igevär,* as Hodell reveals later in his story:

> I performed this command quite half-heartedly. Indeed, my voice was hesitant and often rather sad. At one point, when my holler resounded even

[797] For example, three months after four student protestors were shot and killed by the Ohio National Guardsman at Kent State University on May 4, 1970 the Scranton Commission released a report on the incident that attempted to lay blame on not just the student active anti-war protestors on site, but also anybody that supported them: 'There can be no sanctuary or immunity from prosecution on the campus. Criminal acts by students must be treated as such wherever they occur and whatever their purpose. Those who wrought havoc on the town of Kent, those who burned the ROTC building, those who attacked and stoned National Guardsmen, and all those who urged them on and applauded their deeds share the responsibility for the deaths and injuries of May 4.'

[798] Richard Nixon. 'Vietnamization— The Great Silent Majority. Nov. 3, 1969'. http://www.presidential rhetoric.com/historicspeeches/nixon/vietnamization.html [accessed 28th October 2024]

[799] Ibid

[800] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. 57

> sadder than usual, General Buddy-Buddy approached me, shouting: 'Hodell is crying like a prissy maiden! Act like a soldier dammit! Use your vocal resources! This is how it should sound: 'preseeeeeeeeeeeeee…' At this point he interrupted himself. A couple of pointy e's had gotten struck in his throat. He began to cough violently. This is when I had an idea. I figured that if I shouted present arms and held the holler at the vowels e and a for as long as I could without pausing to breathe, the semantic content of the exclamation would dissolve. Indeed, it would extinguish itself! I confided my idea to an old Zen master. He immediately struck my head with the butt of his rifle and exclaimed 'Satori!' Then he said: If you succeed in this, the exclamation present arms can be transformed into a remarkable mystical musical experience'.[801]

Hodell held true to his decision to elongate the vowels of present arms: as Johan Gardfors observes, written as a score to be performed, *Igevär* consists of '36,680 'i's, followed by one single 'gev, 66,556 'ä's and one final 'r', which 'when transferred to the medium of spoken performance' manifests as 'three minutes of 'I', one second of 'gev', seven minutes of 'ä' and one second of 'r'.'[802] General Buddy-Buddy's intention in giving Hodell repetitive monotonous instructions as a punishment for being an anti-militarist is to regulate and mechanise his body and his speech; *Igevär* was conceived as a response to such dehumanising aspects of the military, specifically militarised language. Hodell's retaliation to having his body restrained by 'the meticulous controls of power', however, is not to imbue his body with 'animal spirit', as Foucault theorised and Abramović realised, but rather to push his militarised corporeal mechanisation to the point where it is he is no longer serviceable as a disciplined body.[803]

Both the visual score and the repetitive vocal performance of *igevär* draw attention to the dehumanising potential of technology. Higonnet's understanding that stuttering language in literature regarding war is a consequence of war-related trauma 'resisting translation into language' is convincing when applied to The Baroness's 'Deathwail', yet, this understanding does not fully explicate the stammering 'i's and 'ä's in Hodell's *igevär.*[804] Higonnet's argument that the resistance to translation that she locates often results in a

[801] Ibid
[802] Johan Gardfors. 'Åke Hodell: igevär'. *Online Encyclopedia of Literary Neo-Avant-Gardes.* https://www.oeln.net/ake-hodell-igevar [accessed 29th Oct 2024]
[803] Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. pp. 148-149; Michel Foucault. *Security, Territory, Population.* p. 356
[804] Margaret Higonnet. 'The Great War and the Female Elegy'. p. 123

'fractured mode' of communicating trauma and grief is also convincing, however for Hodell these are not the only emotions being conveyed in his stuttering sounds.[805] Much like in *Lågsniff*, Hodell uses a hybrid language in *igevär*: the machinic and the human coalesce in the repetitive vowel sounds of the piece. Despite being suggestive of the monotonous sounds that emanate from the repetitive movement of machinery, the vowels in *igevär* are ultimately collagist. In them, for example, the audience could perceive representations of the breakdown of human language, the mechanisation of human bodies and speech though repetitive labour, Hugo Ball's notable claim that 'Men have been mistaken for machine', the increasing omnipotence of machines in contemporary life and the effect this has on human subjectivity, and the sound of a machine – perhaps a fighter plane – malfunctioning.[806] In this sense Hodell's human-machine sounds are in dialogue with concerns that troubled avant-gardist artists working in the aftermath of World War I, pressing issues from the moment it was performed, concerns regarding a dystopic future, as well as a significant traumatic experience from Hodell's past. In regard to Hodell mimicking machine noises in *Lågsniff,* Bäckström argues that he is 'demonstrating interest in machines in the epoch when the human being was experienced as an extension of the machine […] the repetitive vowel sounds could quite easily be a code to be interpreted'. [807] The same could be said of *igevär*, yet the repetition is prolonged to the point where the audience can quite rightfully begin to wonder if is meant to be decoded by machinery rather than them.

Much like *Lågsniff*, technology is evoked in *igevär* to demonstrate the multitude of diverging views on technological developments, specifically Hodell's ambivalent position towards it: after all, it was the sounds of a Swedish fighter plane – the scene of his significant trauma – that lead him to 'satori'.[808] The written score also has illusions to the dehumanising nature of militarised technology: the 36,680 'i's of the score are committed to the page they look like thousands of identical soldiers lined up in a row stripped of any distinctive characteristic. Gardfors, who reveals that the 'i's' likeness to rows of military troops was something early reviewers of *igevär* observed, suggests that it is a characteristic of Hodell's work that renders it the most 'absolute representation of a stichic work of art, as

[805] Ibid
[806] Hugo Ball. *Flight Out of Time*, p. 22
[807] Per Bäckström. 'The Intermedial Cluster: Åke Hodell's Lågsniff'. p. 54
[808] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet.* p. 46

the Greek word stichic derives from, stíchos*,* which is used to not only signify a line of poetry 'but also a file of soldiers.'[809]

Unfortunately, there is no remaining footage of Hodell performing *igevär* live, and the various recordings of him reading the score have been through a process of post-editing in order to loop the vowel sounds.[810] Hodell does give accounts of performing the piece however, which he would follow with performances of *General Bussig*, 'about 60 times':

> I performed these poems on tours throughout Sweden and Denmark between the years of 1963-1965. It was a time of celebration and cheer. Twelve hundred students turned up to the Academic Association's large hall in Lund; 600 of them were for me and 600 against me. At times it ended in fist fights, as it did at the University of Aarhus.[811]

Hodell also recounts a time he performed at Stockholm College and was pelted with rotten tomatoes and eggs by protesting students who sang the nationalistic song 'Sweden' which uses words from Heidenstam's *One People* (1902) once they had run out of ammunition.[812] Whether they knew that this was a song that Hodell had a troubled history with (he has claimed it had made him 'poetry-damaged' as a school boy, that he heard it as a 'combat readiness poem' that he must 'exorcise' when in the Swedish Airforce, before finally realising he would 'never be freed from the poem') is unknown.[813] What is clear from the response of the protesting students, however, is that they understood *igevär* to be an attack on Swedish nationalism in spite of its abstract and non-lexical nature. Whether this attack was perceived to be contained within the content or the form of the piece is unknown, but a defining characteristic of *igevär*, in both written and spoken form, is Hodell's withdrawal of conventional language: a straightforward concise directive becomes a perplexing, jumbled mass of letters.

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[809] Johan Gardfors. 'Åke Hodell: igevär'. https://www.oeln.net/ake-hodell-igevar [accessed 29th Oct 2024]
[810]Åke Hodell. *Igevär.* https://kningdisk.bandcamp.com/track/igev-r [accessed 19th June 2024]
[811] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. 11
Hodell referernce to *igevär* as a poem is misleading, as it was ultimately a multimedia work with Hodell using 'the same title to present three different versions of the work: as a stage performance, as a printed book, and as a sound recording. Later exhibitions of the work, where prints of the text were displayed on gallery walls could be counted as a fourth version with its own medium specifics', as Gardfor observes.
Johan Gardfors. 'Åke Hodell: igevär'. https://www.oeln.net/ake-hodell-igevar [accessed 29th Oct 2024]
[812] Ibid
[813] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. pp. 8-10
Hodell mockingly refers to Heidenstam as 'the Charles XII of Poetry' throughout *The Marathon Poet*. Charles the XII was 'a historic king idolized by Neo-Nazis at the time of the book's publication'.
Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. xii

Olsson refers to another performance of *igevär,* in the autumn of 1963, where Hodell was joined by Swedish poet Bengt Emil Johnson as well as Bengt af Klintberg, Jarl Hammarberg, Svante Bodin and Bo Carlsson: 'Led by Hodell, the six voices sounded the three sonic parts of the piece (iiiiiiiiiiii – gev – ääääääääääär) for a period of ten minutes – a humble vocal counterpart to the minimalist drone music of La Monte Young from the same period, and a political comment voicing Hodell's anti-militarist and anti-authoritarian stance'.[814] Olsson's reference to La Monte Young is relevant in some regards – as Anderson points out Hodell was familiar with the minimalist composer's work, and *An Anthology of Chance Operations* (1963), published with fellow New York-based artist Jackson Mac Low is likely to have been an inspiration for Hodell's own collaborative 'anthology' *Svisch* (1964), co-authored with ten other Swedish artists, composers and poets and published the following year - yet there are marked differences between the two forms of minimalism.[815] Firstly, Hodell's multimedia approach results in a proliferation of physical artworks and artefacts, whereas, as Patrick Nickleson observes, Young's approach to minimalism is essentially 'a reduction of materials', music that the artist claimed was 'composed with a minimum of means'.[816] Secondly, Young has never used his work to explicitly display an anti-militaristic or anti-authoritarian position, in fact he has been accused of being an authoritarian figure by his past collaborators, most notable the musician, academic and visual artist Tony Conrad who famously picketed a 1990 performance of Young's in Buffalo with a placard that read 'La Monte Young does not understand his work'.[817] Conrad's criticism of Young derives from what Conrad saw as an inherent artistic misunderstanding on the part of Young who claimed 'authorial propriety' of music made in the early sixties that Conrad saw as 'the sounding result of egalitarian, collective labour'.[818]

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[814] Jesper Olsson. 'Kneaded Language: Concrete Poetry and New Media in the Swedish 1960s'. pp. 287-288

[815] Fred Anderson. Åke Hodell's Kerberos – A Case Study'. pp. 143-144
Hodell's collaborators on the *Svisch* project were made up of 'writers (Mats G. Bengtsson, Ekbom, Johnson, Nylén), visual artists (Elis Eriksson, Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd, Per Olof Ultvedt) and avant-garde music composers (Lars-Gunnar Bodin, Johnson)'
Ibid

[816] Patrick Nickleson*. The Names of Minimalism: Authorship, Art Music, and Historiography in Dispute*. Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2023, p. 20; La Monte Young quoted in David Toop. *Ocean Sounds: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1995, p. 178

[817] Patrick Nickleson*. The Names of Minimalism*. p.1

[818] *Patrick Nickleson. The Names of Minimalism. pp. 1-2*
Nickleson continues: 'at some point in the mid-1980s, Young asked Conrad and their bandmate John Cale to sign release forms acknowledging Young as the sole composer of a mass of tapes the ensemble had recorded

As Gardfors makes clear, while the durational aspect of *igevär* means that it 'could be compared with contemporary minimalist music, such as that of La Monte Young' the 'central effect lies in the difference between the military function of the original phrase and the semantically void utterance that results from the extended reading of it, in other words in the transition from language to sound'.[819] This transition is what the 'zen master' in Hodell's story refers to a as remarkable mystical musical experience', furthermore it is what angered the protesting students at Stockholm College. By using a speech act that that can be straightforwardly decoded (a military directive) as source material for an artwork that ultimately negates meaning, Hodell creates a space where there is a perceivable disquieting absence where there was once unambiguous signification.

Art with a deliberately constructed absence of meaning was not novel in 1963, in fact Josette Feral has claimed in relation to Artaud's work in her essay on performative subjects 'Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified' (1982) that '[p]erformance is the absence of meaning'.[820] She continues, '[p]erformance does not aim at a meaning, but rather makes meaning in so far as it works right in those extremely blurred junctures out of which the subject eventually emerges.[821] Feral's observation is useful in considering why Hodell's performances of *igevär* elicited such vehement responses from sections of his audience. If his performance had consisted of him shouting 'present arms' in a way akin to the soldier that he could hear from his flat near the Royal Palace in Stockholm, the original meaning would still be troubled from the context in which it was shouted: in a concert hall by a member of the burgeoning Swedish avant-garde who were known to be sympathetic to the politics of the New Left.[822] This approach would, therefore, have been perceived as more straightforwardly anti-militaristic than Hodell's actual version: by repeating the well-known military call it would be clear even to the least critical members of his audience that he was doing so with irony or attempted subversion, yet he also would

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together. Conrad was shocked; he refused permission and began a nearly three-decade argument against Young that took many forms both discursive and performative.'

[819] *Johan Gardfors. 'Åke Hodell: igevär'. https://www.oeln.net/ake-hodell-igevar [accessed 29th Oct 2024]*

[820] Josette Feral. 'Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified'. *Mimesis, Masochism, & Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*. ed. Timothy Murray. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 292

[821] Ibid

[822] For a history of the Swedish Avant-Garde of the 60s and the politics of the New Left see: Sissel Furuseth *'Profil 1966– 69 – Triumph and Crisis of the Collective'. A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975, Leiden: BRILL, 2016*

have been operating from within the same framework of language used by the dominant structures such as the military. What Hodell's non-lexical performance does, in line with Feral's reading, is create an 'extremely blurred juncture', and one that lasts a potentially uncomfortably long time. As Gardfor's observes, although the idea of *igevär* is to 'stretch language towards the point where signification is about to collapse', the military command used by Hodell is 'sufficiently similar to the original phrase to preserve its connection to it, and yet sufficiently dissimilar to become something totally different.'[823] It is this space – where something new has been created, but yet, despite now being useless as a directive, the original phrase still permeates the work – that both differentiates it from the minimalism of Young and enraged the protesting students. While Gardfors and Olsson are not wrong to evoke the name of Young in their close readings of *igevär* – the elongated vowel sounds of the piece do resonate aesthetically with the sustained notes of Young's music – it should be noted that the protracted elements of the composer's work function in a markedly different way to the protracted elements in Hodell's. The composer's work is not only characterised by a 'reduction of materials', but also a reduction of signification.[824] While *igevär* makes it clear that for Hodell the solution to the enforced militarisation of bodies is the designification of language, it is the interplay between this designification that occurs in the sustained vowel sounds and the clearly significative source material that results in the demilitarisation, and, therefore, the meaning of the work. Young's work is characterised not by a designification, but his effort to create a complete absence of signification both in the sustained drones and the spaces that frame them, as Seth Kim-Cohen observes:

> Young couldn't care less about the symbolic grid. His sounds have no textual, no signifying, status. They are not just non-cochlear, but are also mute in relation to concerns beyond their intervals.[825]

It is for this reason that an audience member at a performance of Young's work is not 'awaiting a subject to emerge' out of the sustained notes: as Nickleson makes clear, the

[823] Johan Gardfors. 'Åke Hodell: igevär'. https://www.oeln.net/ake-hodell-igevar [accessed 11th Novemeber 2024]
[824] Patrick Nickleson*. The Names of Minimalism: Authorship.* p. 20
[825] Seth Kim-Cohen. *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art*. London: Bloomsbury, 2009, p. 137

music he made with his various collaborators in the early sixties is the result of an 'egalitarian collective constituted in its dedication to the daily practice of listening' attempting to instil a 'faith in public spaces and the very notion of a commons'.[826] This is not the case with Hodell's *igevär*, which has a very deliberate political framework, a foundation from which subjectivity is expected to materialize. Rather than materialising, however, subjectivity is troubled by Hodell's *igevär.* For a work that deals with war and militarisation in a more general sense, this is fitting. As Jones makes clear, war engenders experiences that undermine 'not only nationalism and the corresponding unquestioned belief in progress that was promoted as part of untrammelled capitalist development but also masculine subjectivity'. For example, in relation to World War I, to which Jones is referring to, how can the construct of heroic masculine subjectivity withstand the undermining and shattering experience of soldiers with trench foot, shitting themselves and weeping before dying an undignified hopeless death? For Jones, this undermining does not necessarily dismantle the construct, but does pose some interesting questions, most notably:

> Despite there being recognition […] that the populist belief in continual progress, notions of European superiority and nationalistic concepts of (masculine) honour had been exposed as myths, and that the pre-war construct of masculine subjectivity had been undermined, had the myths been irrevocably embedded in culture and language?[827]

Despite Hodell's anti-militarist works being produced some forty years after the period Jones is concerned with, it would appear that World War II, during which he sustained his injuries, proposed similar questions that had ultimately remained unanswered. Jones identifies an 'equivocal masculinity' in the male Dada artists that took an antimilitaristic stance during and in the aftermath of World War I, a 'masculinity compromised by its refusal to attach to combatant subjectivity.'[828] Hodell too refuses to attach to a combatant

[826] Josette Feral. 'Performance and Theatricality'. p. 292; Patrick Nickleson*. The Names of Minimalism.* pp. 1-2; Patrick Nickleson. ''On which they (merely) held drones': Fugitive Tapes from the Theatre of Eternal Music Archive, 1963–6'. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 147:2. 2022, pp 337–377 (337)

[827] Amelia Jones. *Equivocal Masculinity*. p. 164-165

[828] Amelia Jones. *Equivocal Masculinity*. p. 178

Jones locates the dislocation in the construct of masculine subjectivity thus: 'Death and the horror of combat (not to mention the wholesale destruction, raping and pillaging, rotting of bodies and cultures, deprivations, grieving, and behind-the-scenes corruptions that take place a short distance away from the front itself) cannot

subjectivity, yet as a Swedish artist based in the capital of his birth country, he was making art from a markedly different context to the artists Jones refers to, such as Duchamp and Man Ray. While it is true that he survived the traumatic experience of crashing the fighter plane he was flying during World War II, it is important to remember that Sweden maintained an official status of neutrality throughout the war. Hodell, therefore, occupies a uniquely equivocal position: he is both a military veteran who sustained a serious injury serving his country (surely one of the most valorised positions in regards to the heroic ideals of masculine subjectivity) and a citizen of a country that abstained from entering the conflict, a decision that resulted in (albeit potentially hypocritical) accusations of selfishness and immorality from leading politicians such Winston Churchill during the war (who went as far as to argue that 'neutral states ought to be made to suffer in the post-war world') and a national identity informed by a collective 'sense of guilt about not having been directly involved in the war' in the aftermath.[829]

The sustained sounds in *igevär* create a space where Hodell's personal equivocal masculine subjectivity can be traced even if it ultimately fails to materialise. The piece, through a framework of weighty contextual symbolism of militarism, leads the audience member to believe that the feelings or opinions of Hodell, a military veteran and a 'radical pacifist', will become distinctly perceptible.[830] Yet materialisation of this kind usually relies on verbal communication or at least an evident showing of emotion, like in the howls of Artaud, The Baroness and Abramović. What the audience get instead is a machinic performance that ultimately negates a culmination to the 'blurred juncture' that Hodell

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be conceived in relation to the heroic ideals of masculine subjectivity that are still operative in Western culture and beyond.'
Amelia Jones. Equivocal Masculinity. p. 195

[829] Cristian Leitz. *Nazi Germany and neutral Europe during the Second World War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 2; Christine Agius. The Social Construction of Swedish Neutrality: *Challenges to Swedish Identity and Sovereignty*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, p. 83
Churchill's position on Sweden's neutrality fluctuated during the conflict. For a detailed account of his position see: *John Gilmour. Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish Experience in the Second World War. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010*
Churchill's moral judgement of neutral countries is also undermined by his role in the Bengal Famine of 1943, in which an estimated three million people died, an event that Senjuti Mallik (among many other historians) have argued 'was exacerbated by the British authorities due to their incompetence and implementation of various erroneous governmental policies.' Churchill laid the blame elsewhere however: 'I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion. The famine was their own fault for breeding like rabbits.'
Senjuti Mallik. 'Colonial Biopolitics and the Great Bengal Famine of 1943'. GeoJournal. 88:3, 2023, pp. 3205-3201 (3205); Winston Churchill quoted in S. Choudhury. 'Bengal Famine of 1943: Misfortune or Imperial Schema'. *Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2021, 1:5, pp. 1-21 (1).

[830] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. 56

creates: the juncture is sustained and unresolved. Regardless of whether Hodell withheld the materialisation of subjectivity in order to enact the dislocations in the post-war construct of masculine subjectivity, his own personal equivocal masculinity, or because he was refusing to participate in a language in which the myths of 'progress, […] European superiority and nationalistic concepts of (masculine) honour' had been 'irrevocably embedded in', one thing is clear: militarism and war underpinned Hodell's decision to withhold conventional language on which accessible subjectivity relies.[831]

I Want to Obey

Another work in which Hodell performs a literal act of demilitarisation is *General Bussig*. The artwork also finds Hodell both breaking down and drawing out (although not quite to the same durational extreme as *igevär*) militaristic language. Hodell's biographer Fia Backström offers a written description of the piece: 'the phonetic sounds of the character General Buddy Buddy's name (General Bussi in Swedish) is repeated eight times followed by 'I want to obey' (repeated four times), 'I want' (repeated five times), 'obey' repeated seven times, 'orders' (repeated seven times).'[832] It was not just that *General Bussig* and *igevär* were often performed one after the other that lead them to being considered companion pieces, they also shared a durational aspect, they were written the same year, and both are works of literal demilitarisation.[833] The question of why so many artists chose to make work that had elements of endurance during the 1960s and 1970s is something that art historian Kathy O'Dell has grappled with: 'Why, I asked myself, would artists push their bodies to such extreme physical and psychological limits? Intuitively, I knew that women's rights, gay rights, civil rights, and the Vietnam War were all part of the reason.'[834] Unlike *igevär,* Hodell keeps the inspiration for *General Bussig* obscured, as Backström observes, 'it appears as if Hodell refrained from indicating where this fragment ['General Buddy-Buddy. I want to Obey'] is lifted from in the service of fiction'.[835] Backström has speculated, however, that, as

[831] Amelia Jones. *Equivocal Masculinity*. p. 164-165
[832] Fia Backström. 'Translator's Introduction'. *The Marathon Poet*. New York: Ugly Duckling Press, 2020, p. xi
[833] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. pp. 10-11
[834] Kathy O'Dell. *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. xii
[835] Fia Backström. 'Translator's Introduction'. p. xi
The name of character appears in the origin story for Kerberos.
Åke Hodell. The Marathon Poet. p. 56

O'Dell felt intuitively, it is both a response to and a critique of contemporary militarised politics, namely the 'Swedish military's popularizing shift, when generals were urged to transition from a disciplinary culture to more of a fraternal attitude' in order win the trust of their recruits with the ultimate aim of creating more readily obliging soldiers in the post-war period.[836]

In taking aim at the lengths the military goes to in order to produce docile bodies, Hodell, like so many artists working in the 1960s, can be seen as being in dialogue with the later work of Artaud, who raged against 'modern medicine collaborat[ing] with the military to produce docile mechanized bodies to send to slaughter' in *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*.[837] Artaud's final play was, as Bradnock asserts, taken up by a generation of disaffected and rebellious North American artists, who saw the text as allowing for 'a fuller understanding of the ways in which they engaged in social and philosophical protest by means of material experimentation in an era when the social body was increasingly coming under pressure.'[838] Bradnock continues:

> The body as a site of personal and political contestation lies at the heart of Artaud's play. For a late 1950s generation increasingly seized by a sense of political futility, *To Have Done…* offered a radical model of the seizure of one's destiny from the constraining hands of damaging authority.[839]

Two of the artists that Bradnock identifies as making work that responds to the issue of the corporeal contestation identified by Artaud, are Wallace Berman and Bruce Connor. Both artists, much like Artaud, understood the body as a site of 'loaded political conflict', and furthermore, shared an 'antipathy towards the American government as a military power' with the author of *To Have Done with the Judgment of god*.[840] Although, as Bradnock affirms, for artists that had personally experienced censorship and were working 'in a

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[836] Fia Backström. 'Translator's Introduction'. p. xiii
[837] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre'. p. 3
[838] Lucy Bradnock. No More Masterpieces. p. 103
Bradnock expands on this idea thus: 'The political relevance of *To Have Done*…, written in France immediately after World War II by one who suffered during the occupation, was powerfully transposed to an American counterculture sensitive to the rise of new social and political threats. To a generation attuned to the rhetoric of the Truman doctrine, The Marshall Plan, the policy of containment, and the war in Korea, Artaud's position seemed none too alien.'
Lucy Bradnock. No More Masterpieces. p. 109
[839] *Lucy Bradnock. No More Masterpieces. p. 116*
[840] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces*. pp. 116-117

political climate dominated by cold war tensions', Artaud's work resonated urgently', there are clear differences between Berman, Connor and Artaud.[841] The most significant difference is that Artaud's theorising about bodily conflict and pillorying of militarism is a response to his traumatic experiences during World War II, when he was confined in an asylum and given over fifty rounds of electroshock treatments, and World War I when he was diagnosed with war neurosis during a traumatic stint in the French military. As Kluber makes clear:

> When Artaud writes that bodies are "not impermeable and fixed organisms" ["des organismes imperméables et fixés"], he knows this because he has seen it three times over: […] through military training to program reflex responses and override inhibitions, acting automatically with a body-machine.'[842]

As Bradnock observes, *To Have Done with the Judgment of god* proposes 'empowerment of the human body from the constricting structures of external authority', yet Artaud's position on the human body was ambivalent; Michael McClure has even argued that the violence enacted on Artaud's body, and the constraint that he observed being put on other bodies, ultimately lead him to be an 'anti-body poet'.[843] While anybody that has seen Connors upsetting and provocative sculpture *CHILD* (1959) or read Berman's assemblage magazine *Semina* (1956-1964), which he used to call for 'the liberation of the body from language's rational systems and from the violent structures of social authority' can attest, neither artist's attitude to the human body was straightforward, yet both took inspiration from Artaud's message of corporeal empowerment in order to make artworks that are, to use the language of Bradnock 'defiant assertion[s] of bodily presence and personal relevance in the face of alienating dogma that sort to anonymize and contain.'[844] Much like Berman and Wallace, Hodell also uses his art – especially *General Bussig* – to fulminate against the controlling systems that seek to 'anonymize and contain' bodies, yet in order to do so he troubles and suppresses bodily presence rather than offering 'defiant assertions'.[845]

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[841] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces*. p. 109
[842] Warren Kluber. 'Artaud's Surgical Theatre'. p. 7
[843] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces*. p. 117; Michael McClure. *Lighting the Corners: On Nature, Art, & the Visionary: Essays & Interviews*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993, p. 168
[844] Lucy Bradnock. *No More Masterpieces*. pp. 65, 116-117
[845] Ibid

Much like *igevär*, there is no known footage of Hodell performing *General Bussig* although there are multiple audio recordings of him reading the score. The first thing that is striking about the piece is that there is more deviation in tempo, speed and pitch than Backström's description lets on. This does not mean, however, that the end result is less machinic that the score sounds, rather the image that is conjured at the start of the reading where, along with the end, the variation is most prominent, is of the engine of a plane straining to start up, a motif he would return to in works such as *Mr Smith in Rhodesia* (1970), and the aforementioned *Lågsniff*. Although this image may conjure Hodell's personal history for those who are familiar with it (it is worth noting that the sounds also resemble a bumble bee repeatedly flying towards and then away from a listener), the predominant effect of the convincingly animatronic vocal sounds is the creation of a body-machine, a mechanoid in reverse. This image is further augmented both by the content of the fragmented words – that of an automaton of a soldier fully submitting themselves to the 'mechanisms of power' in order to become 'a body manipulated by authority […], a body susceptible to specified operations' – and how they are delivered: like a malfunctioning, stuttering robot unable to efficiently perform the action it was programmed to do.[846] It is here where the divergence from the 'defiant assertion[s] of bodily presence' that Bradnock locates in the works of Berman and Wallace can be located in *General Bussig*, despite the Swedish artist ultimately taking aim at the same contemporary issues as his American peers. To read General Bussig as anti-body, as McClure does for Artaud's work, however, would be oversimplistic, despite the fact that Hodell's performances of the piece attempted to withdraw bodily presence as much as is physically possible for an artwork that consists of a body standing on stage.

Listeners and audience members who observe Hodell's very deliberate refusal to display distinguishable human characteristics in his performance may also be tempted to consider *General Bussig* as an example of early posthumanist art, but this again, does not fit neatly or willingly into such a characterisation. In his book *What is Posthumanism* (2009), Cary Wolfe describes the theoretical model, which came to prominence in the late twentieth century but 'may be traced to the Macy conferences on cybernetics from 1946 to 1953', as one that 'removed the human and Homo sapiens from any particularly privileged

[846] Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. pp. 148-149

position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition.'[847] At first glance, this appears to be precisely what *General Bussig* does, yet while posthumanist art troubles human subjectivity in order to deconstruct and expand preexisting constructs in order to 'denaturalise' conceptualisations of human existence, *General Bussig* operates as a warning against a human existence that was rapidly changing in the face of advancements in mechanical warfare.[848] While Hodell's work does suggest that a reworked concept of human (particularly masculine) subjectivity is vitally necessary in the post-war landscape, it also provides a disquieting vision of future where humans have been removed from a 'privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition'.[849]

The ambivalence towards technological advancements that Bäckström locates in *Lågsniff* is nowhere to be seen in *General Bussig*; Hodell withholds assertions of bodily presence in the piece that fragments and strips meaning from spoken language in order to condemn the violence technological militarisation inflicts on the bodies of soldiers.[850] In this sense Hodell's work can be seen as a counterpoint to the unqualified optimism concerning technological developments and unabashed championing of militarism and warfare of one of the twentieth century's most infamous practitioner of sound poetry and an antecedent of posthumanism: the Italian artist and founder of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. It is not just the relative positions on war and technology that are markedly divergent between the two practitioners of non-lexical vocal sounds (in *The Manifesto of Futurism* (1909) Marinetti declared that, along with his fellow futurists, he wanted to 'glorify war - the only cure for the world - militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman' and that 'a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the [2nd Century BC Greek sculpture of the goddess Niké] Victory of Samothrace') but also, crucially, the social-

[847] Cary Wolfe. *Art and Posthumanism: Essays, Encounters, Conversations*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2022, p. 2-3
Wolfe's description here is, of course, a simplified encapsulation of a posthumanism, which the author admits 'generates different and even irreconcilable definitions.' For a detailed description of these different definitions see: *Cary Wolfe. What Is Posthumanism? University of Minnesota Press. 2009.*
Cary Wolfe. Art and Posthumanism. p. xi
[848] Cary Wolfe. *What Is Posthumanism?* Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. 1-2
[849] Cary Wolfe. *Art and Posthumanism.* p. 2-3
[850] Per Bäckström. 'The Intermedial Cluster: Åke Hodell's Lågsniff'. p. 52

historical context in which they worked.[851] While Marinetti continued to display a fascistic obsession with mechanical warfare throughout his life ('I am the only poet who specialised in modern war', he claimed in 1942), the bellicose *Futurist Manifesto* and his most famous work of sound poetry, *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914) – which is an impressionistic retelling of the Battle of Adrianople, which he reported on for French newspaper L'Intransigeant during 1912 – were penned before World War I, a conflict during which Marinetti's peer, the futurist Umberto Boccioni, much like Hodell, suffered an injury during a preparatory military exercises, yet unlike the Swedish artist did not live to tell the tale.[852]

Hodell's bleak vision of the future if developments concerning mechanical warfare go unchecked would not have the same impact had it not been performed two years after the Cuban missile crisis or, for that matter, less than twenty years after a war where an estimated sixty million people died, including the Japanese victims of the first atomic bomb attacks. On the other hand, it is hard not to read, what Marja Härmänmaa terms, Futurism's understanding that 'destruction was imperative for […] creation' in Marinetti's pre-World War I work, or, in a more general sense, that the impending war 'was supposed to end all wars, [and] was celebrated by many European intellectuals of the so-called 1914 generation who saw it as a solution to every kind of problem.'[853] The contrasting historical vantagepoints from which history was observed ultimately revealed itself in how war was represented in the art of Marinetti and Hodell: for Marinetti, who 'placed technological war at the core of the Futurist modernolatry', his art was a tool for 'the aesthetisation of battle as an artistic or erotic pleasure', whereas Hodell's *General Bussig* presented the body already corrupted by the kind of false promises – such as those made by the Swedish

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[851] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. '*The Manifesto of Futurism*. *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Ed. By Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 257
In the 1930s, Marinetti was a member of the Fascist National Party and a member of a special network for 'the internal propaganda in case of war'.
Marja Härmänmaa. Un Patriota che Sfidò la Decadenza: F. T. Marinetti e l' Idea Dell' Uomo Nuovo Fascista, 1929– 1944. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2000, p. 204

[852] Fillippo Tommaso Marinetti. *Canto Eroi e Macchine della Guerra Mussoliniana*. [translation author's own] Verona: Mondadori, 1942, p. 2

[853] Marja Härmänmaa. 'The Dark Side of Futurism: Marinetti and Technological War'. *Back to the Futurists: The Avant-Garde and Its Legacy*. Ed. Elza Adamowicz and Simona Storchi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 257
Another key difference that relates to the contrasting political moments Hodell and Marinetti made their art was their retrospective relationships with their national states. Marinetti's aspiration for Futurism to become an official state art contrasts markedly to Hodell's position. The Swedish artist used his art to critique a state supported military directive.

military when they began to use a fraternal tone in the early sixties – that are often the precursors of devastating conflicts, either unable or unwilling to participate in the language that was used to utter them.[854]

Marinetti's declared 'love' of mechanical warfare, despite not wholeheartedly changing after World War I, did take on more of a sombre and fatalistic tone. Writing one year after the conflict he said:

> For me it seems useless to demonstrate here how, owing to rapid scientific development and the prodigious conquest of the terrestrial and aerial velocities, life has become ever more tragic, and the ideal of an agrarian serenity has definitively declined. The heart of man should acquaint itself ever more with the imminent danger, so that future generations can be reinvigorated with a true love towards it.[855]

If Marinetti's position on mechanical warfare became more predeterministic in the aftermath of World War I, one thing remained resolutely consistent: his unwavering nationalistic idealism. Marinetti saw his art, and Futurist art in a more general sense, as 'necessary to feed the spirit of the heroic citizen', who he idealised as a 'friend of danger and capable of fighting'.[856] As well as being able and willing to fight, Marinetti's 'heroic citizen' should also be adaptable to a world that, thanks to technological advancements, was rapidly changing, and, above all else, be a dedicated Italian nationalist, at all times displaying an unfaltering loyalty to the 'sanctified Fatherland'.[857] Hodell's position on nationalism was, unsurprisingly, antithetical to Marinetti's; as Tania Ørum observes, a unifying characteristic that defined his work and that of his Swedish avant-garde contemporise was the radically 'changing concepts of subjectivity' in their works, which, she argues, led to 'literary characters pieced together out of technological prostheses, characters switching between male and female pronouns, collage figures involved in game structures or science fiction settings'.[858] For Hodell, the chief purpose of reshaping the preestablished concepts of subjectivity was to shatter the construct of a nationalistic heroic

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[854] Marja Härmänmaa. 'The Dark Side of Futurism'. p. 258

[855] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *Teoria e Invenzione Futurista.* ed. L. De Maria. [translation author's own] Milan: Mondadori, 1996, p. 450

[856] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *Teoria e Invenzione Futurista.* p. 620

[857] Ibid; Marja Härmänmaa. 'The Dark Side of Futurism'. p. 256

[858] Tania Ørum. 'The Poast War Avante-Garde in the Nordic Countries'. A *Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975.* ed. Geert Buelens. Leiden: BRILL, 2016, p. 142

masculinity. Crucially, as Hodell himself points out, 'despite what some critics would argue', his works that took aim at nationalism were 'something more than mere sabotage'.[859] For Hodell, who 'had seen at close distance what war does to people and what people can do to each other in totalitarian states', it was imperative that others also adopted his 'lifelong militant commitment' to pacificism and anti-militarism – which he understood as irreconcilable with nationalism – in order to avert humanity from annihilation.

For Marinetti, the vocal sounds of *Zang Tumb Tumb* were conceptualised as 'words in freedom' [parole in libertà], a stirring and spirited style of communication that he developed in order to 'increase the lyrical force' of his work, so that he may replicate 'the expressive cries of the violent life that surround us'.[860] As a result, *Zang Tumb Tumb* (which like *General Bussig* is comprised of some actual words (mostly nouns that are often repeated) alongside mouthed sounds of war machinery) is characterised by a vibrant vitality; even when the Italian artist is replicating machine gun fire his tones move with a dynamic rhythm intended to whip up enthusiasm in his listeners. *Zang Tumb Tumb* is, therefore, one of the clearest manifestations of the ideas Marinetti put forward in *Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without strings – Words-in-Freedom* (1913), which is unsurprising seeing as he was also working on the manifesto as he wrote his epic sound poem. The ideas are most keenly felt in the bullish spirit of the narrator, who is 'deeply affected, lyrical', and busies himself (it's always him) 'brutally destroying syntax as he talks […] in order to render the true worth and dimensions of his lived life'.[861] Marinetti's impetus to break free from conventional syntax in his poetry is redolent of Bäckström's understanding of what drove Hodell to do the same: Hodell, she argues, believed that '[i]f the close and painful reality was put into a poem, the traditional poetical norms must be exploded.' However, this is where the similarity ends; Hodell's refusal to produce comprehensible speech in his art is precisely because language has been irrevocably saturated with militaristic nationalistic dogma: *General Bussig* makes clear that even the fraternal language used between buddies has been coopted by the military in order to produce more malleable soldiers.

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[859] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. p. 35

[860] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *Critical Writings*. pp. 113, 138, 139

[861] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. 'Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without strings – Words-in-Freedom'. *Documents of twentieth century Art: Futurist Manifestos*. ed. Umbro Apollonio. trans. J.C Flint. New York: Viking Press, 1973, 98-99.

The most striking difference between *Zang Tumb Tumb* and *General Bussig* is the retrospective ways in which they use non-syntactical language to espouse their markedly divergent positions on militarism and humanity. To the unattuned ears it would be Marinetti's work – full of dynamism and expressive vitality – that would appear the more responsive to the human experience when compared to Hodell's repetitious and robotic work. Martinetti's understood World War I to be 'an extraordinary spectacle and display, the best one ever created by man', yet also conceded that in order to produce the kind of pro-war futurist art that he aspired to, he had 'to portray its external manifestations (sounds, colours, shapes, actions) and to leave aside human feelings and thought.[862] This position of volitional unfeeling is unsurprising: it is easier to remain steadfastly in favour of an earth-shattering conflict if you do not consider the implications of over eight and a half million people dying. The non-syntactical monotonous language in Hodell's act of demilitarisation is, paradoxically, imbued with a compassion for those affected, or those in line to be affected in the future, by war; he dismantles nationalistic militarised rhetoric (which is an apt description, however exciting it may be, for *Zang Tumb Tumb*) in order to sound an alarm signal for the increased militarisation of twentieth century reality, the mechanisation of the human body, and the resulting anonymisation, or to use the language of Hodell's friend and collaborator Torsten Ekbom, to guard against 'the brainwash that transforms humans into robots'.[863] If *General Bussig* shares characteristics with posthumanist artworks then it is humanist posthumanism Hodell advances, despite all traces of human expression and vitality and conventional communication being deliberately withheld by the artist. As Wolfe observes, 'things that don't make sense make meaning, and it's possible for elements that are not present to be maximally meaningful.'[864]

If John Cage's works of demilitarisation are typified by a breakdown of some *but not all* preestablished codes, then Hodell's *igevär* and *General Bussig*, despite being conceived more than ten years before Cage's *Empty Words,* take the project further. As Gardfors observes, by using a military directive as the source material for a work in which meaning deteriorates, Hodell's *igevär* […] stages an unusually literal "demilitarisation of language", to

[862] Stefano Bragato. 'F. T. Marinetti's Construction of World War I Narratives (1915)'. Annali d'Italianistica: The Great War and The Modernist Imagination in Italy. 33: 1, 2015, pp. 115-130 (116)
[863] Torsten Ekbom. *Bildstorm*. p. 225
[864] Cary Wolfe. *Art and Posthumanism*. p. 3

speak with John Cage'. While *igevär, General Bussig* and *Empty Words* can all be understood as acts of demilitarisation, it is perhaps Hodell's literalism that makes his work more mutinous than Cage's. The composer's demilitarisation in *Empty Words* was, as his friend Norman Brown states, is based on a simple equation: syntax was' the arrangement of the army', therefore to free language of syntax was an act of 'demilitarisation'.[865] While Cage's work is founded on a simple equation however, it still requires certain codified structures to take effect; for example, if a baby coos and babbles happily on being cuddled it produces language without syntax, yet to describe the baby's sounds as an act of demilitarisation would be a stretch. Cage's demilitarisation in *Empty Words* relies on his reputation as a leading avant-gardist composer as well as Thoreau's reputation as an American writer of historical importance: Cage's audience would expect musical and textual elements rather than a work that operates at the juncture of the two, while never fully becoming either. This explains why *Empty Words* did not do away with as many preestablished codes inherent in performance, art and music: as Edmeades, reminds us, *Empty Words* 'relies on our understanding of regular codes'.[866] *igevär* is far less dependent on the audience's understanding of codes, this is in some part a result of Hodell being relatively unknown in 1963, the year he performed the works, yet it also is representative of his artistic output in a more general sense. Where Cage's performance is heterodoxic, Hodell's is heretic: witnessing an artist stand on stage seemingly malfunctioning while occupying a space somewhere between man and machine as he stutters outwardly incomprehensible babble with staunch conviction must have been a discomforting and bewildering experience. In this sense, it is unsurprising that Hodell's audiences in 1963 would sometimes resort to riotous behaviour. As Hodell reveals, despite being a committed 'radical pacifist' his attitude towards his audience was not entirely peaceful: 'The technique of repetition of these poems [*igevär and General Bussig*] was not just created for suggestive effect but also to literally slam certain words into the audience.'[867]

[865] John Cage. 'Empty Words'. *Semiotext(e)*. p. 165
[866] Lynley Edmeades. 'Affect and the Musication of Language in John Cage's 'Empty Words''. p. 224
[867] Åke Hodell. *The Marathon Poet*. pp. 56, 11

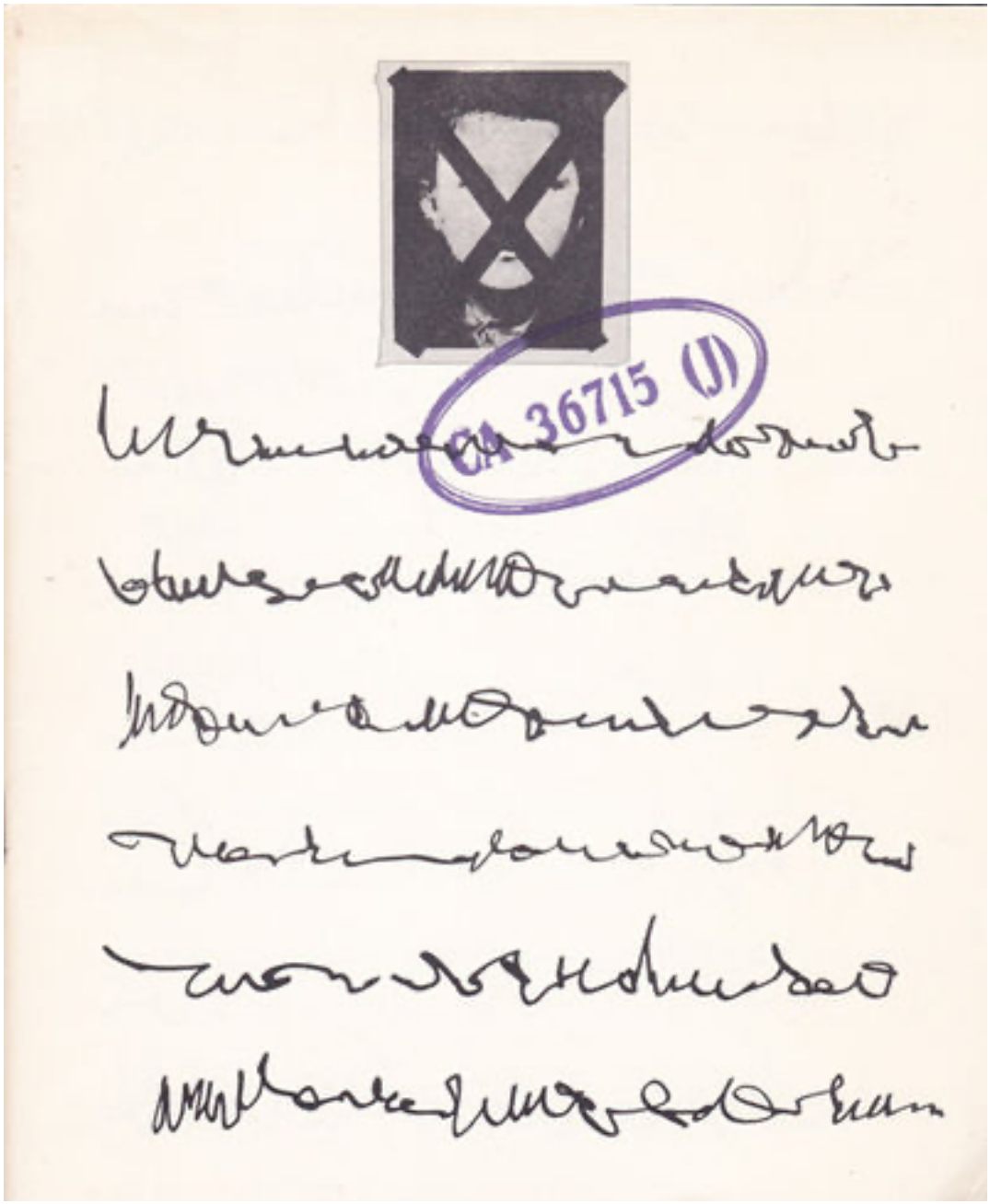


Fig. 10. Detail from Åke Hodell. *CA 36715 (J)*

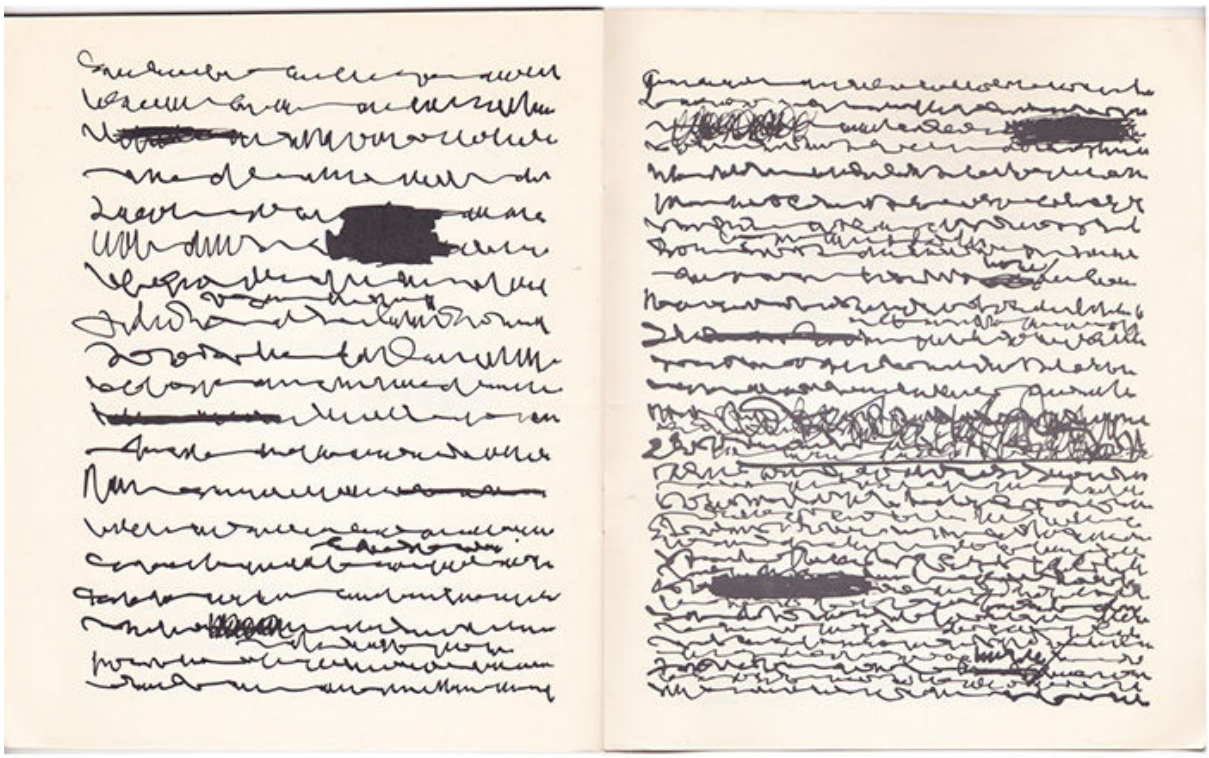


Fig. 11. Detail from Åke Hodell. *CA 36715 (J)*

Conclusion

In 1949 literary theorist and art historian Kenneth Burke used his platform at the 'Western Round Table on Modern Art' organised by members of the San Francisco Art Association to argue that 'recent global catastrophes— from economic collapse to total war— had not only irreparably damaged the average individual but had destroyed the traditional vocabularies through which the world was understood.'[868] The six artists of this thesis knew too well the damage war could cause, and as demonstrated in the close readings of their work, radically fragmented and repudiated traditional language. While the reasons that the artists turned to non-syntactical utterances are divergent, two unifying themes reveal themselves. Firstly, it was not only used to challenge the language imbued with the false logic and phoney reason that twice led to 'total war', but also as a revolutionary disruptive tool to create fissures in the prevailing wartime and post- war time ways of being so that glimpses of a reality that they considered to be more desirable could surface. Secondly, it challenged the dominant empirical method of understanding the history of art and in a more general sense history itself. Out of the six artists examined, The Baroness and Abramović demonstrate the most discernible challenge to the idea that history is reducible to a simple linear model of temporal succession. This is unsurprising, because, as Joan Scott reminds us, in the face of the restrictive and exclusionary histories written by men, women look to the past to find voices that resonate 'incompletely and sporadically, though discernibly' in order to create their own alternative lineages and genealogies and reanimate their radical potential.[869]

For The Baroness, the fractured, non-acquiescent and corporeal language of her avant-garde elegy 'Deathwail', and her radical life-as-art performances, caused ruptures in predominantly white male histographies, and much like Benjamin's conception of messianic time, its revolutionary potential could be reactivated by a future audience, 'predisposed to listen in a certain way'. This is evident not only in Carolee Schneeman taking to the stage to perform her own brand of confrontational feminist art *as* the Baroness but also in the anti-nuclear war protestors at Greenham Common keening their own fiercely defiant elegy and similarly facing violence and confusion as a result. Derrida has argued that Artaud invented

[868] Robert Genter. *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America.* p. 2
[869] Joan W Scott. 'Fantasy Echo'. p. 289-293

his ‘scarcely translatable’ open-ended language that ‘twisted syntax’, in order to counter the repression and coercion inherent in the presiding reality through ‘the unprecedented eruption’ of an ‘ephemeral but real world’ that was ‘tangential to [an] objective reality’ which was maintained and reinforced by a mimetic language of fixed, yet ultimately false meanings.[870] Isou’s film *Venom and Eternity*, which he conceived of as ‘a cinematic anti-grammar’, also took aim at conventional French language, which the artist believed had been torn and mended so many times that by the post-war period it was ‘worn in tatters’.[871] With his new language that freed letters from the denotive structure of the word, Isou sought to liberate both written and spoken communication from the function of primarily being a carrier of semantic meaning. Rather than do away with meaningful language altogether, however, he sought to defer it; Isou claimed his work were acts that ‘stuttered towards a future language’ and gestured to a reality that was ‘never present, but to come’[872]

The guttural repetitive cries that Abramović emits in her piece *Freeing the Voice* are elucidated by ideas put forward at the Schizo-culture conference, which took place in 1975, the same year that *Freeing the Voice* was first performed. The organiser of the event Sylvère Lotringer took to the stage to announce that ‘new ideas must come out in new language.’[873] Abramović’s shocking utterances revealed what a body resisting the ‘meticulous controls of power’ – to borrow a phrase from conference speaker Michel Foucault – looks like, and in doing so challenged the idea that history – which Foucault terms ‘the ruse of reason’ – is reducible to a simple linear model of temporal succession by reanimating the radical potentiality of other similar acts of corporeal and syntactical nonacquiescence such as the Baroness’s.

Both Cage and Hodell made art that presented a non-syntactical language in order to perform acts of demilitarisation, a concept that Cage formulated with his friend Norman O. Brown reflecting his belief that ‘understandable’ English language inevitably leads to both ‘people controlling one another’ and the disappearance of poetry.[874] Brown responded to

[870] Jacques Derrida. ‘Unsense the Subjectile’. p. 67
[871] Lucy Bradnock. ‘Bite Your Tongue’. p. 68; Isidore Isou. ‘Le Manifest de la Poésie Lettriste’. p. 14
[872] Isidore Isou. *Oeuvres de Spectacle*. p. 129
[873] Sylvère Lotringer and Jack Smith. ‘Uncle Fishhook and the Sacred Baby Poo Poo of Art’. pp.
[874] ‘John Cage on *Empty Words* and the demilitarization of language, in a radio interview, August 8, 1974’. https://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/cage-radio.html [accessed 24th March 2025]

Cage's musings by declaring that '[S]yntax is the army, it is the arrangement of the army'.[875] Despite demilitarisation being Cage's conception, it was, as I argue in this thesis, Hodell who took the project further. Cage's *Empty Words*, an artwork that the composer described as his 'most sustained and elaborate move toward the demilitarization of language', does not entirely do away with the linguistic structures that it dismantles or preestablished codes which it deterritorialises.[876] Hodell's acts of demilitarisation, the most striking manifestations being *General Bussig* and *igevär*, are far more literal than Cage's. Hodell unambiguously used military commands as his material in *igevär* to create blurred junctures of signification. Through the degradation of syntactical language, straightforward readings are negated to resoundingly and strikingly enact the dislocations in the post-war construct of masculine subjectivity and undermine the language in which the myths of 'progress' and' European superiority and nationalistic concepts of (masculine) honour' had been 'irrevocably embedded'.[877]

This thesis gives rise to additional questions. Although discussed in the Åke Hodell and Baroness chapters, there is scope to further examine the role that technology plays in the relationship between the artist, the non-linguistic vocal sounds that they emit, and their audience. For example, that *Freeing the Voice* was both performed in an art space for spectators and subsequently seen as a video comprised of a twenty-minute excerpt further complicates the relationship between Abramović's body, her voice and the physical space she inhabited as she performed. If, as Anna Snaith argues, the significance of noise 'resides neither entirely in the sonic object, nor entirely in cultural meaning, but rather in what might be called the sonic encounter between hearer and heard, an encounter contingent on place and time', then what does the fact that the noises omitted by Abramović were initially heard in the gallery space by 'a dozen friends lucky enough to show up', and subsequently seen by potentially hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people on television and computer screens, do to the relationship between the 'hearer and the heard' and the 'place and time' of the her vocalisations?[878] Similar explorations to those that constitute this study

[875] John Cage. 'Empty Words'. *Semiotext(e)*. p. 165
[876] 'John Cage on *Empty Words* and the demilitarization of language. https://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/cage-radio.html [accessed 24th March 2025]
[877] Amelia Jones. *Equivocal Masculinity*. p. 164-165
[878] Anna Snaith. 'Introduction'. *Sound and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 2; Marina Abramović. 'Marina Abramović Interviewed by Nancy Spector'. pp. 22-23

into non-syntactical verbal sounds in music is another way in which the subject could be developed in the future. In the piece 'Triptych: Prayer, Protest, Peace' on jazz drummer Max Roach's *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* (1961), vocalist Abbey Lincoln performs emotive bellows, coos and wails; a close reading could unpack the particular ways in which the piece, and Lincoln's vocals in particular, actively reworks, reimagines, and transgresses the established borders of music performance.

The thesis's close reading of the work of artists who have historically underappreciated and ignored – such as The Baroness and Åke Hodell – alongside those whose work has been canonised points to the too frequently overlooked fact that artworks that have been deemed culturally significant in the grand narrative of major histories are not produce in a vacuum. Rather they are dependent on a series of networks and contingencies, which a totalising application of the history often overlooks. This thesis, therefore, focuses on elements of the artists life and work that the rationalising process of canonisation can deradicalize or even obfuscate: the confrontational, uncompromising, revolutionary and seemingly irrational, as it is these aspects that, as Victoria Horne observes, can 'put pressure upon the calcified cultural operations of art history'.[879] The unconventional choice of artists in this thesis was not established in order to try to form an alternative art history to the calcified conventional western histories of art, but rather to enact an exploration of how art histories are formed, and to ask which voices and artworks are obscured and who gets to attribute significance to what they hear and why. This thesis gives voice to artists – both marginal and famous – whose works, located in the ruptures of history, challenge the very concept of truthful articulation by resisting translation into conventional language.

[879] *Victoria Horne. 'the personal clutter'. p. 1003*

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Images

Fig. 1. *The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven in her Greenwich Village apartment, December 7, 1915*. International News Photography Bettman/Corbis/Magmas Getty Images.

Fig.2. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. *Limbswish*. ca. 1917–1920. Collection of Mark Kelman.

Fi. 3. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven with Morton Schamberg. *God*. 1917. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

Fig. 4. *Gaston Ferdière and Antonin Artaud (right), in the gardens of the Rodez asylum*. *Collection Ferdière*

Fig. 5. Antonin Artaud. *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté*. 1946. Creative Commons

Fig. 6. Detail from *Venom and Eternity* [*Traité de bave et d'éternité].* 1951, Astoria Films 1951

Fig. 7. Detail from *Venom and Eternity* [*Traité de bave et d'éternité].* 1951, Astoria Films 1951

Fig. 8. Marina Abramović. Detail form *Thomas Lips.* 1975, Marina Abramović Archives

Fig. 9. Marina Abramović. Detail form *Freeing the Voice*. 1975, IMMA Collection

Fig. 10. Detail from Åke Hodell. *CA 36715 (J)*. Rabén & Sjögren: Stockholm, 1966, EPC Digital Library

Fig. 11. Detail from Åke Hodell. *CA 36715 (J)*. Rabén & Sjögren: Stockholm, 1966, EPC Digital Library