**Artaud’s Heliogabalus**

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What is interesting in the events of our time is not the events themselves, but this state of moral ferment into which they make our spirits fall; this extreme tension. It is the state of conscious chaos into which they ceaselessly plunge us.

Antonin Artaud

We could write a history of limits –

Michel Foucault

My topic is Antonin Artaud’s strange book, *Héliogabale ou l’anarchiste couronné* (*Heliogabalus, or the Anarchist Crowned*). Unclassifiable, eccentric, written at the limit, this ‘mystico-historical’ narrative (or *schizohistory*, or *anarchaeology*) of the infamous third-century Roman emperor appeared in Paris on 28 April 1934, amid the political tumult of that year. On 6 February, the extreme right had rioted in the Place de la Concorde, causing the collapse of the government and prompting the formation of the antifascist Popular Front. To the East and South, Fascist sovereigns were in power. The subtitle of *Heliogabalus* announces the paradox of sovereignty, of the sovereign who is both ‘outside and inside the juridical order’. Germany and Italy were states of exception and, adjacent to them, the French polis experienced a crisis of representation. Normative distinctions broke down. The far left seemed to mimic the far right. Committed antifascists valorised authoritarianism. Antidemocratic extremists sought to go ‘beyond right and left’. Intellectuals entertained paranoid identifications with foreign powers.

It was an historical conjuncture germane to apocalyptic speech. In May 1933 Artaud felt that he was writing on the verge of ‘cataclysms to come [qui s’annoncent]’. Anaïs Nin recorded his behaviour during the period he was researching *Heliogabalus*:

> Artaud sat in the Coupole pouring out poetry, talking of magic, “I am Heliogabalus, the mad Roman emperor,” because he becomes everything he writes about. In the taxi he pushed his hair back from a ravaged face. The beauty of the summer day did not touch him. He stood up in the taxi and, stretching out his arms, he pointed to the crowded streets: “The revolution will come soon. All this will be destroyed. The world must be destroyed. It is corrupt, and full of ugliness. It is full of mummies, I tell you. Roman decadence. Death. I wanted a theatre that would be like a shock treatment, galvanise, shock people into feeling.”

In a few years Artaud himself would undergo electroshock, writing spells and dedicating books to Hitler from his asylum, even as, to the East, the Führer acted out the death drive.
But I will not pander to biographism. It is a text I wish to situate, not an authorial subject. And how, in any case, could you restrict Artaud to the latter designation? Artaud, who performed the rupture between madness and the work itself.\textsuperscript{12} Artaud, who set out to destroy conventional authorship and exceed representation.\textsuperscript{13} Artaud, who rendered the subject \textit{en procès}: in process – unfixed – and on trial.\textsuperscript{14}

Again and again Artaud flashes through the text of poststructuralism as a vector of radical transgression. In what follows I will offer a partial genealogy of this anti-authoritarian mobilisation. And yet a metonymy dogs the reception. Shadowing the figure of liberation is an anxiety: that Artaud’s production may be contaminated by fascism. If I confront this ambiguity, it is not to purge it from my argument. To the contrary, in outlining the patterns of affirmation and denunciation which since the 1960s have characterised writing about Artaud, I mean to map a threshold for my reading of \textit{Heliogabalus} – which is a reading of a threshold.

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The 1961 publication of Michel Foucault’s \textit{Folie et D\'éraison. Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique} (‘Madness and Unreason: History of Madness in the Classical Age’) was a turning-point in Artaud’s reception. The meaning of the book has altered with its chequered publication history, which saw the main text and preface substantially abridged in the 1964 paperback, and the original preface completely suppressed in the 1972 second edition. Hence Ian Hacking’s remark that the 1961 and 1972 editions (the latter simply entitled \textit{History of Madness in the Classical Age}) are ‘two distinct books’: ‘One of these books is governed by an idea of \textit{déraison}, in which there lurks a dream of madness in the wild, as something prediscursive, inaccessible, pure. The other book is what the first became, stripped of romantic illusion.’\textsuperscript{15} Hacking is not the only commentator to criticise the early Foucault for being ‘Romantic’ – though \textit{Dionysian} might be more accurate.\textsuperscript{16} Nonetheless, it is this Foucault, intimately invested in avant-garde writing, that I want to adduce here: the Foucault of \textit{Folie et D\'éraison} and the 1963 homage to Georges Bataille, ‘A Preface to Transgression’.

In a 1961 interview with \textit{Le Monde}, Foucault cited Artaud’s writing as an example of the sort of ‘lyrical protest’ that might ‘restore to the experience of madness the profundity and power of revelation that was extinguished by confinement’ during the classical age (circa 1650 to 1800).\textsuperscript{17} Foucault begins and ends the book by invoking Artaud alongside other ‘mad’ exemplars, but while there is a ritual aspect to this tactic, it is no mere name-dropping.\textsuperscript{18} A concrete intertexture is at play between Artaud’s writings and Foucault’s philosophy of history. In the astonishing opening chapter entitled ‘Stultifera Navis’ (‘The Ship of Fools’), Artaud stands for the ‘tragic, cosmic experience’ of madness, as against the ‘critical consciousness’ which in modernity has determined, mastered and internalised madness as unreason.\textsuperscript{19} Despite the historical triumph of reason, the tragic experience of madness haunts Western culture like a repressed memory:
It is that tragic consciousness that is visible in the last words of Nietzsche and the last visions of Van Gogh. It is that same element that Freud began to perceive at the furthest point of his journey, the great wound that he tried to symbolise in the mythological struggle between the libido and the death instinct. And it is that same consciousness that finds expression in the work of Antonin Artaud.

Under the sign of tragedy, Foucault conjoins Artaud with the Nietzsche of the *Wahnbriefe* (the ‘Madness Letters’ in which he identified himself as Dionysus and the Crucified),21 and the Freud of the second topography, the ‘cosmological’, originary limit of Freudian theory.22

There is an echo in the reference to Van Gogh, of Artaud’s 1947 anti-psychiatric broadside, ‘Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society’, which construed *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890) as opening ‘the secret door to a possible beyond, to a possible permanent reality’:

The sky in the painting is very low, bruised.

violet, like the lower edges of lightning.

The strange shadowy fringe of the void rising after the flash.

Van Gogh loosed his crows like the black microbes of his suicide’s spleen a few centimetres from the top and as if from the bottom of the canvas, […]

Worthy accompaniment to the death of the man who during his life set so many drunken suns whirling over so many unruly haystacks and who, desperate, with a bullet in his belly, had no choice but to flood a landscape with blood and wine, to drench the earth with a final emulsion, both dark and joyous, with a taste of bitter wine and spoiled vinegar.23

Across the border between life and death, a lightning-flash. In Bataillean vein – and Van Gogh was important for Georges Bataille too – this solar cataclysm of a suicide, this manifestation of something like the death drive, has the tenor of a sacrificial affirmation, ‘dark and joyous’, with the taste of Crucifixion in the sour wine.24 As we shall see, a significant factor in Artaud’s reception has been his encounter with Bataille in the text of theory.25 But my point in citing Artaud’s description of Van Gogh is that it inscribes a *limit-experience*. The latter term, derived from Maurice Blanchot’s reading of Bataille, was crucial for Foucault. Limit-experience calls the subject radically into question.26 In it, Foucault later explained, ‘experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. This is a project of desubjectivation. The idea of a limit-experience that wrenches the subject from itself is what was important to me in my reading of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot.27 I would add Artaud to the list.28
In *Folie et Déraison*, Artaudian tragic experience, which is limit-experience, is noncontemporaneous with and contestatory of modernity:

This madness, which knots and divides time, which curves the world in the loop of night, this madness so foreign to the experience contemporaneous with it, does it not utter to those who can hear them, like Nietzsche and Artaud, the scarcely audible words of classical unreason, where all was nothingness and night, but now amplified into screams and fury? Giving them for the first time expression, a *droit de cité* [‘right of abode’], and a grasp on Western culture, a point from which all contestation becomes possible, as well as the contestation of all things? By restoring them to their primitive savagery?²⁹

The evolutionist language here would seem to locate tragic madness in the premodern, and indeed Foucault says that Artaud ‘never ceased to claim that Western culture lost its tragic focus at the moment it finally forgot what he termed the great solar madness of the world, the violent ceremonies which enacted the life and death of “the great Fire Satan”’.³⁰ The rationalisation of madness is a disenchantment, a desacralisation – major themes in Artaud’s writing, as elsewhere in dissident surrealism. We will see that a sacral, pagan, tragic heliopoetics is at stake in *Heliogabalus*, as it was at certain moments for Bataille. Foucault enunciates his own historiography ‘beneath the sun of the great Nietzschean quest’.³¹

Among the founding divisions Foucault associates with the renunciation of tragedy is the heliotropic opposition between East and West:

In the universality of the Western *ratio*, there is this division which is the Orient: the Orient, thought of as the origin, dreamt of as the vertiginous point from which nostalgia and promises of return are born, the Orient offered to the colonising reason of the Occident, but indefinitely inaccessible, for it always remains the limit: the night of the beginning, in which the Occident was formed, but in which it traced a dividing line, the Orient is for the Occident everything that it is not, while remaining the place in which its primitive truth must be sought. What is required is a history of this great divide, all along this Occidental becoming, following it in its continuity and its exchanges, while also allowing it to appear in its tragic hieratism.³²

Edward Said (who certainly read this passage) pointed out that the ‘demarcation between Orient and West’ was ‘already secure by the time of the *Iliad*’; and that in *The Bacchae* Dionysus is ‘explicitly connected with his Asian origins and with the strangely threatening excesses of Oriental mysteries.’³³ A more recent historian of Orientalism has argued that the modern champion of Dionysus, Nietzsche, chose Zarathustra as his hero ‘chiefly to slap the face of his Greek counterpart, Socrates.’³⁴ And any reader of Artaud’s interwar writings will
attest to the crucial importance in them of the opposition between the Orient and the Occident. As we shall see, this traditional paradigm acquired a particular political valence in France between the wars. In Artaud’s Heliogabalus, an anti-Western Orientalism – appearing in all its ‘tragic hieratism’ – coincides with solar mythology. The name Heliogabalus itself was a Hellenistic (aptly heliocentric) corruption of Elagabalus, the Syrian sun-god of whom the adolescent emperor was high priest and eponym.

Foucault speaks to the origin of the division between reason and its other. Yet on examination the historicity of this division is radically ambiguous. It is unclear when the division emerges – whether it is the seventeenth century, the sixteenth century, the middle ages, or antiquity. Foucault’s language of tragedy suggests nostalgia for the pre-Socratic. But the 1961 preface complicates the question of diachrony with a synchronic problem of the limit:

To interrogate a culture about its limit-experiences is to question it at the confines of history about a tear that is something like the very birth of its history. There, in a tension that is constantly on the verge of resolution, we find the temporal continuity of a dialectical analysis confronted with the revelation, at the doors of time, of a tragic structure. 35

To write the history of madness is to question the limit of history as a rational construct. The tragic oscillates on a threshold. The limit is a ‘lightning-flash’, ‘heterogeneous with the time of history, but ungraspable outside it.’ 36 It touches on dialectic, yet, unsublatable, exceeds it.

In Folie et Déraison, limit-experience is a Left-Nietzschean ‘way out between Hegelianism and the philosophical identity of the subject.’ 37 It exceeds dialectical thought. In ‘A Preface to Transgression’, where the lightning-flash returns, alongside the trope of oscillation, 38 Foucault calls in vatic wise for a ‘nondialectical language of the limit’, 39 a philosophy of ‘nonpositive affirmation’ in the manner of what Blanchot called contestation, 40 with which to speak the experience of sexuality, the emergence of which he ties to the death of God. He proclaims ‘the impossibility of attributing the millenary language of dialectics to the major experience that sexuality forms for us.’ We will see that Artaud’s Heliogabalus stages this ‘impossibility’, adopts a stance along the rift where ‘the interrogation of the limit replaces the search for totality and the act of transgression replaces the movement of contradictions’. 41 Though it wishes for metaphysical resolution, Heliogabalus affirms a sovereignty that problematises the surrealist attempt to cross the discourse of sexuality with dialectical philosophy.

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In the 1930s Artaud yea-said transgression in the same breath as freedom, insurrection, ‘anarchy’. It was a shibboleth of what he called the Theatre of Cruelty. In The
Theatre and its Double (1938), Artaud vaunts John Ford’s Annabella, who commits incest in 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore, as ‘an example of absolute freedom in revolt’. Like Foucault’s, Artaud’s transgression was against foundations: ‘And when we tell ourselves that we have reached the paroxysm of horror, blood, and flouted laws, of poetry which consecrates revolt, we are obliged to advance still further into an endless vertigo.’\(^{42}\) About the incestuous gender-bending family-background ascribed by history to Heliogabalus, Artaud assured the reader: ‘I am not judging what resulted as History may judge it; this anarchy, this debauchery, please me. They please me from the point of view of History and from the point of view of Heliogabalus’.\(^{43}\) Heliogabalus functioned as a negative exemplum in the historiography of Rome.\(^{44}\) He brought the idol of the sun-god Elagabal from Emesa (Homs) to Rome and installed it in place of Jupiter. He personally enacted every vice and profanation, from deflowering a Vestal Virgin, to transvestism and passive pederasty. Oriental, effeminate, criminal, prodigal, the adolescent emperor (he was fourteen when he came to the throne in 218CE) was everything romanitas was not. What marked Artaud out from the données of historiography was that he said a big Yes to these crimes. His Heliogabalus was a sacred lord of misrule.

Among the essays assembled in Jacques Derrida’s L’écriture et la différence (1967) were two important discussions of Artaud that affiliated the Theatre of Cruelty to deconstruction. For Derrida, Artaudian transgression opened the space of the ‘festival of cruelty’, by rupturing such given ‘ethico-metaphysical prohibitions’ as the opposition between stage and audience (the Theatre of Cruelty is a node in the genealogy of avant-garde participation).\(^{45}\) He was, however, scathing about countercultural grabs at this abysm-fest:

As regards the festival, as invoked by Artaud, and the menace of that which is “without foundation”, the “happening” can only make us smile: it is to the theatre of cruelty what the carnival of Nice might be to the mysteries of Eleusis. This is particularly so due to the fact that the happening substitutes political agitation for the total revolution prescribed by Artaud. The festival must be a political act. And the act of political revolution is theatrical.\(^{46}\)

This theatre is “the art of difference and of expenditure without economy, without reserve, without return, without history. Pure presence as pure difference.”\(^{47}\) The performative contradiction signals différance or pharmakon, here expressed in the Bataillean vocabulary of general economy or the sovereign operation.\(^{48}\) That is to say, the Theatre of Cruelty is an impossible theatre.\(^{49}\) Earlier, Derrida had described Artaudian Cruelty as the ‘nonrepresentable origin of representation’, the ‘archi-manifestation of force’.\(^{50}\) This is what Artaud called ‘another archetypal and dangerous reality, a reality of which the Principles, like dolphins, once they have shown their heads, hurry to dive back into the obscurity of the deep.’\(^{51}\)
Derrida insists that Artaud’s is a ‘revolutionary affirmation’. Why? First, it is anti-Western: Artaud ‘intends the effective, active, and nontheoretical destruction of Western civilisation and its religions’. This is fair. For Artaud, Western theatre has fallen away from the ‘Danger’ of Cruelty, subordinated itself to the text; a ‘Latin’, Occidental state of enervation, against which he calls for ‘the discovery of an active language, active and anarchic, a language in which the customary limits of feelings and words are transcended.’ He poses the Balinese dancing he witnessed at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition as gestural force, contrary and prior to the Western logos. As such this force ‘condemns us, and along with us the state of things in which we live and which is to be destroyed, destroyed with diligence and malice on every level and at every point where it prevents the free exercise of thought.’ Artaud avers: ‘our present social state is iniquitous and should be destroyed. If this is a fact for the theatre to be preoccupied with, it is even more a matter for machine guns.’ Alarm-bells ring here for those who would impose literalism (and liberalism) on Artaudian Cruelty. But he goes on to specify his purpose as the ‘higher and more secret one’ that is ‘the spirit of deep anarchy which is the root of all poetry.’ Artaud’s aim is avant-garde insofar as he wishes to rupture aesthetic autonomy. But aestheticism is a symptom of the Occidental malaise because of its autonomy from ‘mystic attitudes’. It is a case not of broaching the seal between art and politics, but of opening art to limit-experience. The limit-experience of Cruelty (or the Dionysian, or différance, or the Real – non-synonymous substitutes all), is cognate with the transgression of West by East.

At the same time as generating a transgressive ‘idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits’, the Theatre of Cruelty aspired to the ‘total’ experience of the ‘mass spectacle’. It was contemporaneous with projects such as Walter Gropius’s Total Theatre, and Mussolini’s attempts to develop a ‘theatre of masses’ (which in October 1934 was the subject of the star-studded Volta congress, attended by Gropius, Pirandello, Yeats, Copeau, Maeterlinck, to name but a few). There was a fine line between total and totalitarian theatre between the wars, and a general permeability between “fascist,” “socialist,” and even sometimes “liberal” modes of envisaging a theatrical revolution. Again, Artaud’s calls for anarchy coincide with authoritarian language. Derrida is justified in describing the Theatre of Cruelty as a ‘protest against the letter’, which sought ‘emancipation from the text’, its hieratic yet nontheological space releasing the mise-en-scène from the word and the ‘author-god’. But Artaud simultaneously invokes the ‘absolute preponderance of the director whose creative power eliminates words’. Derrida acknowledges the contradictions in Artaud’s extremism. ‘How,’ he asks of the Theatre of Cruelty, ‘are this liberation and this raising of the repressed possible? And not despite, but with the aid of a totalitarian codification and rhetoric of forces?’ Artaud’s politics are in fact radically in doubt. ‘All of The Theatre and its Double’, writes Derrida, ‘could be read – this cannot be done here – as a political manifesto, and moreover a highly ambiguous one.’ This ambiguity proceeds from Artaud’s calling for an impossible theatre of transgression.
‘without the destruction of the political structures of our society.’ Derrida cites the counterblast Artaud aimed at the surrealists (‘these bog-paper revolutionaries’) in 1927 after he left the group. There, Artaud rejected the surrealist coding of theatre as ‘counter-revolutionary’, as if ‘revolution were taboo and we were forbidden to tamper with it forever’:

Well, I do not accept taboos.

I personally feel there are several ways of looking at the Revolution and among them Communism seems to me much the worst, the most restricting. A lazy man’s revolution. I say it out loud, I don’t care whether power passes out of the hands of the middle-classes into those of the workers. This is not the Revolution for me, just transferring power. A revolution which has put the need for greater production as a matter of prime concern, because it insists on stressing mechanisation as the means of easing working conditions, seems to me a eunuch’s revolution. […] We are driven to despair by mechanisation at all levels of contemplation. […] For the moment, let us simply say the most urgently needed revolution is a sort of retro-action in time. We ought to return to the state of mind, or simply even the practices, of the Middle Ages, but genuinely, by a form of essential metamorphosis.

‘Well, I do not accept taboos.’ A declaration of transgression. And yet this is also an anticommunist manifesto, calling for medieval reversion.

Antimodern medievalism; resistance to a dialectical conception of history: pre-echoes of Folie et Déraison. The conventional assumption is that noncontemporaneity is reactionary, and, to be sure, the conservative and fascist right dragooned the premodern in interwar Europe. But as Ernst Bloch recognised, noncontemporaneity was irreducible to fascism. One might even envisage an antifascist noncontemporaneity. This is what dissident surrealism aspired to in the 1930s, culminating in the (notoriously ambiguous) activities of Acéphale and the Collège de Sociologie. The rejection of industrial production that we see here in Artaud, was common to the Collège and the antiparliamentary ‘nonconformist’ movement whose contributions to fascist ideology Zeev Sternhell itemised in Neither Right nor Left. Like the extremists in the ‘neither right nor left’ movement (and like Artaud), the sociologists of the Collège rejected the Marxist privileging of economics, instead ‘asserting the primacy of the symbolic (or of myth, in Georges Sorel’s sense). Both groups had a vision of reanimating a disenchanted world. But the ‘most disturbing similarities’ lay in the strategy these groups adopted towards German and Italian fascism, which was one of ‘a mimetic subversion that appropriates the enemy’s slogans and twists them to its own ends’ – a structure of paranoid identification that resulted in Acéphale’s so-called surfascisme. (If Artaud is not interested in changing society, we must ask in what sense might his aesthetic be political? Recall Benjamin: ‘The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of
aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its Führer cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values." And yet, when the sovereign appears in *Heliogabalus*, he is self-transgressing.)

After 1968, identity politics and ‘revolution in poetic language’ became urgent questions for the group based around the radical journal *Tel Quel*. Artaud was a key term in this discussion. *Tel Quel* had published Derrida’s essays about Artaud, and in 1972 the editor, Philippe Sollers, organised the colloquium at Cérisy-la-Salle entitled ‘Towards a Cultural Revolution: Artaud, Bataille’. The remit was the historical ‘period of crisis’ that had seen ‘fascism, Stalinism, two World Wars, the displacement of history from Europe towards Asia, two or even three revolutions, or more precisely the practical experience that the revolution cannot be stopped.’ Thus Sollers elided 1917 and 1949 with 1968, his geopolitics inflected by a ‘Maoist’ Asiaticism. The student revolt had been marked by a sense of the 1930s happening again, with anti-colonial struggles and De Gaulle as a fascist.

In this revolutionary moment, Sollers declared, ‘the whole of our epoch is animated by *travaillé par* Artaud, by Bataille.’ After the May events, ‘theory itself can no longer be done’ without Artaud and Bataille. Those names ‘or rather gestures’ have begun to ‘cut the subjugated knot of the *subject*.’ This focus on the subject was crucial. Julia Kristeva’s contribution to the conference was entitled ‘*Le Sujet en procès*’ – ‘The Subject in Process/ on Trial’. Like Foucault, Kristeva apprehended Artaud’s writing as desubjectivation, as a prelinguistic ‘negativity which dissolves subjective unity.’

Among the contributors to the Artaud section of the Cérisy-la-Salle conference was Xavière Gauthier, author of the groundbreaking psychoanalytic-feminist critique of surrealism, *Surréalisme et sexualité* (1971). Her lecture, ‘*Héliogabale travestissement*’ (*travestissement* expresses both ‘travesty’ as parody, and the etymological sense of cross-dressing), recounted Freudian thematics of castration and maternity, and proffered some entertaining analogies. Heliogabalus made a dancer leader of the praetorian guard – ‘Transposition: Nureyev commanding the C.R.S. [French riot police] squads.’ Heliogabalus’s modern equivalent is the ‘blouson noir’ – the Hell’s Angel, the rock ‘n’ roller: ‘Direct descendants of Heliogabalus, a whole current of pop music: Mick Jagger and his whorish ways of wiggling, Alice Cooper, his black stockings and his boa between the thighs, Jimmy [sic] Hendrix and the obscene relentlessness with which he wanks or mounts his guitar.’ The parallel with countercultural individualism is suggestive as well as amusing. But simultaneously, Gauthier is disturbed by the perverse authoritarianism of the *anarchiste couronné*: ‘All these decrees [such as appointing senators according to the size of their cocks] made by a man who governs a nation, are those of a tyrant and a thug. “He pursues systematically the perversion and destruction of all value and all order.” Sometimes close to tipping over into fascism, these are fringe, marginal acts, the acts of pirates.’ Heliogabalus as *fascist pervert* – a trope with a
lineage in left-wing thought. Irruption of the signifier fascism into a political discourse scripted as antifascist struggle.

Post-68, Artaud and Bataille offered the theoretical neo-avant-garde a Nietzschean ‘antifascism’ distinct from the humanism of the PCF. And yet Nietzsche, Bataille: the ideological sirens wail. Nietzsche because of his posthumous imbrication with fascism; Bataille because of his ‘fascinated’ deconstruction of it. Targets of committed critics from Lukács to Habermas; more recently of liberal Nazi-hunters such as Richard Wolin. And now Artaud is on the hit-list. His first advocates in the theatre were already nervous. In 1968, Peter Brook felt bound to ask: ‘is Artaud in his passion dragging us back to a nether world, away from striving, away from the light […]; is there even a fascist smell in the cult of unreason? Is it a cult of the invisible, anti-intelligent? Is it a denial of the mind?’ In the same year, Peter Schechner wrote of his ‘hidden fear’ that Artaudian theatre might be ‘perilously close to ecstatic fascism.’ And indeed one might well detect a fascist whiff in Artaud’s extremist, antimodern advocacy of Danger, Cruelty, ecstatic experience and solar myth.

Later, in the polemics around postmodernism, we find Artaud accused of a ‘totalitarian bent’ that ‘results from his negation of the subject and his antihumanism that have made Artaud a saint in the postmodernist calendar.’ A sentiment – that poststructuralism prepares the way for fascism – recently rehearsed as the conclusion of Kimberley Jannarone’s provocative attempted exposé of Artaud’s ‘fascist underpinnings’, Artaud and his Doubles. Habermas was surely correct to say that between the wars ‘there was no theory of contemporaneity not affected to its core by the penetrating force of fascism.’ Artaud himself wrote in May 1933 that in ‘the harrowing and catastrophic period in which we live, we feel the urgent need for a theatre which events do not surpass [ne dépassent], whose resonance is deep within us, dominating the instability of the times.’ Artaud’s writings of the 1930s are not separable from the fascist moment. And yet their specific historical conditions must be worthy of consideration, lest fascist be a ritual banishing-word, a mere token of miasma or unrepresentability.

Rather than investigating Artaud’s local contexts, Jannarone takes a long view, grounding her argument in Isaiah Berlin’s liberal-rationalist account of fascism’s roots in the counter-Enlightenment. (There is ad-hominem irony in this enlistment. Berlin’s collusion with military-industrial anticommunism during the Vietnam war was on a different ethical plane from Artaud’s tarrying with phantasms.) A concatenation of binaries ensues from the opposition between ‘man’s [sic] powers of reason’ and ‘irrationalism’. Jannarone’s argument rests on the assertion that Artaud’s irrationalism was more ‘consonant with the discourse of the reactionary Right between the wars than with the liberal Left.’ What this schema
suppresses (along with the radical right) is the positionality – one well-represented in 1930s Paris – which is both anti-fascist and anti-liberal.

For Jannarone, Artaud and fascism fall into the same counter-Enlightenment bracket:

A furious rather than contemplative attitude, a rancour towards Western civilisation rather than a liberal curiosity towards ‘other’ cultures, and a fundamental basis in violence rather than a search for beauty or peace underlay this interwar irrationalist resurgence.93

Given these bourgeois terms of disapproval, it is unsurprising that surrealism – which exhibited all these negative characteristics, these characteristics of negativity – barely features in *Artaud and his Doubles*. When surrealism does appear, Jannarone misrepresents it as seeking to remove ‘hindrances to self-expression and cultural exploration so that a greater number of people would be happy and so that the individual might come into his or her unique voice. This liberal attitude, as we will see, is the opposite of Artaud’.94 Only a passing acquaintance with historical surrealism is necessary to recognise this liberal-humanist image as a gross distortion. It is true that Artaud renounced surrealism’s Marxian politics when he left the group. And yet there was continuity between surrealism’s anticolonial revolutionary-defeatism and Artaud’s anti-Western Orientalism.

Jannarone’s argument proceeds by way of resemblance, seeking out transnational ‘correspondences’, ‘affinities’, ‘consonances’ and ‘commonalities’ between *The Theatre and its Double* and ‘the maelstrom of ideas that fuelled the early stages of fascism’.95 The latter metaphor indicates the unstable idealism of this style of ‘intellectual history’, on which Jannarone attempts to impose order by recourse to theorists of ‘generic’ or ‘ideal-type’ (sic) fascism. The usefulness of this essentialist school is questionable (as is its rhetoric on occasion).96 It is striking that while Jannarone cites Lukács’s notorious post-war Stalinist tract, *The Destruction of Reason* (which denounced not only Nietzsche but Freud as fascist),97 she eschews contemporaneous theories of fascism, such as those of Wilhelm Reich or, most pertinently, Georges Bataille. Bataille’s essay, ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism’, published in the non-aligned leftist journal *La Critique sociale* in 1933-1934, sought to interpret fascist sovereignty in relation to the anthropology of the sacred and a politics of affect.98 Scholars such as Michèle Richman and Gavin Grindon have convincingly located Bataille in his intellectual milieu, allowing us to discount unbalanced accusations of essential fascism.99 While important reservations have been raised about its historicity (notably by Giorgio Agamben),100 Bataille’s attempt to think fascist sovereignty in relation to the heterogeneous – that which is ‘incommensurate’ with everyday life – is relevant to the present discussion. According to Bataille, as opposed to the ignoble heterogeneous of the slave (which Bataille privileges), the fascist heterogeneous, while drawing on irrational affect, is that of the master. Its authoritarianism is constituted ‘by an act excluding all filth’, and by a sadism
purified of eroticism or perversion. One might apply this understanding of fascism, as grounded in a primary repression or abjection, to the French far right between the wars. Equally, in thinking about Heliogabalus, it will become clear that there Artaud affirmed what fascism excluded, in particular at the level of sexuality and gender.

There is in fact surprisingly little agreement among historians about what constitutes fascism, or to what extent authoritarian nationalism in interwar France might be classed as such. In any case, the labour of nomination might be misplaced. Refining the category of fascism may be less productive than tracking the local operations of extreme nationalist discourse. As Sandrine Sanos has recently emphasised, far-right intellectuals in 1930s France perceived the contemporary crisis above all as one of the subject: as a crisis in ‘man’. Far from an antihumanism, this was a militant, hygienic humanism, where the (Western, masculine, heterosexual) subject was at stake. Abjection was the privileged mode by which this discourse prosecuted its anti-Semitic, xenophobic, homophobic politics of exclusion. It is in this French context that we must read Artaud. Just prior to the Heliogabalus project, Artaud found himself under attack from the far right. His 1932 manifesto, ‘The Theatre of Cruelty’, had met with derision in the pages of L’action française, whose critics espoused the classical aesthetics associated with the authoritarian nationalism of Charles Maurras. It is noteworthy that the peculiar affirmation of the plague in The Theatre and its Double transvalues the language of the bacillus with which Maurrassians condemned their ethnic, political and aesthetic adversaries. We should also note that Artaud’s plague is from Beirut, a ‘virus from the Orient’. This is a strategy of affirmation, affirmation of the excluded.

‘The future of Western civilisation, indeed the future of mankind, is today in jeopardy.’ So began Henri Massis’s 1927 bestseller about the ‘crisis of Western civilisation and the threat of Asiaticism’, Défense de l’Occident (Defence of the West), a text which defined the political discourse of East and West in interwar France. Massis was a rightwing journalist, editor of the chauvinist Revue universelle, where he worked with Charles Maurras. Defence of the West – so titled to contradistinguish it from Oswald Spengler’s Decline of the West – postulated a Manichaean division in the geopolitics of culture or ideas, between an East beginning at the Rhine, and a West identified with a classical humanism of which the Roman Church was the culmination:

The radical and essential opposition between the East and West lies in the different idea that each has of man and his relation to the universe. In the West, man has desired to be; he has not consented to lose himself in things, or to regard the human person as a simple dependency of nature, which, for the Asiatic, plays itself out in the illusion of living forms, and entangles all life in an immense ambiguity.

For Massis, everything in Western identity proceeded from the ‘grand unitary principle’ of ‘Judaean-Christian monotheism, “garbed in the heritage of Graeco-Latin culture”,’ which
asserted ‘the unity, the personality and the finality of being’: this resistance, he wrote, ‘of form to the formless, of unity to chaos, is what might be called the “creative limits” of the West. A classical aesthetic, and the model subject homologous with it – rational, bounded, sealed off against otherness, indeterminacy and the flows of desire – underpinned this logic.

For Massis and others like him the threat of the East was revolutionary and irrationalist. Massis rehearsed a move well-practiced on the French authoritarian right, of mapping this threat onto the ancient dualism between civilisation and barbarism. He wrote that

A return of the barbarians, that is to say, a further triumph of the least conscious and least civilised parts of humanity over the most conscious and most civilised, no longer seems impossible to us. The Bolshevist revolution has familiarised us with this thought, which yesterday was still monstrous, and which, today, forces itself on our minds.¹⁰⁹

The Orient precisely threatened the integrity of the humanist masculine subject:

Personality, unity, stability, authority, continuity – these are the root ideas of the West. We are asked to break these to pieces for the sake of a doubtful Asiaticism in which all the forces of the human personality dissolve and return to nothingness. We are asked to destroy the lineaments of man, which he has spent long years and methodical and persevering efforts in acquiring.¹¹⁰

Massis saw the Asiatic forces of dissolution, revolution, mysticism and unreason as invading the cultural and intellectual domain, which was where they had to be repelled. ‘Let the forces of the mind,’ Massis wrote, ‘organise the defence’ of the ‘Roman idea.’¹¹¹

Massis railed against the turncoats who, ‘on the pretence of opening us up to the ideas of the East, are betraying civilisation. […] These are the real fosterers of the crisis in Western thought, or, to put it bluntly, in thought itself.’¹¹² In the mid-1920s there was no more extreme example of such cultural defeatism than what has been called the ‘reverse-Orientalist […] revolutionary masochism’ of the surrealists by Denis Hollier has argued, the surrealists simply inverted the East/West hierarchical opposition, conflating the North African rebellion with Asia in that broad, imaginary category of alterity, ‘the Orient’. The operation of this dualism is evident in the layout that Antonin Artaud used in the one issue he edited of La Révolution surréaliste, in 1925, where the negative ‘Address to the Pope’ sat opposite the positive ‘Address to the Dalai Lama’. (This antinomy owes something to Artaud’s reading of René Guénon, the
Orientalist mystic whose 1924 book Orient et Occident had posited an essential, hierarchical opposition between the spiritually rich East and its bankrupt Western other.\textsuperscript{116}

After his expulsion from the surrealist group and the failure of his Théâtre Alfred Jarry, Artaud’s cathexis of the East/West opposition resurfaced in the early 1930s. His identification with an Oriental position can be glimpsed in his 1931 plan for a ‘poetic account’ of the Battle of Salamis (480 BCE), at which the Greek navy had famously vanquished the Persians. By focusing on the psychology of the Persian king Xerxes, nourished as it was by the ‘Spirit of the Orient’, Artaud intended to show how the defeat demonstrated the ‘superiority’ of that spirit ‘on the plane of the absolute’.\textsuperscript{117} It is in this context, of an identity politics of East and West, that I want to look at Heliogabalus, or the Anarchist Crowned.

Heliogabalus starts out as Elagabalus, boy-priest-king and personification of the Sun, in the Syrian city of Emesa at the beginning of the third century AD. This Syria conforms hyperbolically to the Orient abjected by Massis, in that it is barbarian, mystical and indeed abject. At the outset, Artaud acknowledges the ideological or civilisational stakes:

From the geographical point of view there had always been this barbarian fringe around what is usually called the Roman Empire, and within this Roman Empire must be placed Greece, which invented, historically, the notion of barbarism. And from this point of view we are, we people of the Occident, the worthy sons of this stupid mother, since for us the civilised are ourselves and all else – this shows up our universal ignorance – is identified with barbarism.\textsuperscript{118}

In fact, claims Artaud, the Orient was the origin of anything in the Greco-Roman world that participated in the great mystical Tradition (with a capital T). Although Heliogabalus’s temple of the Sun no longer stands, according to Artaud its present-day site, Homs, ‘stinks like Emesa stank, since love, meat and shit are all to be found in the open. And pastry shops are near latrines, ceremonial slaughterers beside ordinary butchers. The whole of it shouts out, spills forth, makes love, squirts poison and sperm, just as we ourselves might hawk and spit.’\textsuperscript{119} Artaud’s Orient is a scene of the sexual and sacrificial miscegenation of substances, a commingling of ‘urine, sweat, sperm, spittle, excrement, human blood’ and the ‘plasma of certain animals’. In ancient Emesa, the worshippers of Elagabalus’s sun-cult become a cloacal horde, rankly autochthonous and indistinct from nature, as ‘all around the temple, in multitudes issuing from huge black sewer-mouths, stream forth the servants of the rites, as if born of the earth’s own sweat.’\textsuperscript{120}

The religion of ancient Syria is fundamentally sexual and anti-Christian: ‘At the moment of its death – just when the religion of Ichtheus, the perfidious Fish, made signs of the cross over the guilty parts of the body – the religion of Elagabalus exalted the dangerous activity of the dark member, the organ of reproduction.’ When Heliogabalus raises an army and journeys to Rome – in a ‘strange sexual procession, a dazzling explosion of festivities’, with a
‘ten ton Phallus’ drawn ‘at the speed of a galloping zebra’ by ‘three hundred bulls, enraged and harassed by packs of howling but chained hyenas’ – he becomes a ‘St Louis of the Sex Crusade, who’d carry a male member to serve as cross, spear or sword’. This is an anti-crusade, a trajectory both topographically and morally opposed to the medieval Catholic march on the Holy Land. The East comes to – comes on to, comes all over – the West.

Heliogabalus enters Rome ‘on the dawn of the Ides of March’ – and he ‘enters it backwards’, preceded by the giant Phallus. This, ‘from the viewpoint of Roman custom means that Heliogabalus is entering Rome as a ruler, but backwards, and that at the outset he’s had himself buggered by the whole Roman empire.’ It is, says, Artaud, a ‘profession of pederastic faith’ consistent with ‘a systematic and joyous demoralisation of the Latin mind and consciousness’. Heliogabalus jettisons the Roman toga, assumes the Phoenician purple, and gives ‘that example of anarchy which, for a Roman emperor consists of adopting the costume of another country and for a man in wearing women’s clothing, adorning oneself with jewels, pearls, feathers, coral and talismans’. ‘Sporting on his pubis a sort of iron spider whose legs tear at his skin and draw blood with each extravagant movement of his thighs dusted with saffron – his member dipped in gold’, the body-modified Heliogabalus, like a ‘hooligan and an irreverent libertarian’, taunts the Senate, asking if the senators too ‘got themselves buggered in their youth’; Artaud imagines the ‘venerable greybeards’, ‘pale with shame, bowing their outraged heads, swallowing their humiliation.’ He deflowers the Vestal Virgin with ‘blasphemous and sacrilegious intent’, ‘pollut[ing]’ the ‘climate of the Palladium’.

The arrival of the Eastern sex-cult leader in the capital of the Western Empire is an egregious category mistake: ‘he puts an elephant in the place of a donkey, replaces a dog with a horse, puts a lion where a tabby cat would have done’. Heliogabalus is a lord of misrule, calling ‘weakness strength and theatre, reality’, ‘overturning the received order’, choosing ministers by the enormity of their pricks and appointing prefects with the job of ‘systematically perverting’ the young. Artaud cautions us not to ascribe to madness or the youth of this teenaged emperor that which is ‘the systematic disparagement of an order’, the expression of ‘a desire for orchestrated demoralisation.’ The ritual buggery, the heterotopic transvestism, the shaming of the elders, the pollution of the Palladium, constitute, he reiterates, a systematic ‘perversion and destruction of all value and all order’, a programme of ‘monstrous moral disorganisation’.

Artaud’s vocabulary of ‘moral disorganisation’ and the ‘demoralisation of the Latin mind’ could have been lifted from the Revue universelle. Just as Artaud affirms the abjected geopolitical other of the ‘Orient’, he affirms Heliogabalus’s transgression of normative gender and sexuality. In the interwar period, the French far right increasingly defined national identity in relation to heterosexist masculinity and reproductive virility. This heteronormative discourse was continuous with longstanding anxieties in the Third Republic around masculinity and birth-rate – anxieties heightened by the 1914-1918 war. When André Gide defended pederasty in Corydon (1925), in an attempt to render French the so-called ‘German
vice’ he strove to code it as virile, classical, and compatible with familial reproduction.\(^{127}\) To the contrary, Artaud ridicules the ‘hearth and home mob’, emphasising Heliogabalus’s effeminate and Eastern characteristics, and the gender trouble of his parentage (his virile mother, his effeminate father).\(^{128}\) Again, *Heliogabalus* participates in the extraordinary pullulation of castration imagery that characterised the interwar avant-garde. There is a nonreproductive negativity at stake here.

To be sure, a concern with virility and *natalité* was common across the political spectrum in the Third Republic. Again, there is no doubt that the conservative and extreme right used the discourse of sexual deviance to repudiate perceived political, aesthetic or ethnocultural deviance.\(^{129}\) In the words of one right-wing newspaper, responding to a homosexual scandal in 1933, ‘the inversion of the genital sense very often calls forth the inversion of the national sense’.\(^{130}\) But recent research has made clear that homophobic language was not limited to the political right in interwar France. It was also a fixture of the antifascist left.\(^{131}\) Indeed it was an aspect of antifascism which developed after the war into a full-blown trope of critical theory.\(^{132}\) In this context, Artaud’s 1934 celebration of Heliogabalus’s ‘religious pederasty’ truly transgresses the limits of political discourse, since the repudiation of homosexuality was common across the political spectrum. For confirmation of this fact we need look no further than the homophobia of André Breton.

Now, the discourse of sexuality in interwar France assumed an essential relation between sexual dimorphism and homosexuality, deploying the language of the ‘third sex’ and the hermaphrodite to describe homosexuals, and *Heliogabalus* participates in this language. If the Orient/Occident dualism determines the ethnocultural valence of *Heliogabalus*, then its mystical dimension is governed by a cosmic antagonism of masculine and feminine ‘principles’. Heliogabalus’s own sexuality emerges as an attempt to combine phallic sun-worship with femininity:

Heliogabalus, the pederast king who wanted to be a woman, was a priest of the Masculine. He achieved in himself the identity of opposites, but did not achieve it without harm, and his devout pederasty had no origin other than an obstinate and abstract conflict between Masculine and Feminine.\(^ {133}\)

Heliogabalus becomes performative contradiction, a ‘life-size statue, taken to the utmost extreme of religious mania, aberration and lucid lunacy, the image of all the human contradictions and of the contradiction within principle’. This vision of a dualistically gendered and sexualised universe bears the inscription, the horizon of expectations, of the occult revival of its day (and indeed Heliogabalus’s transgressive sexuality finds parallels in the magick of Aleister Crowley).\(^{134}\) Heliogabalus incarnates the supposed contradiction between god and man, man and woman, and yet ‘far more’ than the divine ‘Hermaphrodite’ appears in this ‘devious’, dual image of ‘the end of contradictions’: and that is, writes Artaud, ‘the idea of
ANARCHY’. Anarchy, ‘at the point to which Heliogabalus pushes it, is poetry realised.’¹³⁵ This magus is the embodiment of a certain point where opposites conjoin, reminiscent of André Breton’s telos. This embodiment of poetry, of a surrealist operation – is queer.

The coding of Heliogabalus’s homosexuality as sublation harks back to late-nineteenth-century Decadence, in the shape of Jean Lombard’s extraordinary novel, L’Agonie, which depicted Heliogabalus’s ‘sexual revolution’ as a mystical apocalypse.¹³⁶ Louis Estève’s 1933 pamphlet, ‘Elagabalus, a Lenin of Androgyne’, shows that at least one interwar pundit of sexuality was reading L’Agonie in the 1930s, and connecting Heliogabalus’s pederasty with revolutionary politics.¹³⁷ For Artaud, the metaphysics of androgyne – which is to say, of binary sex – works to contain the negativity or limit-experience at stake in Heliogabalus’s transgressions. Derrida describes this kind of move as the ‘duplicity of Artaud’s text, simultaneously more and less than a stratagem’.¹³⁸ Heliogabalus is on the threshold of the transition from dialectic to transgression. The metaphysics of sexuality – which in the nineteenth century became precisely a mysticism of sexuality – persists, even as its limits are transgressed.

Artaud’s narrative arc – which ends with the murder of Heliogabalus in the palace latrines and the expulsion from Rome of his corpse through a sewer – transgresses the oppositions West/East, civilisation/barbarism, straight/queer. The Action Française critics repudiated Artaud’s dramaturgy on the grounds of its anticlassical, Romantic excesses – which, interestingly, they related to the ‘violence and excess’ visible in Nazi Germany.¹³⁹ There was an Orientalist strand in German nationalism, which expressed itself in Aryanism, the swastika and so on.¹⁴⁰ But the Nazi aesthetic was neoclassical. There is surely a certain mimicry of fascism in Artaud’s Heliogabalus. Heliogabalus is a sovereign in the era of the Führer, Il Duce and Rexism (Belgian fascism). But in his ‘perversion’, Heliogabalus transgresses the virility and compulsory heterosexuality of fascism. Again, though it may be possible to identify a ‘Nazi sublime’ in, say, Himmler’s wartime rhetoric, which ‘involved a fascination with excess or unheard-of transgression’,¹⁴¹ crucially, that ‘sublimity’ was invested in the phobic expulsion of contaminating presences – the opposite movement from that which we see in Artaud’s affirmation of abjection. Although Heliogabalus was ultimately expelled from the Roman order as human waste, Artaud honours his memory. Heliogabalus himself, with his total insubordination to the Roman regime, would seem to personify a Bataillean sovereignty, sovereignty as excessive expenditure or dépense: with him there is ‘everywhere prodigality, excess, abundance, immoderation’; his is a ‘spirit undisciplined and fanatical, a real king, a rebel, a crazed individualist.’¹⁴² Sovereignty is of course a contested term, bound up with the history of fascism.¹⁴³ Artaud’s Heliogabalus is inseparable from that history. And yet it remains unassimilable to fascist ideology.


11. Artaud was hospitalised in 1937 on his return from his disastrous trip to Ireland to return what he believed was St Patrick’s cane. On which see David Rattray, *How I Became One of the Invisible* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1992), 143-172. Artaud claimed to have met Hitler on a visit to Berlin in 1932, and in 1939 addressed the following spell to him: ‘Dear Sir, In 1932 in the Ider Café in Berlin, on one of the evenings when I made your acquaintance and shortly before you took power, I showed you a series of roadblocks on a map that was not just a map of geography, roadblocks against me, an act of force aimed in a certain number of directions you indicated to me. Today Hitler I lift the roadblocks I set down! The Parisians need gas. Yours, A.A.—P.S. Be it understood, dear sir, that this is hardly an invitation; it is above all a warning.’ Quoted in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), 163-164.


18 James Miller claims that the very tactic of the litany proceeds from Artaud’s 1947 essay, ‘Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society’, arguing that Folie et Déraison is crisscrossed with ‘countless allusions and references’ to Artaud. Miller, The Passion of Michel Foucault, 414, n. 95.

19 Foucault, History of Madness, 168.

20 Foucault, History of Madness, 28.


26 ‘The limit-experience is the response that man encounters when he has decided to put himself radically into question.’ Maurice Blanchot, The Infinite Conversation, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 203.


29 Foucault, History of Madness, 532.

30 Foucault, History of Madness, 28.

31 Foucault, History of Madness, xxx

32 Foucault, History of Madness, xxx.


35 Foucault, History of Madness, xxix.
36 Foucault, History of Madness, xxxiii.
39 Foucault, ‘A Preface to Transgression’, 44.
43 Artaud, Heliogabalus, 19 (translation modified).
45 Derrida, Writing and Difference, 244.
46 Derrida, ‘Writing and Difference’, 245.
49 ‘There is no theatre in the world today which fulfils Artaud’s desire.’ Derrida, Writing and Difference, 247-248.
50 Derrida, Writing and Difference, 234, 238.
52 Derrida, Writing and Difference, 189.
53 Derrida, ‘Writing and Difference’, 237
54 Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 41.
55 Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 47.
56 Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 42 (translation modified).
58 Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 85-86.
60 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 187.
64 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 328, n.37.
68 Hollier, *Absent without Leave*, 78-79.
69 Hollier, *Absent without Leave*, 79.
72 Margaret Atack, May 68 in Fiction and Film: Rethinking Society, Rethinking Representation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 112.
75 Kristeva, ‘Le sujet en procès’, 50.
80 Gauthier, ‘Héliogabale travestissement’, 192.
81 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 216.


Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 216.

Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 84. Translation modified.


Jannarone, Artaud and his Doubles, 50.

Jannarone, Artaud and his Doubles, 65.

Jannarone, Artaud and his Doubles, 67.

Jannarone, Artaud and his Doubles, 15.

Jannarone, Artaud and his Doubles, 67.


Jannarone, Artaud and his Doubles, 27.


Agamben rejects the notion of the ambiguity of the sacred as a ‘scientific mythologeme’. Agamben, Homo Sacer, 80.


The literature on this topic is vast. For a recent review, see Brian Jenkins, ed., France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right (London: Berghahn, 2005).


107 Massis, *Defence of the West*, 3.


110 Massis, *Defence of the West*, 52.


112 Massis, *Defence of the West*, 12-13

113 Massis, *Defence of the West*, 132.


115 Massis, *Defence of the West*, 3.


118 Artaud, *Heliogabalus*, 16.


120 Artaud, *Heliogabalus*, 43.


123 Artaud, *Heliogabalus*, 122-123.


133 Artaud, Heliogabalus, 72.

134 For a comparison of Crowley with Bataille see Keith Urban, Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

135 Artaud, Heliogabalus, 133.


137 Louis Estève, Elagabal ou un Lénine de l’androgynat (Orléans, 1933).

138 Derrida, Writing and Difference, 194.

139 Sreen, ‘Resisting the Plague’, 94.

140 Cf. Marchand, ‘German Orientalism and the Decline of the West’.


142 Artaud, Heliogabalus, 133.

143 Agamben, Homo Sacer.