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Abstract

**Escaping the Phantom's Ghostly Grasp:
On Psychoanalysis as a Performance Art in the Spirit World**

by

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Wherever there is culture there are forms of theatre. And as a cultural phenomenon, the theatre is generally seen as a source of entertainment or as a diversion from real life. Rarely, is the theatre thought of as necessary for sustaining life itself. A very different meaning, function, and significance emerges when the mind of the analyst reaches into the theatre, steps onto its stage with another human being, and blends the transformative arts with the performance arts to speak with the ghosts of the spirit world. In the *Theaters of the Mind* (1985), for example, Joyce McDougall considers the theatre as: a metaphor for the human dramas of everyday life; a way of understanding psychic process and reality; and, as providing the stage on which these dramas can be re-constructed, re-lived, and re-experienced in the analytic space. And in her *Theaters of the Body* (1989), the mind of the analyst reaches even further to include those people accustomed to speaking their stories through their bodies and, in so doing, giving expression to the psyche's primitive messages in the form of allergic, gastric, cardiac and other such physical symptoms. And both the *Theaters of the Mind* (1985) and ... *Body* (1989) trace their genealogy to Anna O's private theater and the mysterious processes of 'chimney sweeping' by which she expressed her experiences surrounding her father's death and through which expression her deafness, visual disturbances, and muscular paralyses gradually disappeared; chimney sweeping somehow enabled her escape from her phantom's ghostly grasp.

Escaping the Phantom's Ghostly Grasp... raises the question, Is there another stage from which the mind might reach even further into the spirit realm to speak with the phantoms that reside therein? Described as a madman-philosopher, a poet-dramatist, and a theorist-playwright, Antonin Artaud (1895-1948) wrote a collection of essays on the theatre during his nine years in various mental asylums in France in the 1930's. Published in 1938, *Le Theatre et son double* (*The Theatre and Its Double*) presents a revolutionary theory in which his metaphysical theatre replaced the psychological theatre of the West. In so doing, Artaud broke with the Aristotelean tradition in which theatre: is an act of catharsis, is spoken from a scripted narrative text, and appeals to the intellect by providing psychological insights into the human condition. Influenced by an Oriental

philosophy of theatre, Artaud's metaphysical theatre neither assumes nor imitates an objective reality, nor does it seek to portray universal psychological truths about people. As embodied in his *Theatre of Cruelty*, his theatre represents: an imitation of *internal* experiences; is spoken in a unique language of the stage, e.g., a language of space and movement; and, enters a more dangerous order of reality that looks beneath the mask of the civilized and demands that the audience viscerally see and speak with the more barbaric, primitive, and real aspects of *self* and *other*. His theatre is characterized by the terrors of freedom, the surreal, and the mysterious.

Escaping the Phantom's Ghostly Grasp ... enters Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* as found on the in-patient unit of an inner-city state hospital to consider the beginnings of a conversation with *The Man From Venus* for the purpose of, first, contributing to a more radical poetics of psychic theatre in which the stage of Artaud's theatre presents us with another reality and space – a spiritual reality and space- from which we might speak with the ghosts of the spirit realm. And second, considering in the context of process material some of the philosophical and theoretical issues involved in speaking from this more dangerous reality as the phantom of Mr. W's private theatre materializes on the stage in the form of his Virgin Queen Mother as (s)he prepares to nurse me as one of her insatiable Venetian babies. Considering the analytic discourse as a performance art requires the analyst become nothing long enough to become the character of the phantom *other* in the performance so as to word the madness of *self* and *other* and, in so doing, contribute to escaping from the phantom's ghostly grasp.