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Theatre-without-organs: Artaud, Deleuze and theatrical presence

This paper departs from the conjunction of two dramatic thinkers: Gilles Deleuze & Antonin Artaud, in order to explore the potentiality and problems of articulating a concept of theatrical presence beyond representation. In the paper I will argue that Deleuze's philosophy allows us to develop a reading of Artaud's project that runs counter to the dominant view of its impossibility. Drawing from Deleuze's theory of affect and his interpretation of Artaud's concept of the body-without organs, I will suggest that Deleuze provides an ontological framework to flesh out the notion of matter as performing a particular kind of thinking, which Artaud outlines in early works such as *Situation of the Flesh*. Re-reading *The Theatre and Its Double* in the light of this materialist metaphysics, I will argue that Artaud conceives theatrical presence as a nonrepresentational mode of communication, or a nonlinguistic manifestation of meaning. Indeed, I will suggest, this is Artaud's concept of theatricality in its essential form: the expression of that which cannot be put into words. Or rather, insofar as it is motivated by a profound distrust of language but also, simultaneously an awe at the power of language to create that which it speaks, I will argue that Artaud's theatricality incorporates words, on condition that they are used performatively. Along with gestures, colours, sounds, sets and props, words become part of a vision for theatre as the ritual ground of metaphysical revelation. Theatre bypasses representation and provides its audience with an encounter with life's most fundamental principle: movement.