

Lost in translation?

Nancy Spero / Antonin Artaud / Jacques Derrida

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Abstract

This essay seeks to situate the influence of Antonin Artaud on the work of the American artist Nancy Spero within the realm of linguistic dislocation, drawing on her experiences in Paris during the period 1959-64. The problematic nature of language, translation and nationality in the literature surrounding her work is highlighted, and an alternative methodology is proposed: drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva and particularly on that of Jacques Derrida, the essay asks whether Spero's quotation of Artaud can be seen as effective through the medium of difference rather than identification.

It will always be me speaking a foreign language with an always recognisable accent.

Antonin Artaud¹

'If you're not French how can you understand Artaud?' This was the question posed by Margit Rowell, curator of the Museum of Modern Art's 1996 exhibition of drawings by the almost legendary French artist, poet and theorist Antonin Artaud. Responding, at the Drawing Centre in New York on 10 November 1996, was a group of artists, critics and art historians, both American and European: among them the late Jacques Derrida, Artaud scholar and publisher of the poetry and literary magazine *Sulfur* Clayton Eschelman, post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak, *Semiotext(e)* founder and editor Sylvère Lotringer and Nancy Spero, the only artist on the panel, whose work has, since the late 1960s, been allied with the writings of the Frenchman.

The curator's question, of course, was a rhetorical one. Yet the matter of how, and with what implications, a female, indeed feminist, American artist like Spero accesses the words and images of the Frenchman Artaud, remains unsatisfactorily addressed in much of the writing on the subject.² The difference in gender is difficult to ignore, and yet the relation of Spero's artistic methods to the divide between America and Europe during the 1960s is even less often addressed, with many studies of American artists in Paris limited to considerations of Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Larry Rivers.³ How and why did Spero journey to

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France and Artaud's writings and drawings travel to America? And where might we situate the collision of their work?

Benjamin Buchloh's insightful analysis a decade ago of Spero's relation to American modernist works of the period attempted to refute the usual marginal positioning of her work, claiming that she aims 'to establish "other" traditions within the territory of modernism.'⁴ Buchloh's trajectory, however, is problematic in its limitations: it begins, by his own admission, with the work of Johns in the early 1950s and marches toward the conceptual, analytic peak of American art in 1968, though the iconic nature of that date and the revolution that it brought to the streets of Paris, with the city's artists and writers at its heart, remains unacknowledged. Spero's move to Paris in 1959 is posited as the deliberate reaction to the hegemony of the New York school that it undoubtedly was, yet the impact of those Paris experiences on her intellectual and artistic formation are insufficiently explored, despite Buchloh's focus on the *Artaud Paintings* (1969-70) and the *Codex Artaud* (1970-71), both completed after her return to the United States, but certainly influenced by her time in France.

Spero and her husband, painter Leon Golub, were certainly motivated to move to Paris to escape the hegemonic domination of the discourse of abstraction in the United States, which culminated for the couple in a particularly scathing critical response to Golub's work in the Museum of Modern Art's 1959 display of figurative painting.⁵ They lived in France until 1964. Though moving in largely ex-patriot literary and musical circles during this five-year period, Spero and Golub were exposed to important contemporary French artists on the Paris circuit, thriving within the international community of artists that passed through the city. Spero found the gallerists of Paris more willing to accept her as an artist, holding three solo shows at the Galerie Breteau, and taking part in various group exhibitions. The gallery maintained strong connections with the surrealist group, with whom Antonin Artaud had been involved intermittently and for whose leader André Breton he was something of a hero.⁶ The Cultural Centre on the rue de Dragon, run by the visionary USIS cultural attaché Darthea Speyer, also provided a gateway to the city's art world, and provided a venue for Golub's first European show.⁷

Spero once again encountered Jean Dubuffet, to whom they had been first introduced during his major exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago some years earlier, and



who had during the 1940s coined the term 'art brut' with which Antonin Artaud's oeuvre has often been associated. Under this designation, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the 'art of the insane' had been exhibited by major art venues in Paris, including a permanent installation in the basement of the Galerie René Drouin. The naïve aesthetic of Dubuffet's own work proposed the possibility of recovering a voice for the 'outsider,' offering Spero an important alternative to the New York School model.

Golub exhibited at the Galerie Iris Clert, where Yves Klein had created his notorious *Le Vide* in 1958, and Nouveau Réaliste artist Arman displayed a gallery full of refuse titled *Le Plein*. In 1961 Pierre Restany's exhibition *40° au dessus de Dada* was held at the Galerie J in Paris. This and the American Embassy collaboration between members of the Nouveau Réalistes group and American neo-dadaists in the same year, would have introduced Spero to the possibility of crossing the strict national boundaries set up by Abstract Expressionism and its proponents.⁸

It is during this time too that Spero first encountered the work of Artaud, at least fragmentally, well before she acquired an anthology of Artaud's poems in English sometime in 1969.⁹ French publisher Gallimard had begun to publish Artaud's complete works in French in 1956, while his texts appeared occasionally in the journal *Tel Quel*. Officially formed in 1960, the latter featured Artaud's writing several times in 1960 and 1961, and its layout was partially devised by his close friend Paule Thévenin. As Patrick French and Roland-François Lack have noted, *Tel Quel* was not only a journal of 'creative writing' but one dedicated to the radical textual practices and theoretical writings of its protagonists, Marcelin Pleynet, Denis Roche, Philippe Sollers and, later, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida.¹⁰ In 1965 *Tel Quel* would dedicate an issue to Artaud's texts which would include Derrida's first contribution to the journal, 'La Parole soufflée.' This and the study of Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* by French theatre groups meant that his was a constant, if alternative, voice on the Paris literary and art scene throughout the 1960s. This voice was strong, too, in May 1968 with the publication in Jean-Jacques Lebel's revolutionary broadsheet *Le Pavé* of Artaud's 1925 letter to the Rectors of European Universities and the broadcast of his 1947 'To Have Done with the Judgement of God'. Though Spero had left Paris by this time, the primacy given to a linguistic consideration



of Artaud during her years there seems to correspond to her own concerns with the function of language.

The first translation of Artaud's writings made widely available to an American audience was published by City Lights in San Francisco in 1965 (in an edition still available today). Its editor Jack Hirschman was a friend of Spero, who described him as an 'Artaud freak.'¹¹ Hirschman used translations provided by American poets living in Paris and the texts provided a fashionable influence on literary and experimental theatre groups surrounding the underground bookshop in San Francisco. The markings that fill the margins of Spero's copy attest to her continual return to Artaud's works. Despite owning the Hirschorn edition, however, Spero repeatedly stresses the importance to her of the text in its original French.¹² This stance hints at her engagement with Artaud's works not only in terms of the now familiar sense of alienation and isolation that they express, but also on a fundamentally linguistic level, concerned not only with the subject of Artaud's screams but with what she later identifies as the 'disrupture of language' itself.¹³

Spero's direct quotation of Artaud first appears in the variously sized *Artaud Paintings* (1969-70). With their slanting, hand-written painted incantations, these are often regarded as pivotal in Spero's move from figuration to her inclusion of text within the pictorial space. In fact, though her earlier works, including the *Paris Black Paintings* (1959-64), project a very different aesthetic from both the *Artaud Paintings* and that of the document typewriter font of the thirty-eight *Codex Artaud* scrolls (1970-71), we can discern in them the seeds of Spero's later works, both in terms of her use of the blank page and her investigation of language. In particular, we may turn to a work like the apocalyptic *Les Anges, Merde, Fuck You* (1960; fig. 1), as one of the earliest examples of her exploration of linguistic elements.¹⁴ White words are painted on paper scrubbed with black ink, patches of paper still visible, particularly around the ragged edges, where the artist's name, also in black ink, is almost obliterated. Floating above the words, three disembodied heads with dark eye holes, gaping mouths and a central red tongue projecting into the void prefigure those which will become a motif throughout Spero's work of the late 1960s and early 1970s.





Fig. 1: Nancy Spero, *Les Anges, Merde, Fuck You*, 1960, oil on canvas, 43.8 x 55.9 cm.

Collection of the artist. © Nancy Spero.

Having been in Paris for only a year when this work was produced, Spero's early use of a foreign language reveals vocabulary that is both sublime and obscene: noun and exclamation, divorced from the syntax that follows a basic acquisition of vocabulary. The words, iconic and contradictory, exist in shadowy limbo, isolated from any kind of context that might hint at a graspable meaning, ripped from the world of sentences and sense. We are reminded already of Julia Kristeva's identification of obscenity without objective referent in the work of Artaud, a function that she interprets as a means of resisting the symbolic order.¹⁵ The work bears early witness to the insertion of the body into the linguistic order, the dislocation of meaning and the destruction of the self, that Spero would discover in the 'fissured, deteriorating, petrifying, liquefying, coagulating, empty, impenetrably dense' mind of Artaud.¹⁶

In one of the later *Artaud Paintings* (1969; fig. 2), Spero quotes Artaud's plea 'why couldn't it have been some world without numbers or letters,' the tiny phrase hanging, without



interrogative punctuation – a statement, an incantation? – in the middle of the paper page above much larger, blood red nonsense poetry: whilst not escaping letters here, we are at least freed of words, led back to the primal, guttural voice that Artaud strives for in much of his writing, and that resonate with the work of several French post-war avant-garde movements such as the Lettrists.

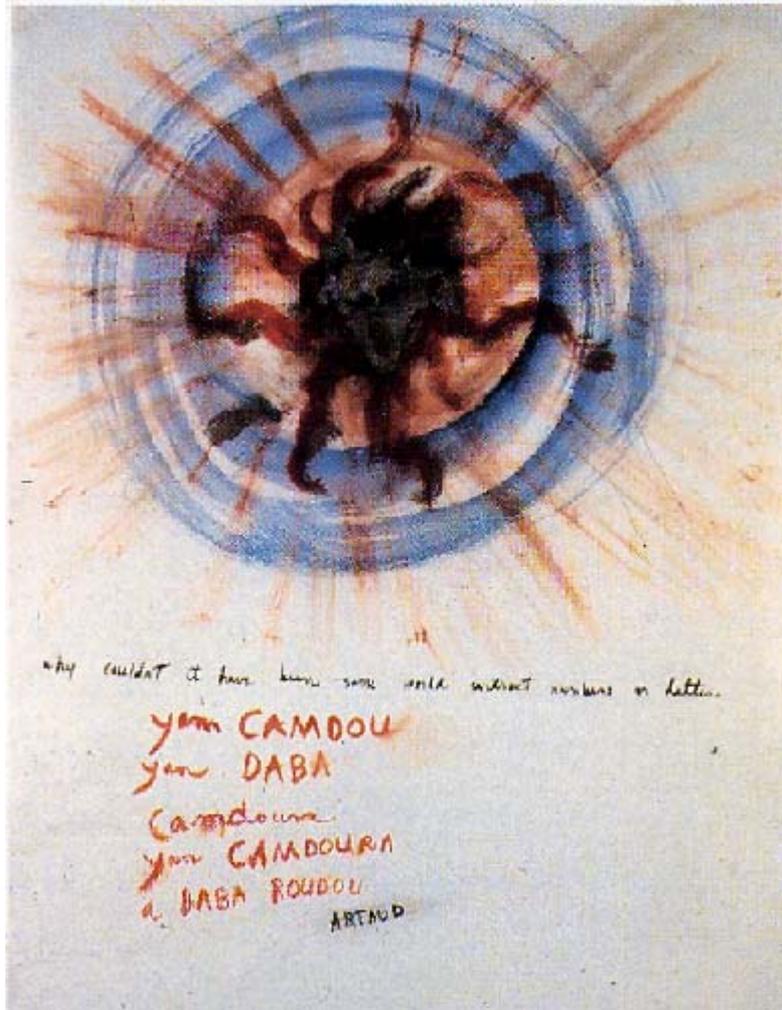


Fig. 2: Nancy Spero, Artaud *Painting: 'Why Couldn't It...'*, 1969, gouache and ink on paper, 64 x 51 cm. © Nancy Spero.

The upper half of Spero's work is devoted to an image reminiscent of an explosion, the big bang, strokes of paint swirling around a central black vortex, surrounded by rays of red and auratic blue bands. The all-consuming black fog of *Les Anges ...* has become concentrated, not exploding but *imploding*, offering us a glimpse of that primal nothingness which exists before the codification of language and of visual symbol. In the centre of the



blackness is a ghostly head, similar to those of the earlier painting, with three dark holes for eye sockets and mouth. Sound becomes the means by which the shapes of the image might be understood, resonating throughout the work, from this ominous head to Artaud's 'verse' and back again, situating meeting of the two within the realm of corporeal noise, wailing, screaming, sighing, the expulsion and impulsion of air into the bodily cavity.

Kristeva's 1972 psycholinguistic analysis of Artaud's use of poetic language identifies his writing as the process by which the 'exteriority' of language is called forth. Thus the other of language itself is called into play: Artaud is 'in conflict and thus in dialectic with himself.'¹⁷ For her, this state of the pre-verbal is conjured through the production of such 'isolated, non-lexicalised phonemes.'¹⁸ She describes Artaud's vision in his own words. It is both attractive and repulsive, seductive and nauseating: 'The fire of languages, the fire woven into the twists of language, in the brilliance of the earth which opens like a pregnant belly with entrails of honey and sugar ...'¹⁹ Language is a twisted and dangerous thing, allied to the sweet and bloody violence of birth, the journey from womb to world, from the belly of the m/other earth to the realm of the 'twists of language' that constrain and bind. Considered in this context, the swirling vortex of Spero's painting may be seen as vaginal, a painful path back to the womb. The linguistic labour of which Artaud speaks is reversed in an attempt to thrust us back into this primal pre-verbal state, ungoverned by the 'numbers or letters' of writing and painting.

The gaping womb-like mouth creates a violent link between the interior of the mouth, site of the voice, and the interior of the womb. The primal is visceral. Spero's interest in Eric Neumann's vision of the 'Great Mother,' which traces the myth of the womb as the origin of 'the breath and the word, Logos' is tempered by the violence of Artaud's language in which such a journey from the womb is one that involves violence and pain.²⁰ Breath and birth lead from inside out, both denoting a separation from the m/other and the painful joining of a rigid, codified society. Later, in Spero's *Codex Artaud*, the gaping, empty, screaming mouth becomes the site of the tongue, with its manifold phallic implications, cementing language to the body and to sex.

The tongue (*langue*) is body *and* language, that which speaks *of* and *from* the body. The great, swollen head of *Codex Artaud XVII* (fig. 3), and its protruding tongue enact the dislocation of language by disrupting the grid of typed text. Language is reclaimed by its most



bodily, primeval form, the tongue. Artaud's repeated text, into which the tongue forces itself, reads: L'OBSCÈNE PESANTEUR PHALLIQUE D'UNE LANGUE QUI PRIE ('the obscene phallic weight of a tongue that prays'): the heavy phallic tongue that recurs in Spero's painted pictograms. A phallic language, which, if we are to play Jacques Derrida's linguistic game, prays, pries and preys upon, concerns especially pertinent to Spero's feminist project, fighting to express the female in a visual and textual field dominated by phallogocentrism. The 'phallic language' is heavy, weighty, burdensome, yet by appropriating the broken and frenzied text of Artaud, Nancy Spero uses it as a way to escape this phallic burden: 'I'm literally sticking my tongue out at the world – woman silenced, victimized and brutalized, hysterical, talking "in tongues".'²¹ The disruption of language becomes a deliberate strategy aimed at undermining a symbolic order structured through the acquisition of such language: hysteria and 'talking in tongues' are elevated as the means by which a pre-symbolic state might be expressed, outside the realm of the patriarchal. To this end, Artaud's name, repeated four times on this one scroll, acts both as incantation and attribution alongside the recurring tongue motif. As she reminds us time and again, Spero is harnessing the mother tongue of Antonin Artaud, one that is alien in its foreignness, in maleness and its madness.

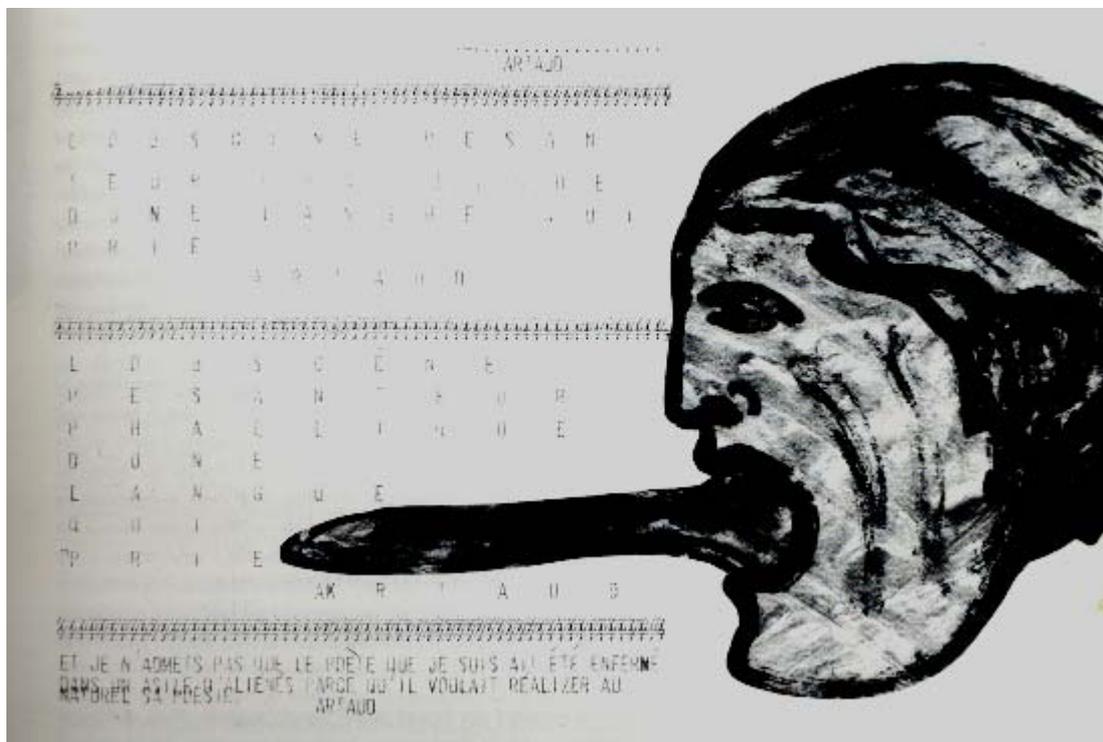


Fig. 3: Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud XVII*(detail), 1972, typewriting, collage, gouache on paper. © Nancy Spero.

Derrida offers another appropriate voice of linguistic dissent, one that returns frequently to the subject of Artaud. His 1965 text 'La Parole soufflée' was followed by 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation,' originally a lecture delivered at the Artaud colloquium, International Festival of University Theatre, Parma, in April 1966, and printed in *Critique* in July of that year. Dedicated to Paule Thévenin, the latter essay identifies the primacy of alienation in the *Theatre of Cruelty* and the central role of Artaud's questioning of language, which Derrida represents as his opposition to a form of theatre 'consumed by speech.'²² Both the subversion of the centre-periphery relationship and the use of language and its dislocation are themes that correspond to Nancy Spero's artistic project.

Derrida's later text *Forcener le subjectile*, published in 1986, once again takes up the theme of Artaud's work as a means of discussing the dislocation of language and meaning, through the merging of word and sign into troublesome pictograph. Though taking as his subject a series of portraits and sketches produced by Artaud during the late 1940s, Derrida's approach remains one that focuses on the function and dysfunction of language. Derrida's 'subjectile,' neither subject nor object, itself an expression of the untranslatable, is the means by which we might access

the support, the surface of the material, the unique body of the work in its first event, *at its moment of birth*, which cannot be repeated, which is as distinct from the form as from the meaning and the representation ...²³

Derrida's text was intended originally for publication in German only, appearing in Munich in Spring 1986. In the later French edition, published by Gallimard in Autumn of the same year, Derrida makes this paradox explicit: 'what I am writing here in French, in a language that was up to a certain point and most often that of Artaud, is first appearing in a language said to be foreign.'²⁴ Writing originally, then, for a language not his own, Derrida notes that Artaud 'uses the words of others,' in his use of 'indirect naming' ('what "is called" like this "the subjectile"').²⁵ The voice of the other – a function more specific than the general ecstatic unintelligibility of glossolalia – simultaneously controls (in Artaud's case spoken by the



doctors of the asylum, in Spero's the patriarchal art world that refused to show her work) and liberates, freeing the self from the constraints of origin. Derrida speaks thus of writing against the mother tongue: 'it will be necessary to force it, to render it completely mad,' in order to express what is untranslatable, the subjectile.²⁶ Artaud's violent fusing of drawing, writing, signs and nonsense emerges as an attempt to 'unsense' in order to attain a universal language beyond, or prior to, the constraining systems of linguistic signification, 'a language that was not French but could be read by everyone, of no matter what nationality.'²⁷

Such terms speak effectively of the violence inherent in Artaud's texts, which, veering from verse to nonsense and back again, are simultaneously poetic and obscene. Spero, cutting, slicing, and overlapping his words in blocks that are sometimes illegible, enacts this violence on the surface of the paper. The pain of the body (Artaud's wracked by the electro-shock therapy inflicted at the Rodez asylum, Spero's by the pain of female subjugation and, later, of progressive arthritis) is paralleled to the pain of the text, which is presented in shards of torn paper, sometimes legible, often not: one scrap, in the lower left corner of *Codex Artaud XXVII* bears a round hole similar to those that Artaud inflicted on his 'spells,' scrawled and scored letters posted to Parisian friends and enemies during his doomed flight to Ireland in September 1937. Spero's aim, 'to further fracture the already fractured writings of Artaud,' is clear.²⁸ Artaud's writings are used against themselves, to interrogate their own substance, to confuse and render incomprehensible.

As in the early *Les Anges, Merde, Fuck You*, where Spero's own name is almost obscured by black ink, it is often Artaud's name that is obliterated. In *Codex Artaud VI* (fig. 4), the letters of his name are layered densely on top of one another, repeated to create a pattern of dark inky smudges where once nominal identity would have been. Identity is denied logic (the rule of the symbolic law rooted in the word, or 'logos'). The self is shattered, in both its physical and its psychic form, the body and its textual boundaries turned inside out. Word becomes a black void, whilst the tongue repeatedly forces its way out onto the page, into the text: interior and exterior are confused, conflated: we encounter the realm of the in between, the passage from one state to another.



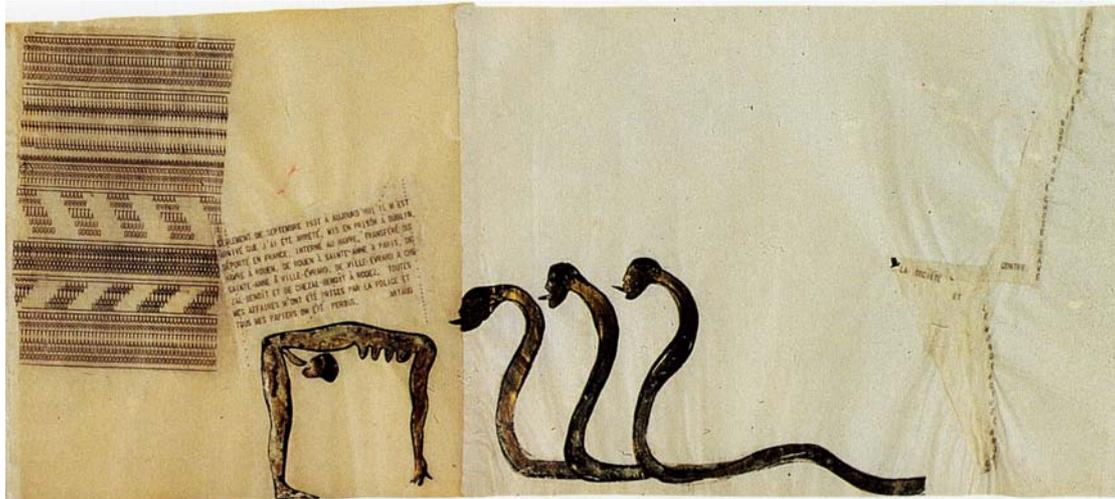


Fig.4: Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud VI* (detail), 1971, typewriting, painted collage on paper, 52 x 316 cm. © Nancy Spero.

Thus the *Codex Artaud* can be located neither within the self, nor without, but existing in, or beyond, the boundaries of the body, its membrane-like surface offering a clear analogy to skin. We are reminded of the ‘*other side of the looking glass*,’ that André Breton visualised in his tribute to Artaud, but may oscillate between one side and another, constantly aware of the existence of that plane that simultaneously separates and joins the two.²⁹ It is in this realm that we may most easily situate Derrida’s definition of the Artaudian *subjectile*, ‘what has no consistency apart from that of the between,’ ‘the hymen between the inside and the outside, the upper and the lower, the over here or the over there.’³⁰ Thus for Derrida, the *subjectile* that lies at the heart of Artaud’s work is ultimately both male and female, bound up with the implications of the process of creation, both birthing table (*couches*) and paper support.

Once again we may turn to the ‘body’ of the *Codex Artaud* scrolls, their material makeup, which makes deliberate allusion to the function of the paper support in several ways. Spero’s adoption of the collage technique enacts over and over again the tearing of the text. But this is articulated doubly, for the scrolls themselves are created by the pasting together of several sheets of rice paper. Overlapping, tearing, cutting, sticking, all are qualities inherent in the work’s very support. The creases that run through the torn pages of text add further reference to the messy process of fusing that her method entails. Her layers, deliberately fragile, evoke the delicate strata according to which identity is structured and controlled by the



symbolic order, and suggest the vulnerability of language in its purest sense. Wounds appear throughout Spero's work as they do in Artaud's drawings, both metaphorically and physically, in the torn, burnt, paper. The penetration of the page is allied to the penetration of the body.

The tongue that plays across the scrolls of the *Codex Artaud* acts as both public and private organ, that of speech and sense, but also of sensuality and sexual pleasure, the organ that licks, tastes, probes. Thus it can occupy the realm of the traditionally male and female, sense and sensual, whilst having the ability to breach the boundary of the body, stretching from the inside (visceral, warm, soft) to the outside (the world of words, grids, typeface). Male and female are conflated in the figure that appears next to the web of Artaud's name in *Codex VI*, reappearing in triplicate in *Codex XXV*, bearing four udder-like breasts and phallus. Other is incorporated into self in a literal and bodily form, that occupies neither gendered realm, but that *in between*, the realm, once again, of both *and* neither, of the *subjectile*. The symbolic order incarnated in the *logos*, the intact word or text, is undermined and dismantled. Defined in Lacanian terms according to lack, where the phallus represents both a split from m/other and fear of castration, the symbolic order is subverted by Spero's hermaphrodite forms, which reclaim the phallus for the feminine and the womb for the masculine, and the ability of each to speak with the voice of the other. Spero can utter male words, just as Artaud can describe himself as 'his daughters' or 'his mother.' Symbolic structuring of body and language are attacked by both Artaud and Spero: irrationality becomes a weapon, the 'split mind' of the schizophrenic a rejection of the self imposed by psychoanalytic law.

Spero speaks Artaud's words, in his (m)other tongue. Her paintings do not illustrate, but rather *resonate alongside* Artaud's text, forcing his words to speak with her voice. Spero's statement that 'Artaud would have hated my appropriating his language and shifting his implications,' is central to understanding the way in which the *Codex Artaud* functions.³¹ 'Shifting' Artaud's 'implications' is an act that far better reflects the sense of dislocation found in his work (visual and textual) than the stiff application of theory to image. Her own implications are as constantly shifting, her hieroglyphs imbued deliberately with several different and contradictory voices. Thus, her exclamation 'Artaud, I couldn't have borne to know you alive ...' can be read as much on theoretical level as an emotional one.³²



While Nancy Spero made a conscious decision to quote Artaud in his original French (if that is what we can call the language that he himself declared not to be such), she manipulated, crushed and twisted the words that she appropriated. If, according to Derrida, the 'unsensing' (*forcené*) of language is core to Artaud's ethic, then is to translate into English to lose meaning, or further to unsense it? Does Artaud make more (or less) sense in English? Perhaps, to return to Margit Rowell's initial question, one may better understand the 'nonsense' of Artaud when one is *not* French. Thus approaching from a different mother tongue, we avoid being distracted by the 'natural' language that Derrida identifies as Artaud's target. How different would this paper be if it were translated into French or, as Derrida's, was intended for a German speaking audience? We are impelled to repeat Derrida's aside, 'how will they translate that?'³³ Where is the sense? The subtitle of this short study (Nancy Spero / Antonin Artaud / Jacques Derrida) places Artaud deliberately in the middle: he is drawn in opposite directions, towards the wordy French philosopher and the American feminist artist, who fishes amongst literature, art, history and myth to catch her sources in a way that is unwittingly Derridean.

Derrida's own struggle with language is a bodily one, centred on the vocal repetition of his subject, located somewhere deep in his throat, spat out onto the page. The repeated utterances of the words of his title, *forcener* and *subjectile*, as sounds first and foremost – *for*, *fort*, *force*, *fors et né* – remind us of Artaud's primal sounds. Is Derrida too trying to escape the web of linguistic signification, or does he weave it yet tighter? Our journey of other voices has been one of betweenness, beginning by traversing the distance between uptown and downtown New York, moving between America and France, male and female, insanity and comprehension. This is the only method by which we might engage with the work of Artaud or of Nancy Spero. Derrida warns us against trying to write in Artaud's language:

Anyone who would try to write *like* him, under the pretext of writing *towards* him, would be even surer of missing him, would lose the slightest chance of meeting him in the ridiculous attempt of this mimetic distortion.³⁴

Those writing on Spero encounter a similar problem: our texts are littered with references to glossolalia, logorrhoea *et cetera*, because we can find no words in our own mother tongue capable of describing what we are experiencing in front of these works. Art



historians must resort to ancient languages, placing words side by side like building blocks of expression, while Derrida plays endlessly with the etymological implications of a solitary Artaudian neologism, arguing in endless spirals over the subjective subject of the *subjectile*:³⁵ in the end, 'the mind of man has been poisoned by concepts' and all words are the words of others.³⁶

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¹ Jacques Derrida, 'To Unsense the Subjectile', in Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin, trans. Mary Ann Caws, *The secret art of Antonin Artaud*, Massachusetts, 1998, 149 n. 5. This volume was originally intended to appear only in German (Munich 1986). The essay was published in French later the same year (Paris 1986).

² On the issue of feminism and the challenges facing a female artists see Nancy Spero, 'Creation and Pro-creation', *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* #12, November 1992, 38 following. Strong analyses of the relationship between the work of Artaud and Spero's oeuvre include: Pamela Wye, 'Nancy Spero: Speaking in Tongues', *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, #4, November 1988, 33-41; Benjamin H D Buchloh, 'Spero's other traditions', in M. Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible. An elliptical traverse of 20th century art, in, of and from the feminine*, Massachusetts and London 1994-95; Jon Bird, Jo Anna Isaak, Sylvère Lotringer, *Nancy Spero*, London 1996; and, most recently, Jon Bird, 'Present Imperfect: Word and Image in Nancy Spero's 'Scrolls' of the 1970s', *Otherworlds. The Art of Nancy Spero and Kiki Smith*, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead 2003. However, the implications of nationality and the role of the foreign language on Spero's interpretation of Artaud have not been sufficiently explored.

³ See Amy Jo Demspey, *The friendship between America and France: a new internationalism, 1961-1965*, PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1999 (unpublished), for a useful summary and insightful analysis of the main collaborative projects between these American neo-dadaists and the French Nouveau Réaliste artists Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle.

⁴ Benjamin H D Buchloh, 'Spero's other traditions', 239.

⁵ In fact, Spero had spent time in Paris before, at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Atelier Andre l'Hote during 1949-50.

⁶ André Breton, 'Homage to Antonin Artaud' [1946], in Edward Scheer, ed., *Antonin Artaud. A critical reader*, London and New York, 2004, 14-5. This text was originally published in *Entretiens radiophoniques (1913-1952)*, Paris 1969.

⁷ Darthea Speyer was sent to France in 1950, where she remained USIS cultural attaché until 1965. In 1968, just days before the May '68 riots, she opened a gallery at 6 rue Jacques Callot, which is still open. See 'Interview with Darthea Speyer conducted by Paul Cummings, in her Garden in Paris, June 28, 1976', transcript at www.artarchives.si.edu/oralhist/speyer76.html.

⁸ See note 2



⁹ Nancy Spero, interview with Jon Bird, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, *Nancy Spero*, 1987, 24.

¹⁰ Patrick French and Roland-François Lack, *The Tel Quel Reader*, London and New York, 1998, 5.

¹¹ Nancy Spero in conversation with Jo Anna Isaak, in Jon Bird et al., *Nancy Spero* 15.

¹² For example, Jon Bird et al., *Nancy Spero*, 15; Nancy Spero, interview with Jon Bird, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, *Nancy Spero*, 24.

¹³ Nancy Spero, 'Creation and pro-creation', 39.

¹⁴ The even earlier *Homage to New York (I Do Not Challenge)* of 1958, also includes text though its function here is metonymic, the letters standing in for the names of prevalent artists, rather than operating to investigate language itself.

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in language: a semiotic approach to literature in art*, Leon S Roudiez, ed., trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, Leon S Roudiez, Oxford 1980, 286 following. For a detailed discussion of the function of Kristeva's 'semiotic chora' in the work of Antonin Artaud, see Jon Bird, 'Dancing to a different tune', in Jon Bird, Jo Anna Isaak, Sylvère, *Nancy Spero*, London 1996, 44 following.

¹⁶ Susan Sontag, introduction to Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, xx.

¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, 'The subject in process' [1972], in Edward Scheer, ed., *Antonin Artaud. A critical reader*, London and New York 2004, 119. This text was originally a paper given at the 1972 conference 'Artaud / Bataille: Towards a Cultural Revolution'. It was subsequently published in *Tel Quel*, 52-53 (1973).

¹⁸ Kristeva, in Edward Scheer, ed., *Antonin Artaud*, 119 following.

¹⁹ Kristeva, in Edward Scheer, ed., *Antonin Artaud*, 119.

²⁰ Eric Naumann, *The Great Mother: an analysis of the archetype*, trans. R. Mannheim, RKP 1955, cited in Jon Bird, 'Codex Artaud, the phallic tongue', Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, *Nancy Spero*, 1987, 27.

²¹ Nancy Spero, 'Creation and pro-creation', 39.

²² Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, London and New York 2001, 307. The text was originally published as *L'Écriture et la différence*, Paris 1967.

²³ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 65.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'To Unsense the Subjectile', 65.

²⁵ Derrida, 'To Unsense the Subjectile', 61. See Mary Ann Caws' preface on the difficulties of translation.

²⁶ Derrida, 'To Unsense the Subjectile', 67.

²⁷ Derrida, 'To Unsense the Subjectile', 82.

²⁸ Nancy Spero, interview with Jon Bird, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, *Nancy Spero*, 24.



²⁹ André Breton, 'Homage to Antonin Artaud' [1946], in Edward Scheer, ed., *Antonin Artaud. A critical reader*, 15.

³⁰ Derrida, 'To Unsense the Subjectile', 71, 75.

³¹ Nancy Spero, Statement made originally at the College Art Association, repeated at The Drawing Center, New York, *Artaud: writing / drawing*, panel discussion (Jacques Derrida, Clayton Eschelman, Sylvère Lotringer, Margit Rowell, Nancy Spero, Gayatri Spivak), 10 November 1996, 2 tapes (unpublished, courtesy of Jon Bird) (see Appendix).

³² Nancy Spero interview with Tamar Garb, *Artscribe*, Summer 1987, 61. Spero here describes a work that bears this statement.

³³ Derrida, 'To Unsense the Subjectile', 66.

³⁴ Derrida, 'To Unsense the Subjectile', 70.

³⁵ See Amanda Lee, *Writing the Body: Barthes/Réquichot, Derrida/Artaud, Deleuze/Bacon*, MA thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1993 (unpublished), for an impressive analysis of extremely subjective 'criticism.'

³⁶ Antonin Artaud, 'Manifesto in clear language, for Roger Vitrac' [1925], *Selected writings*, 109.

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