Theory Culture & Society

Theory, Culture & Society
2016, Vol. 33(7–8) 237–252

DOI: 10.1177/0263276416650723
tcs.sagepub.com
SAGE

The Life of an Idiot: Artaud and the Dogmatic Image of Thought after Deleuze

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Abstract
The conceptual persona of the idiot recurs and evolves over the decades between Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and his final book with Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, shifting from a philosophical question to a nonphilosophical one that allies thought with literature and life. The great figure of this shock of literature is Antonin Artaud who, Deleuze argues, refinds thought's creative capacity by putting it back in touch with its immanent outside – with a machinic and pre-personal 'unthought'. This essay will argue that by turning to works from later in Artaud's œuvre, especially the 1946 poem-cycle *Artaud le Mômo*, the problem of idiocy meets a correlative problem concerning life and death. Artaud establishes a four-fold of thought-unthought-life-unlife which is problematically resolved in what he calls a 'body', a figure which I will argue requires that we rethink the relationship Artaud experiences between idiocy and suffering.

Keywords
Artaud, Deleuze, literature, philosophy

> Intelligence came after idiocy. (Artaud, 1995: 122–3, translation modified)

Deleuze and Guattari's appropriation of Antonin Artaud's poetic image of a body without organs in their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books is, for many readers, what brokers first contact with Artaud's work. The figure is by no means ubiquitous in Artaud's œuvre, and even if it is representative of the insistently visceral character of his idiosyncratic metaphysics and its consequences for living a life, Deleuze and

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Guattari put it in the service of quite another ontology and ethics. They are being quite rhetorical when they ask, 'is not Spinoza's *Ethics* the great book of the BwO [Body without Organs]?' (1987: 153).

From Deleuze's first invocation of Artaud's figure in *Logic of Sense* as 'blocks of coexistence' (1990: 224), the body without organs is used to support a mode of composition older than contradiction. In *Anti-Oedipus* it is 'a surface for recording [. . .] the entire process of production' or the 'system of possible permutations between differences that always amount to the same as they shift and slide about' (1983: 11–12); and in *A Thousand Plateaus* the 'BwO' is the 'full egg' or 'plane of consistency' beneath the 'organization of the organs' (1987: 153), older than any stratification or any other 'abject reterritorialization' (1987: 284). If, by *What is Philosophy?* (1994) the body without organs has disappeared, this is because it has been fully absorbed into the plane of consistency or 'pure immanence': what Deleuze also calls 'A Life' (2001). And yet, whilst Artaud does assert that contradictions are overcome in his body ('yes and no, black and white, true and false, although contradictory in themselves have melted into one man's style, that of this poor Mr. Antonin Artaud' [1995: 82]), he is equally insistent that 'my body / is never to be touched' (1995: 303) – which is to say that his body (equally, his body of work) is not to be made to pursue a higher unity or non-contradiction with the outside; or, at least, not one rooted in the outside as an ontological anteriority older than this body. Contra Artaud, this latter is precisely the end which the body without organs is oriented toward throughout Deleuze and Guattari's Spinozist project of refinding 'pure immanence'.

On this occasion, then, the philosophers are openly engaged in the age-old heresy of reducing literature and a life (and, for Artaud, his work, body and life are one and the same) to their instrumental value as provider of examples and *belle lettres* for the 'real work' of thinking.

Yet, there is also, in Deleuze and Guattari's work, a provocative project to expose thought and the institution of philosophical writing to literature's exorbitant capacity to exceed instrumentalization – that is, to expose thought to its outside, to the shock of literature. It is this project, driven by a sort of experimental literacy, which, I would like to suggest, might in turn allow the reader of Deleuze and Guattari to ultimately return to literature and to find there something quite different from their own project – different ethics, different metaphysics, and different bodies. As much as we might be guided by Deleuze and Guattari toward such a return to literature, the results inevitably – if not, in fact, necessarily – will be very different from what the philosophers themselves have to say about that literature. The great figure of this shock of literature – this excessive disturbance to thought – is, once again, Antonin Artaud. Many of us may first encounter Artaud in the pages of *Anti-Oedipus* or *A Thousand Plateaus*, but we do a disservice to those books as

well as to Artaud if we do not find our way back to the literature – and, I will suggest, to life, albeit a life much less enticing than the one laid out by Deleuze and Guattari.

There is a radical reconfiguration of the conceptual persona of the idiot between Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1997) and his final book with Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1994; also see Beckman, 2009). This shift could be cursorily summarized as a shift from a philosophical idiocy to a nonphilosophical one that allies thought with literature and life – modes of creation which are also at stake in O'Sullivan's and Ståhl's essays in this issue. It marks a transition from idiocy as that which names the naturalization of thought as a capacity of a thinking subject, to idiocy as the denaturalization of thought and the irruption of the unthought into life: an unearthing of the machinic and pre-personal creative force immanent to thought.

Deleuzian Idiots

The philosophical idiot, for the Deleuze of *Difference and Repetition*, finds its apogee in Descartes, for whom the capacity to think is a given. In their later recapitulation of the argument, Deleuze and Guattari would argue that, as a 'conceptual persona is the becoming or the subject of philosophy, on a par with the philosopher [...] Descartes should have signed [himself] "the idiot", just as Nietzsche signed himself "the Antichrist"' (1994: 64).

Two basic characteristics define Cartesian idiocy, and engender what Deleuze calls the 'dogmatic image of thought' (1997: 130–8). On the one hand, there is the universal arrogation to man of the capacity to think: there is such a thing as common sense, which is a 'natural' and 'pure element' (Deleuze, 1997: 131). On the other hand, concomitantly, there is an inalienable alliance of thinking with a search for truth, such that thought 'formally possesses' and 'materially wants' the true (Deleuze, 1997: 131). Deleuze goes on to identify a third naturalization, common to Plato, Descartes and Kant: the thinker is not only endowed with the ability to think and a thirst for truth, he is also invested with the capacity to recognize the True when he finds it. These three naturalizations together constitute the philosophical idiot of *Difference and Repetition*. Moreover, '[t]he supposed three levels – a naturally upright thought, an in principle natural common sense, and a transcendental model of recognition', this latter being that which Nietzsche condemned as the equation of the Good and the True, 'can constitute only an ideal orthodoxy' (Deleuze, 1997: 134). The stakes of this idiocy are high. For if '[p]hilosophy is left without means to realise its project of breaking with *doxa*' (Deleuze, 1997: 134), it can be no more than a toothless thought which 'harms no one', nor, indeed, harms any thing – be it State, Church or Clinic (Deleuze, 1997: 136). Clearly, in such a persona we can recognize

not at all the man whom Deleuze and Guattari's later work recognizes as the paradigmatic idiot; he of whom Louis Aragon announced: 'Antonin Artaud is the man who attacked the ocean . . . He will have respect for nothing – not your schools, your lives, or your most secret thoughts' (see Hayman, 1996: 19).

The later, creative and literary form which the idiot takes is presaged – and even, perhaps, best expressed – in *Difference and Repetition*, but it is only from the vantage point of *What is Philosophy?* that we can fully grasp the import of Deleuze's words in the earlier book:

> At the risk of playing the idiot, do so in the Russian manner: that of an underground man who recognises himself no more in the subjective presuppositions of a natural capacity for thought than in the objective presuppositions of a culture of the times, and lacks the compass with which to make a circle. (1997: 130)

That completed circle which the 'Russian idiot' cannot trace – or, rather, which he will not enclose himself within – is the horizon which enshrines the syllogism that '[i]t is because everybody naturally thinks that everybody is supposed to know implicitly what it means to think' (Deleuze, 1997: 131); such a circle, then, with man at its centre, becomes the cipher for the dogmatic image of thought.[1] The dangers are clear: to naturalize thought as an omnipresent condition and capacity erects a transcendent thinking Subject with a privileged and de facto capacity to access transcendent Truth, whilst simultaneously enshrining Truth as the ultimate goal, or enclosing horizon, of thought. The dogmatic image of thought, then, heralds a wrecking of immanence: it is the willing enclosure of thought within the horizon of the dogmatic image which typifies Cartesian idiocy, that is, philosophy's 'idiotic' turn away from the creative capacity of thought and from thought's reciprocal relation to affect.

The conceptual persona of the idiot as it is given in *What is Philosophy?* 23 years later has undergone a shift from the natural and implicit capacity of the Cartesian model to an explicit capacity or demand which brings thought into contact with its constitutive outside ('non-thought'). Concomitantly, there has been a shift from philosophical resources to literature – a medium, at least since Kleist, less beholden to thought as an axiom or even precondition.[2] Idiot, here, is no longer a term of denigration in the way it had inevitably been in *Difference and Repetition*. The first citations are Tolstoy and especially Dostoevsky,[3] such that the remade persona can be named the 'Slavic' or 'Russian' idiot (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 62).[4] As Deleuze and Guattari explain, the 'old idiot wanted, by himself, to account for what was or was not comprehensible, what was or was not rational, what was lost or saved; but the new idiot wants the lost, the incomprehensible, and the absurd to be restored to him' (1994: 63).

The 'new idiot', then, is no longer a 'thinker', no longer naturally invested with the capacity to think, no longer steeled by doubt, directed toward rectitude, nor innately able to recognize Truth. Rather, this idiot can raise 'the *absurd* [to] the highest power of thought' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 62); he has found thought's capacity 'to create', the 'power of the false' forged by Nietzsche (especially in Deleuze's account [e.g. 2006: 94–7]). Thought for the Russian idiot is an impersonal, machinic event rather than a matrix of natural capacities birthed in an individual; thought precedes the thinker, and the idiot's incapacity to think places it anterior to both of these. Indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, this '"Incapacity" of thought [. . .] remains at its core even after it has acquired the capacity determinable as creation [. . .] as Kleist or Artaud suggests, thought as such begins to exhibit snarls, squeals, stammers; it talks in tongues and screams, which leads it to create, or to try to' (1994: 55). This idiot is never more redolent of Artaud and his own mature figure of embodied idiocy, *Artaud le Môm*o, than when Deleuze and Guattari note that '[t]he new idiot will never accept the truths of History' (1994: 63). There is a deeper resonance still between Artaud and another Deleuzian 'pathic' persona, the 'cataleptic thinker or "mummy" who discovers *in thought* an inability to think' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 70 [emphasis added]).

Artaud's Case and the Rivière Correspondence

Frida Beckman, in her essay 'The Idiocy of the Event' (2009), nonetheless attributes a certain recidivism to Artaud's idiocy. The goal of her essay – to assert a novel and superior form of idiocy proper to Kathy Acker – is strategically served by diminishing Artaud, but the central reason, I would suggest, that she finds a lamentable and regressive nostalgia for thought in Artaud's work is that – like so many authors who invoke Deleuze's Artaud – she is referring only to the young Artaud, the one who, as we shall see, died before *Artaud le Môm*o gave birth to himself. Beckman argues for a residual Cartesianism beneath the Russian idiocy which Deleuze and Guattari associate Artaud with – indeed, she finds in the Russian idiot *tout court* a falling back on to the earlier model. Just as Deleuze had in *Difference and Repetition*, though less sympathetically, Beckman turns to some of the very earliest of Artaud's writings, the correspondence with Jacques Rivière, then editor of the journal *Nouvelle Revue Française (N.R.F.)*, of 1923–4 (Artaud, 1968: 25–45). As Deleuze explains of the correspondence:

> Artaud does not simply talk about his own 'case', but already in his youthful letters shows an awareness that his case brings him into contact with a generalised thought process which can no longer be covered by the reassuring dogmatic image [of thought] but which,

> on the contrary, amounts to the complete destruction of that image. (1997: 147)

Artaud's first letter to Rivière sets the tone for all that follow. It is intense, cogent, unremitting. His letters' topic is the flight of thought from himself, and his grasping of poems from the rare moments of clarity he can seize, or from the more frequent absence of such clarity. What Artaud solicits from Rivière is not advice for the perfection of his poems – there is already, here, the absolute disavowal of apprenticeship or novicehood which would later bring Artaud to violently reject the occult practices he had for some time taken an interest in (see Artaud, 1974, 2008). He does not ask for tutelage in understanding what the poems lack, but rather presents an extremely forceful insistence that, for all their overt inadequacies as literature, the poems can be nothing other than what they are. The letters, then, are a refusal of judgement, even this early in Artaud's œuvre. He has submitted them to Rivière not for a critical response, but for acceptance; not for publication (their publication or not is, he says, irrelevant; these are not the scales they are to be weighed on), but for an acknowledgement that they, that *he*, their author, Antonin Artaud, exists. As he writes in the first letter to Rivière, harking back to their recent, first meeting: 'It is very important to me that the few manifestations *of mental* existence I have been able to give myself should not be dismissed as non-existent, because of flaws and poorly written phrases scattered through them' (1968: 28). Concomitantly, it would be a gross misunderstanding – one which Artaud is desperate should be avoided – to think that he had such an 'immediate, petty goal in mind' as publication; and anyway, no amount of 'time or hard work will set these lapses and *unintelligibility* to rights' (1968: 28, emphasis added).

By the first letter of 1924, six months into their correspondence, it is not only literary judgement which Artaud professes indifference to, but also the acceptance (which it seemed was being solicited in the earlier letters) of himself by others: 'I am not trying to justify myself in your eyes, as it makes little difference to me whether I appear to exist to anyone. I have the whole distance separating me from myself to cure me of other people's opinions' (1968: 30). He is at pains to assert that he is not intending insolence toward Rivière. Rather, he is clarifying what is at stake: not literature (though, as we know, the whole of literature will be indelibly marked by his work); not his social being; but the singularity of his 'case' (see also Derrida, 2001: 212–45). Necessarily, this singularity must not be judged under the criteria of an existing milieu, be it literary or social. The 'case' of Artaud invites no judgement nor critique, then, but begs only acknowledgement. As Artaud writes, 'All I need is someone to believe I have the potential to crystallize things in appropriate forms and words' (1968: 38). Artaud is not seeking

to write better, but to write at all. What must be believed is that his ideas are being stolen, that his mind is in a singularly fragile state; he is suffering, and is plunged into idiocy; he is suffering from an incomprehensible distance from thought, from himself – and this, he realizes, both constitutes and devastates his being. It is from this idiocy that he writes, but its only phenomenal correlate is this suffering:

> There is, therefore, one single thing which destroys my ideas. Something which does not stop me being what I might, but if I may express it thus, leaves me in a state of suspense. Something furtive which robs me of the words *I have found*, which reduces my terseness of mind, progressively destroying the bulk of my ideas within its own matter. (1968: 31)

And five months later, the necessity of this suffering that is his idiocy becomes more clear:

> The moment the soul proposes to coordinate its riches, its discoveries, its revelations, unknowingly at the very minute the thing is about to emanate, a higher vicious will attacks the soul like vitriol, attacks the mass of words and imagery, attacks the mass of our feelings and leaves me as it were panting at the gates of life. (1968: 41–2)

The choice, then – which Artaud quite rightly will not acknowledge as a choice, for nothing like volition can be involved – is between the enormous cruelty of these furtive attacks which take his words and the very air from his lungs, or the cruelty of 'true wastage', the 'utter void' (1968: 28). Artaud's 'case', then, is the articulation of a body and a body of work which can salvage something – anything – from this pincer attack.

It is not Artaud's poems which are finally published in the *N.R.F.*, it is the letters. Thus, Rivière's letters also. These latter have been much criticized, and not least by Artaud himself, who found reason to 'resent' certain parts, because 'I [Artaud] had presented myself to you as a mental case, an actual psychic anomaly and your reply was a literary opinion [. . .] I flattered myself you had not understood me' (1968: 30). We see here the root of the complaints against Rivière as they are taken up later, by others: against the intensity of Artaud's need to be acknowledged as a singularity the editor-confidant was found to have misunderstood what was needed of him.[5] But, as Marthe Robert, a friend of Artaud's in later life, explains, Rivière's

> good will cannot be doubted. Clearly, the critic was in an awkward position: what does one say to a man who puts so much passion and talent into declaring himself incapable of everything, of thought

> and literature as well as life? Instinctively, Rivière got himself out of the situation by using a common tactic; he generalized the all-too-singular nature of the case [. . .] To this fundamental state, which Artaud presented as unique and incomparable, Rivière contrasted the malady of the epoch, the malaise of contemporary literature, and more generally, the impossibility of all thought to account for itself absolutely. (1996: 26)

Deleuze gives yet shorter shrift to Rivière's side of the correspondence: 'The reader notes with astonishment that the more Rivière believes himself to be close to an understanding of Artaud, the further away he is, and the more he speaks of something altogether different' (1997: 147). The 'something' Deleuze refers to is a Cartesian form of idiocy, 'the image of an autonomous thinking function, endowed in principle with its own nature and will' (Deleuze, 1997: 146). It bears repeating that, for Deleuze, Artaud is already at an unprecedented pitch of a more sophisticated idiocy, that even in 1925 Artaud's 'case' already 'amounts to the complete destruction of [the dogmatic] image' of thought, beyond even that restored to literature by Dostoevsky (1997: 147).

We may wholeheartedly agree with Deleuze that Artaud's destruction of the dogmatic image of thought is well under way by his late 20s. But Artaud's need to receive an acknowledgement of this, as we have seen, is an insistence on the fact that it is his very being which is at stake – that there is a knotting or reciprocity between (un)thought and life which Deleuze, perhaps surprisingly, does not seem to be accounting for: within this discussion of idiocy's movement from philosophy to literature, he seems to pass over the opportunity to follow the line of flight off the page and into life – I do not mean 'Life' in the later Deleuze's sense of a byword for immanence (2001), but the life of the idiot: the suffering which Artaud ceaselessly underwent in his idiocy. For it is in this that the greater difficulty of reading Artaud lies, where we experience the full force of his convulsion of thought beyond the dogmatic image.

In a question posed with all the authenticity, blindness and self-admonishment of a true friend and a true reader, Marthe Robert asks:

> Among all those who approached Artaud, who loved and admired him as a man and as a poet, how many can be sure of not having aggravated his suffering with a look, a question, a doubt? How many guessed that their advice, their appeasements, their words of consolation, indeed the way they remained silent at times, were for the perpetually guarded poet an intervention scarcely less scandalous than the coercive measures which society was legally able to use against him? (1996: 27)

Whilst evidently inspired by Rivière, this is clearly not an accusation but a question Marthe Robert is asking of herself. And, I suggest, it is one which, in order to read Artaud after Deleuze, we must take up as our own, as an affective and intellectual imperative to confront the suffering which is inalienable from a life of idiocy; the suffering of a man for whom his body just as much as his 'thoughts are ill-formed' (Artaud, 1968: 73) – both subject to furtive attacks and brutal determinations, from stolen thought to the regulation of his body by organs.

Idiocy as Suffering

It is when Deleuze asserts that 'Artaud opposes *genitality* to innateness in thought, but equally to *reminiscence*' (1997: 147, second emphasis added), that Beckman (2009) parts ways with him. For Beckman, Artaud is precisely reminiscent: he mourns the capacity to think; he rages against the theft of his thought. It could be said that Beckman is quite right that the Artaud of the early 1920s is not only experiencing the rending of thought as painful, but that he wishes this pain to be gone; that he reminisces not for his own thought to be returned to him (the mistake which Rivière makes in the earlier letters), but that he would acquiesce to the return of the dogmatic image of thought if it would grant him but a moment's respite from suffering. In short, in these early years the unbearable cruelty of his suffering has not yet been revealed to be absolutely necessary: he is still the man who asked Dr Toulouse for 'a sufficient amount of subtle liquids, illusory agents, of mental morphine to raise my debasement, to balance what is falling, to rejoin what is disjoined, to recompose what has been destroyed' (1968: 51).

Beckman is quite right that Deleuze and Guattari write of a restoration for the Russian idiot, who 'wants the lost, the incomprehensible, and the absurd to be restored to him' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 63); who wants the absence of the dogmatic image to be restored, not as a reclamation of stolen property, nor to 'recompose what has been destroyed' (Artaud, 1968: 51) but as a vertiginous freedom *from* that image. Such is the right of the idiot, even if it is equally the name of his suffering. By contrast, Beckman summarizes her argument with the assertion that

> Artaud's letters suggest that his failure of rationality does not do away with rationality and truth but compares itself with them. Not only does it invest these concepts with a sense of nostalgia; his recognition of his own lost capacity to think also keeps his thought in the grip of reactive forces [. . .] measuring his thought according to innateness and doubt. (2009: 61)

If she is right, it is at best only of the young Artaud: if he is ever nostalgic for possession of his thought it is short lived. As Maurice Blanchot

observes, in a short – typically, exceptionally – exquisite essay which itself appeared in the pages of *N.R.F.*, even if in the early letters Artaud does maintain 'the hope of making himself equal to himself' (2003: 38), the sense of lack and its invitation of judgement is violently reversed in Artaud's ontology into the burning necessity of his suffering in thought, in life, in poetry. For, Blanchot continues,

> by a sure and painful development, he comes to reverse the polarity of the impulse and to place dispossession first, not the 'immediate totality' of which this dispossession seemed at first the simple lack. What is prime is not the fullness of being; what is prime is the crack and the fissure, erosion and destruction, intermittance and gnawing privation: being is not being, it is the lack of being, a living lack that makes life incomplete, fugitive, and inexpressible, except by the cry of a fierce abstinence. (2003: 38)

Beckman's bibliography lists only two volumes of Artaud's work: the first volume of the Calder edition of the *Collected Works* and the famously terrible City Lights *Artaud Anthology*.[6] She is hardly alone in preferring these resources, and it would be grossly unjust to suggest that Beckman's work is anything but rigorous and inspiring. But if we are to properly concern ourselves with Artaud's idiocy, we must trace the problem through to his later life, and especially to *Artaud le Môm*o, the 1946 poem-cycle which Clayton Eshleman, its most dedicated translator, asserts 'is probably Artaud's most honed and polished work' (Artaud, 1995: 336).

Artaud le Môm*o*

The text of *Artaud le Môm*o as we receive it was prepared from notebook writings produced between July and September 1946 (Artaud, 1995: 336). The final text came from Artaud reading aloud from his notebooks, with some improvisations, and the result being transcribed by his secretary, and later legatee, Paule Thévenin (Barber, 2008: 64).[7] '*Môm*o' is a slang term used in Marseilles – the place of Artaud's birth – meaning 'simpleton, or village idiot' (Artaud, 1995: 336). The classical affinity which no doubt appealed to Artaud is to Momus, Greek god of mockery, patron of poets. Momus is often depicted with a crotalum, a kind of castanet, reminding us of Artaud's sophisticated use of percussion and of the stump which he frequently used in his later years to beat out a rhythm as he wrote and read – as he no doubt did during the composition and dictation of this poem (see Artaud, 1995: 336).[8]

The poem lays out a rigorous metaphysical system with an important role for idiocy. The fourth section of the cycle, 'Execration of the Father-Mother', opens with an ontological prioritization of nonsense: the

placing of the modality of idiocy prior to, rather than subordinate to, intelligence and sense-making (the similarities to Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* (1990) are mostly superficial). The intelligent are condemned by the idiot, *le Môm*o, who is differentiated from them and exempted from their fate:

> I condemn you because you know why . . . I condemn you, –
> and me, I don't know why. (1995: 127)

Having made this condemnation of enslavement to thought and sense-making, and distanced himself from it, *le Môm*o goes on to reaffirm the well-trodden Artaudian theme of self-determination in defiance of the two most pernicious of determinants: man as the image of God and as the biological iteration of parents. For Artaud, genital reproduction must be neither an urge determining his thoughts and actions, nor that from whence he came. As the oft-quoted lines run,

> I don't believe in father
> in mother,
> got no
> papamummy[9]

Crucially, it is neither mind nor spirit which is able to sever the reigns of these alien powers and their claims to pre-date Artaud and to have made him in their own image: 'It is not a spirit which has made things,/ but a body' (Artaud, 1995: 237), specifically the body of Artaud, of *le Môm*o, which has made itself. This strange temporality of retroactive causation recurs throughout Artaud's later work.

The very first thing which *Artaud le Môm*o does – the event announced by the first of the five parts of the poem – is to return. This is neither a resurrection nor the *noch einmal* of Nietzsche's eternal return. This is a return from the dead, and it is a return for the last time. The return of *le Môm*o brooks no further deferment, offers no promise of happiness and will be subject to no more of God's 'pranks': and not just God's, but

> the prank of the whole earth
> against whoever has balls
> in his cunt. (Artaud, 1995: 99)

This latter, of course, is Artaud: his is a whole body which lacks nothing, and which has generated itself or, rather, overcomes linear causation to lay claim to itself from its very inception: *causa sui*. This is beyond even that 'new idiot' who, for Deleuze and Guattari, 'will never accept the truths of History' (1994: 63): *le Môm*o has blocked both past and future at the level of his body, and has taken possession of his conception, his birth and his death; has returned them to himself not as extrinsic

determinations nor as naturalizations, but as power to be wielded in acts of creation and, more urgently, in the ceaseless project of bodily and metaphysical self-defence. This is an account, then, of how *le Môմo*, by figuring an idiocy which trashes the dogmatic image of thought, has become inextricable from Artaud's demand 'to have done with judgement', be it in the form of genitality, of finitude or of the vitalist doctrine of the circularity of birth and death.

Undead

In a letter of 1948, the year of his death, Artaud reports that 'looking carefully at this life I remember being dead in it really and corporeally at least 3 times, once in Marseilles, once in Lyons, once in Mexico and once at the Rodez asylum in the coma of electroshock' (Artaud, 1995: 83). He is clear that these deaths have been overcome and incorporated in his returning as *le Môմo*. He has wrested the force of death away from the outside, where it would have killed him, and bound 'life and thought' and 'death and the nought' in a flat ontology: a refusal of any precedence (temporal or ontological) of one over the other in which finite and infinite are bound together in a knot of cosmic significance which can be maintained only by – or *as* – his body, the body of *Artaud le Môմo* (Artaud, 1995: 84). As much as he is an idiot, then, *le Môմo* is equally now undead, a mummy, able to see himself from both sides – life and death, the side of the infinite and the side of finitude – a newly revealed being which 'suffers the world and disgorges reality' (Artaud, 1995: 64).[10]

This figure is redolent of another invoked by Deleuze and Guattari, which they name the 'cataleptic thinker or "mummy" who discovers in thought an inability to think' (1994: 70), and again of the recurrent figure of the idiotic undead, which Deleuze finds in Artaud's (mostly unrealized) cinema projects: 'the Mummy, this dismantled, paralysed, petrified, frozen instance which testifies to "the impossibility of thinking that is thought"' (1989: 166).[11] But, as Artaud makes clear, it is not only thought which is denaturalized by *le Môմo*; life too confronts its outside: the body of Artaud, *Artaud le Môմo* returned, is subordinate to neither thought nor life. Never made in their image, he binds them in himself. Idiocy, for Artaud, is not only philosophy, and not even only literature, but a yet more profound binding of the outside, be it unthought or unlife.

For all the triumph of Artaud's return as *le Môմo* – of his refusal to be dominated by the theft of his thought, the threats to his life or the theft of representations and genitality – there is no peace, here. The fourfold of life, death, thought and unthought must be constantly maintained through unfailing vigilance and active force. It is an interminable fight to protect this remade, undead, idiotic body from the forces which would reorganize it in their own image: society and its language and genitality; psychiatry; God and his body-image and genitality; representation and

dogmatic genitality in all its forms. It is this absolute vigilance which will occupy Artaud to the end of his life.

Conclusion

I would like to extrapolate two points from what I have been arguing here. Firstly, a philological assertion addressed to all serious readers of Deleuze: an entreaty, perhaps, that we read Artaud and that we confront the demands that he makes of us, his readers, to not violate the vigilance over his body – his body of work – that obsessed him. As I hope I have made clear, such an engagement necessarily involves delving into the late works, into the difficult terrain of Artaud's refrains and reinventions, his screams and his scribbles. Certainly, Deleuze's readings of much literature restores an active, creative force to them – as O'Sullivan's and Ståhl's essays in this issue make so evident – but in some cases, and especially Artaud's, the work itself also takes us into other territories. Secondly, I would like to suggest that such an attention to Artaud's work, indeed to literature as something which philosophy aspires to rather than captures and clarifies, might yield at least one important response to Deleuze: if the project of immanence as 'a life' (Deleuze, 2001) designates an inseparability of concept and affect; and if the trajectory of immanentization of thought passes through the destruction of the dogmatic image of thought into idiocy, then we must heed to Artaud's lifelong scream: the life of idiocy – the life spent in confrontation and invitation to the outside – is one indelibly marked by suffering.

In many ways, Deleuze and Guattari's work is directly and productively engaged with the question which – pre-empting Marthe Roberts' questioning of Rivière and herself – also rounds off the poem-cycle of *Artaud le Mômo*: 'what guarantee do the obvious madmen of this world have of being nursed by the authentically living?' (Artaud, 1995: 167). But, in the specific case of Artaud, whilst there is on occasion some acknowledgement from the philosophers of the kind of 'suffering without glory' which constitutes the life of the idiot (1994: 55), Deleuze and Guattari never deign to turn directly to the problems of living a life of idiocy – the problem of how to read Artaud when, as Nancy Spero so succinctly and tangibly observed,

> ARTAUD
> I couldn't have
> borne to know
> you alive your
> despair
> despair[12]

Notes

1. John Mullarkey's recent work has addressed this image of the dogmatic circle, for example his lecture 'Picturing Regress: The Diagram as Virtuous Circle in Metaphilosophy', given as a part of the series 'Visual Cultures and the Diagram', Goldsmiths, University of London, 19 January 2011.
2. Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811). For Deleuze and Guattari on Kleist see especially (1987: 4, 25, 268, 355–6, 378). Also see Deleuze and Parnet (1987: 123).
3. It is of particular note that Deleuze acknowledges the indispensable influence of Leon Chestov on his reading of Dostoevsky. During his exile in Paris, Chestov befriended a young Georges Bataille, whom he introduced to the writings of Nietzsche, and otherwise influenced deeply (see Surya, 2010: esp. 57–63). See Deleuze (1997: 107) on Lev Shestov and Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 62) on Leon Chestov.
4. As Beckman (2009) astutely notes, there is a third figure of the idiot given in 'Plato and the Simulacrum' (Deleuze 1983). She quotes Gregg Lambert: '[this third idiot] is more likely to be found in Shakespeare than in Dostoevsky and is characterised less by the naive innocence of the common man than by a "will to stupidity" or even "malicious cunning" that allows him to ignore his effect on the world' (Lambert, 2002: 5).
5. Indeed, Artaud thought the misunderstanding, which displaced the poems as the centre of the correspondence, to be the cause of Rivière's death in 1925: 'I asked him if it had been understood. I felt his heart swell up as if it would burst when confronted with the problem. He told me it had not been understood. I would not be surprised if the black cyst which opened up within him that day, drew him away from life much more than his own sickness' (1968: 20).
6. The City Lights *Artaud Anthology* (Artaud, 1986) was edited by Jack Hirschman, a junior editor who took over the task from an overstretched Victor Corti. Hirschman had little or no prior knowledge of Artaud's work, and was provided with poor translations he was in no position to recognize as such. Disturbingly, the anthology is still available and has been little revised. For further criticism of the volume see Barber (2008) and Rattray (1992: 283–290).
7. Jean Genet described Thevenin's inheritance of Artaud's notebooks as 'a poisoned gift' (Barber, 2008: 30).
8. Artaud's interest in percussion, which dates back to his early days in theatre, was intensified in Mexico, where he learned of the system of phonetic scoring of drum beats used on the ceremonial teponaztli which he saw being made and in use (Artaud, 1976: 365).
9. Famous, of course, because quoted by Deleuze and Guattari (1983: 14). The lines are from 'Here Lies' (see Artaud, 1995: 237).
10. The figure of the mummy – as Beckman notes (2009: 59) – appears a few times in Artaud's earlier works, including 'Mummy Correspondance' (1968: 164), 'La Momie attachée' (1968: 168–9) and 'Invocation à la Momie' (1968: 188).

11. The embedded quotation is taken from the Blanchot article mentioned above. Blanchot writes: 'poetry is linked to this impossibility of thinking which is thought – that is the truth that cannot be revealed, for it always turns away and forces one to experience it beneath the level where one could truly experience it' (2003: 36–7). Blanchot is writing about the Rivière letters, but later discusses the letter to Peter Watson – sure evidence that Deleuze, despite never mentioning it, was aware of the reappraisal of life–death made by Artaud in the later letter.
12. Nancy Spero, *Artaud Painting – Letter from Spero*, 1969. Cut-and-pasted painted paper and gouache on paper. Vancouver Art Gallery, gift of Keith Westergaard and Cordell Couillard.

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This article is part of a *Theory, Culture & Society* special section, 'Deterritorializing Deleuze 2', edited by Simon O'Sullivan.