

*Complicating the Curricular
Conversation with Antonin Artaud
and Maxine Greene*

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...if I and other teachers truly want to provoke our students to break through the limits of the conventional and taken for granted, we ourselves have to experience breaks with what has been established in our own lives; we have to keep arousing ourselves to begin again. (Greene, 1995, p. 109)

One purpose of a/r/tography is to open up conversations and relationships instead of informing others about what has been learned. Another purpose is to open up possibilities for a/r/tographers as they give their attention to what is seen and known and what is not seen and not known. Openings are not necessarily passive holes through which one can see easily. Openings are often like cuts, tears, ruptures or cracks

that resist predictability, comfort and safety (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008).

For the past few months I have been ruminating deeply on the ideas Maxine Greene discusses in the above quotation while simultaneously giving myself multiple excuses for resisting acknowledging the ways that the breaks she describes haunt me. I perceive myself as living in contradiction because I appear to myself to embrace the purposes and renderings of *a/r/tography*, all the while wishing for comfort and safety and to some extent predictability. *A/r/tography* is an arts based research method in which ones identity and work as an artist, teacher and researcher impact and inform one another in multiple and emergent ways (Carter, 2012; Carter, 2013; Carter, Beare, Belliveau & Irwin, 2011). Part of the nature of living and working *a/r/tographically* is to embrace the uncertainty of the in between and so the conundrum is thus: How can I encourage my arts education students to dwell with/in ambiguity, represent their thoughts in multiple kinds of texts and feel their worlds in body, mind and spirit, if I am hesitant to be seen living these ways by them and by myself? The short answer to this question is that I can't.

And so, as a way to arouse myself to begin again I have chosen to discuss some of Antonin Artaud's key theoretical concepts alongside selected curriculum theories as a way of tuning into and articulating what curricular openings are and might mean.

Antonin Artaud¹

¹ References for background information on Artaud are taken from: Barker, 2008; Bermel, 1977; Costich, 1978; and Goodall, 1994.

Antoine Marie Joseph Artaud, called Antonin was born on September 4th, 1896, in Marseilles, France. From an early age, ailments such as meningitis and neurasthenia began to plague Artaud. These physical ailments were coupled with psychic troubles that appeared at the age of 19. In 1914, right before graduating high school, Artaud had a nervous breakdown. Similar attacks are said to have recurred numerous times throughout the rest of Artaud's life and his family subsequently spent a lot of money moving him from one clinic to another for "rest cures" and art therapy before he was given over to the care of Dr. and Mme. Toulouse in Paris.

During the next 16 years (1920-1936) in Paris, Artaud dedicated himself to the theatre, film, and writing. Though finding some success as a film actor, Artaud was chronically broke after the death of his father in 1924. Poverty coupled with his addiction to drugs such as laudanum, opium and heroin meant many of his theatre projects were unrealized. Also in the mid 1920s, Artaud attempted to have some of his poetry published in *The French Review*. Although the poetic attempts that Artaud offered to Jacques Rivieré were continuously turned down for publication, the letters that Rivieré and Artaud began writing back and forth were eventually published. This series of letters provides an example of how conscious Artaud was of the restrictions he felt his mind was having on his ability to fully express what he wanted to do artistically.

Thinking means something more to me than not being completely dead. It means being in touch with oneself at

every moment; it means not ceasing for a single moment to feel oneself in one's inmost being, in the unformulated mass of one's life, in the substance of one's reality; it means not feeling in oneself an enormous hole, a crucial absence; it means always feeling one's thought equal to one's thought, however inadequate the form one is able to give it. (as cited in Sontag, 1976, p.70)

This quotation exemplifies the way that Artaud feels thinking and being aware of his inner thoughts, before trying unsuccessfully to express this interiority through writing, is part of how he believes all people should live. Eventually, Artaud tried to awaken these dormant metaphysical parts of man (his gendered language not my own) through sounds and movement when he found that language was too limiting. His dedication to writing poems, essays, letters, chants and manifestos was constantly underscored by the frustration that he also records about being unable to express in these forms what he wanted to. This reality led him to feelings of inadequacy and despair. Yet, despite these frustrations, Artaud continued to act in Surrealist films and express inspiration about possibilities for a revitalized form of theatre. In 1926 Artaud co-founded the Alfred Jarry Theatre with Roger Vitrac and Robert Avon. This theatre was founded in order to explore surrealism and symbolism theatrically but only lasted for two years. During this time, Artaud produced and directed plays while also writing about some of the basic theatrical principles that he believed needed to be enacted in order to disrupt the trends, like department stores, that were enveloping France at the time.

Artaud saw this work as a serious game which both actor and spectator had to realize in order to be reached as deeply as possible (as cited in Sontag, 1976). He thought that by presenting the audience with images that could speak directly to the mind and consciousness, rather than employing illusions, props or scenery to entertain, that people would understand that nothingness was something that was not to be feared.

By the late 1920s, manifestos and performances with The Theatre of Cruelty were taking place to enable:

...the theatre [to] seek by every possible means to call into question not only the objective and descriptive external world but the internal world, that is, man from a metaphysical point of view. (as cited in Sontag, 1976, p. 244)

These manifestos, coupled with three features of The Theatre of Cruelty as outlined by Albert Bermel (1977) in *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*, state the necessity for: the implacability of life; drawing upon the collective and individual dreams of all men, both dark and utopian; and a theatre that works on the senses and nerves, rather than the intellect, that can subsequently be aimed at a general public so that the transcendental experiences of life that the theatre inspires can encourage the individual to live more passionately. When using the word cruelty, Artaud means that he wants to cleanse his audience so that they are awakened when they leave the theatre. Since Artaud wrote about most of his ideas in fragments, this in conjunction with what some have called a tendency to incorrectly interpret events, such as the Balinese theatre's emphasis on

gestures and movements, cautions the reader to question the way he seeks to apply his interpretations.

Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* was published in 1938 while most of the manifestos and essays in this book were written between 1931 and 1936. Since Artaud's death, these writings have been extremely influential to theatre practitioners. However, within arts education, the works of Artaud are rarely mentioned. Thus, as a way to expand the literature in arts education, specifically curriculum theory within arts based research, I now consider some of Artaud's key concepts in relation to selected curriculum theories. The field of curriculum theory is particularly well suited to a discussion of Artaud because of its focus on lived experiences, autobiographical engagements and *currere* (Pinar, 1974). I have also chosen to delve into the work of Artaud as a way to understand the a/r/tographic and curricular openings that Greene describes as important for living in the world "wide awake".

Artaud, Curriculum Theory, and Arts Education

People achieve whatever freedom they can achieve through increasingly conscious and mindful transaction with what surrounds and impinges, not simply by breaking out of context and acting in response to impulse or desire. And it seems clear that most people find out who they are only when they have developed some sort of power to act and to choose in engagements with a determinate world... freedom has to be gradually achieved and nurtured in situations that have been

made intelligible but that have to be continually named and understood. The pedagogical implications of this view are multiple, and it is hard to conceive of a set of educational purposes that does not include a concern for human freedom and sense of agency in the face of a more and more controlled and administered world. (Greene, 1995, p.178)

According to Artaud some of the men and women who lived in his contemporary society had to be *awakened* from their mindlessly lived lives. Artaud discusses this issue by talking about the ways that some people went to the theatre to be entertained and seen, or to department stores to buy things that were unnecessary. Such actions were compared to what Artaud saw occurring in Mexico, where all things were made for a purpose; even art was created for enacting various rituals. This idea of men and women existing in a dream-like state is articulated in curriculum theory through the works of Maxine Greene, who says:

To open up our experience [and, yes, our curricula] to existential possibilities of multiple kinds is to extend and deepen what each of us thinks of when he or she speaks of a community. (Greene, 1995, p.161)

[T]he role of the imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected. (Greene, 1995, p.28)

By discussing the importance of extending, awakening and deepening our multiple experiences, that may often be hidden, Maxine Greene reflects in relation to education and curriculum Artaud's dream to awaken society. This wide-awakeness in Greene's (1977; 1991; 1995) writings highlight the importance of contextual, emergent, creative, connected and imaginative qualities within lived curriculum. Such a view of the curriculum also anticipates the inward turn described in *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (Pinar and Grumet, 1976). This inward turn asks the individual to look inside oneself (as well as outside) to begin to describe honestly and personally what one's internal experience is in order to bring into being a self in relation to knowledge and to the world (Miller, 2004). This engagement is required as a way to capture the process of autobiographical educational engagement; as situated within a personal, political, historical and social reality that William Pinar has theorized as *currere* (1974).

In general terms, *currere* has been defined in the field of curriculum studies as running an educational course or the lived experience students and teachers have when engaged in learning. Understanding *currere* in this way was first proposed by Pinar (1974) and then later discussed as a method for systematic educational self-study by Pinar and Grumet (1976). This method has four steps: regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetic.

In the regressive step one's past lived experiences are considered the "data," which [is] generated through "free association"—a psychoanalytic technique—to revisit the

past and thereby re-experience and “transform” one’s memory. In the progressive step one looks at what is not yet and “imagines possible futures.” The analytical stage is like phenomenological bracketing; in this step one examines the past and the future and creates a subjective space of freedom in the present. The present, the past, and the future are looked at as one movement. In the fourth, the synthetical moment, one revisits the “lived present.” [Here, one listens] carefully to one’s own inner voice in the historical and natural world [and] one asks: ‘what is the meaning of the present?’... [the] moment of synthesis... is one of intense interiority.” (Kumar, 2011, p.9)

Engaging in this process of *currere* is meant to help an individual address a significant and personal educational moment by dynamically and psychoanalytically looking at it in order to understand the roots of the chosen issue. It is thought that by following this method, one can deepen one’s agency “...because autobiography is concerned with reconstructing self and cultivating singularity, which is politically progressive and psychologically self-affirmative” (Pinar as cited in Kumar, 2011, p.10).

Currere as an inquiry process and as a creative art and a means for self-reflection and deepening agency, compliment Greene’s definition of the curriculum as a “means of providing opportunities for the seizing of a range of meanings by persons open to the world” (1977, p. 284).

Imagination also plays a key role in Greene's encouragement to becoming wide-awake by: listening in new ways, developing on-going opportunities to encounter the arts, and working with others in community, because the imagination offers an individual a way to consider what might be rather than what is. Highlighting the role of arts curriculum, Greene calls us to move into spaces where we can create visions of other ways of being and ponder what it might mean to realize them (1995). These perspectives are in an educational context, the same outcomes for society that Artaud wished to achieve through theatre. Although I am not making a case for Artaud's influence within the works of either Grumet or Greene specifically at this time, I have chosen to link curriculum theorists with the work of Artaud because my research into Artaud inextricably informs and affects my readings of these and other theorists.

Another large part of Artaud's theatrical theorizing is focused on breaking through the barriers of language in order to touch life and create new things with the fervor of a religious awakening but without the constricting system of beliefs. Instead he focuses on movements, gestures and sound as a way to disrupt habitual patterns of thought and action as a means for coming to know. Artaud believed that all systems such as institutions are within us and permeate our being and that for this reason it is the individual's responsibility to create change if something is wrong in society. However, as the passage below indicates, Artaud does not think that people understand this. Rather, he thinks that men and women create society and their relative institutions to solve

problems and keep order instead of relying on one's self to do this work. This results in disengagement with the world and one's life.

If our life lack's brimstone, a constant magic, it is because we have chosen to observe our acts and lose ourselves in considerations of their imagined form rather than being impelled by their force. And this faculty is an exclusively human one. I would even say that it is this infection of the human that contaminates ideas that should have remained divine; far from believing that man invented supernatural and the divine, I think it is man's age -old intervention that has ultimately corrupted the divine within him.

(Artaud, 1938/1958, p.8)

In his later writings, Artaud develops the seed of the idea that he began to articulate in this passage by talking about the ways that man made himself into a god who no longer has to engage in his world because he has been able to gentrify some of the natural parts of himself such as using the bathroom for bowel movements. Artaud uses this as an example for the way that man has distanced himself from his humanness and signifies that an individual's creative, imaginative and spiritual capabilities have also been dulled down. While Artaud's theories for "fixing" this problem include extreme suggestions such as those written about in *The Theatre and its Double* (1938/1958), other interpretations of his ideas for an educational audience have been made by theorists such as Madeleine Grumet.

Madeleine Grumet has written about the curriculum as theatre in

Curriculum as Theater: Merely Players (1978) and in *Towards a Poor Curriculum* (1976). In these two texts, she theorizes how the ritual roots of theatre can lead to an understanding of freedom for the educator by conceiving of the curriculum as a moving, spiritual, artistic experience. In *Curriculum as Theater: Merely Players* (1978) Grumet considers the way that the Greeks used props as actual representations of spirits that affected the individual and the society within which they lived. She then turns to the work of Antonin Artaud as a modern theatre theorist who picked up on the idea that people have lost their deeply spiritual essences because they do not engage in ritual processes of destruction and rebirth. For Artaud, this understanding was developed in part through his work with the Tarahumaran Indians in Mexico (1976) where all things, including art, were made for a purpose and not for mere consumption. Because Artaud's ideas were so theoretical and Jerzy Grotowski's work² attempted to put into action Artaud's concepts, Grumet turned to applying some of Grotowski's actor training concepts that seek to eradicate an individual's habitual blocks, in her work with teacher candidates. Grumet went on to show how engaging with a curriculum that has significance for the individual leads to opportunities for her students to experience freedom, rather than liberation, through shared theatrical experiences.

² Jerzy Grotowski was founder and director of the Polish Laboratory Theatre, an experimental company that became an institute for research into theatre art and the actor's art. Later he disbanded the company and focused on understanding human creativity outside the theatre and leading people back to ritual elemental connections with the natural world.

For Grotowski, the theatre is not an end in itself but rather a vehicle for self-study and self-exploration that leads to a possibility for salvation. Thus for Grotowski, acting is a life's work and the act of performance is an act of sacrifice similar to that of a priest and worshipper (Brook, 1968/1990). This connection between the theatre and a religious encounter can be viewed in a curricular context in *Theory as a Prayerful Act* (1995) where Macdonald tells educators that they must profess, reveal and justify, from their own viewpoints what they believe and value. This sort of living educational theory is:

...[t]he act of theorizing [as] an act of faith, a religious act... [or an]...expression of belief, as William James expounds in *The will to believe*. [This] belief necessitates an act of the moral will based on faith. *Curriculum theorizing is a prayerful act*. It is an expression of the humanistic vision of life. (Macdonald, 1995, p. 181)

In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook (1968/1990) calls Artaud's views of the theatre holy. He then discusses how Grotowski's theatre is as close as anyone has gotten to Artaud's ideal because its purpose is holy. For Brook, Grotowski's theatre is holy because it seeks to respond to a need that churches can no longer fill by professing to an audience images, words and visions that require contemplation, attention, meditation, consideration and action.

Curricular theorizing as theatrical engagement as an act of faith can thus be understood in relation to Grotowski and Macdonald's writings about curriculum theorizing as a prayerful or religious act. Curricular

engagement as religious or prayerful seeks through study, contemplation, theorizing and writing an understanding or deep engagement with a particular topic over a lifetime. This requires continual commitment and practice. It also means that at some point in time one must give over to a hope or belief that they don't completely understand in order to enter into moments with the divine. For Artaud, this kind of engagement would represent one becoming familiarized with the divine within.

The Plague, Deterritorialization and a Rhizomatic Curriculum

In order to describe how to push the theatre and society to new understandings and limits, Artaud uses the metaphor of the plague. This metaphor works extremely well for Artaud since the plague³ actually decomposes the body while an individual is still living and causes one to take all actions/gestures/sounds to a limit that was previously unfathomable. For the actor, this meant that they take on a form that negates itself to just the degree it frees itself and dissolves into universality (Artaud, 1938/1958). In this way both the theatre and the individual have the possibility of recovering dormant conflicts, feelings, or emotions within the self. Arguably, if every individual experiences such transformation, society would as a reflection adapt and change.

³ The symptoms of the bubonic plague include painful, swollen lymph glands, vomiting and urinating blood, coughing, terrible pain (caused by the decaying of one's body while still alive), fever, chills, delirium; two out of three people who have the plague die from this contagious disease.

Alongside the writings about an ongoing deterritorialization of curricular borders that exist between the hierarchical structures in and within the very educational landscape curriculum scholars seem continually attempting to unify, Artaud's metaphor of the plague can be seen as a reason for not trying to for example, find a one-size-fits-all definition for curriculum or the period that some have named it now in. This suggestion means that like a plague taking over a body's organs in order to change a person's physical form into something new, frozen institutional structures should be continually dissolved and rebuilt instead of artificially held up or maintained beyond their actual moment of effectiveness in order to allow for the continual process or transformation of the field.

The metaphor of the plague has helped me to come to understand the curriculum field as a process of deterritorialization as theorized by Deleuze (1994). This is a process by which we leave a territory in order to make new connections, or move away from spaces regulated by dominant systems of signification that keep us confined within old patterns. This notion is combined with Kaustuv Roy's (2003) writings about curriculum as rhizome⁴ where the potential for a people-centered curriculum lies in the building of strong yet seemingly unconnected connections. Roy places his ideas within the reconceptualization of the curriculum movement and it may very well be that we are always in a

⁴ In *Teacher in nomadic spaces*, Roy (2003) describes curriculum as rhizomatic because learning occurs as an offshoot, irregular growth that is not the result of deliberate planting. This means all events (not just those that are measured on a territorialized and conscious level) affect learning in powerful yet sometimes irregular ways.

process of reconceptualization if we agree with his idea of curriculum as rhizome.

Rhizomes are usually thought of as root systems that grow in multiple directions but that eventually interconnect and strengthen a plant. Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2007) use rhizome to theorize research that is non-hierarchical and that uses multiple entry and exit points to represent and interpret data. To me, thinking about approaching the curriculum as rhizomatic and people-centered means that multiple people, with varying perspectives, can have the opportunity to be involved with and engaged in a particular curriculum. For example, a rhizomatic people centered curriculum can allow professors, policy makers and governments to theorize and consider curricular questions as well as children, parents and communities. This means that a rhizomatic curriculum is people-centered because although there are so many different people with so many different relationships to a particular curriculum in existence; rhizomatic offshoots of curriculum allow multiple perspectives to co-exist and strengthen one another. In this respect, thinking about the curriculum field as rhizomatic recognizes that it is always shifting and moving; dependent on context; open to reinterpretation; looking to the past and to the future to inform the present; and available for multiple paths and people to engage with its conception. The curriculum is alive!

Researching the work of Artaud from the perspective of an a/r/tographer and then finding themes such as the plague, sleep-walking and having a double, in combination with the rhizomatic people-

centered curriculum, have given me an understanding about working in a liminal space or opening that I did not understand before engaging with said writings.

Understanding and Living the Openings

The difficulties that Artaud laments persist because he is thinking about the unthinkable—about how the body is mind and how mind is also a body...Artaud's work denies that there is any difference between art and thought, between poetry and truth...so he takes art making to be a trope for the functioning of all consciousness—of life itself. (Sontag, 1976/1988, p.xxv)

Near the end of his life, Artaud worked on a radio drama called *To have done with the judgment of God*. This radio drama was recorded on November 28th, 1947 with Maria Casares, Roger Blin and Paule Thevenin for airing on February 2, 1948. Before the actual broadcast however, the drama was pulled on the grounds of it being obscene, anti-American and anti-religious. Artaud responded to this censorship by writing, in a letter, that creating this play for which he had previously been given free creative reign, was to create a work that would appeal to certain organic points of life that would encourage the audience to participate in a new and unusual Epiphany. Numerous other individuals such as Rene Guilly supported the publication and airing of this work to no avail (Eshleman & Bador, 1995). Ironically with the invention of You Tube and the internet current versions of this once banned recording are now

available for the world to view and listen to at any time. Strange sounds, primal screams and made up sounds combined with text about fecal matter and the death of God are just a portion of the experience that a listener can have.

At this time, however, the actual radio play and its text are not the main reason for introducing this particular text. Rather, it has been included in order to point out the term Artaud uses in this play that he calls the Body without Organs (BwO). This description of a BwO is given at the very end of the play where Artaud is asked about the purpose of this piece of writing. Basically, Artaud suggests that he has created this particular radio show in order to denounce certain kinds of social filthiness such as the American people's occupation of Indian lands and the way that man has used science to replace what is actually a God, that is both destructive and rebuilding. Artaud says that for this reason, we must find new ways to get God to emerge from the puritanical consciousness that man has attached to his identity in order to believe more in the possibilities of man. For this reason, Artaud suggests man must be emasculated by physically changing his anatomy since there is nothing more useless than an organ (1975). It is once a man has been given a Body without Organs, that he will have been delivered from all his automatisms and restored to his true liberty. Only once this physical act is complete can a man be retaught to dance from the inside out and this inside out is his true side out.

Though vivid and perhaps extreme, this description of a BwO suggests, in perhaps the most powerful way, what Artaud has

continually said throughout the rest of his life's writings. He articulates once more that in order for any sort of societal change to occur, one must physically experience something that will strip one's self of one's habitual ways of doing things. This physical transformation according to Artaud can then lead to internal shifts/changes/openings that free the inner self, thus restoring one's liberty and freedom.

Final Thoughts: Openings in Deleuze & Guattari

One of Deleuze & Guattari's questions in Chapter Six of *A thousand plateaus* (1987/2007) asks "How do you make yourself a body without organs". In response to this and related questions they discuss how dismantling the organism, to become a BwO, is about opening up the organism to levels and thresholds, passages of intensities, that help the unconscious significations that cling to the organism find release. This is discussed in relation to Artaud's radio play *To have done with the Judgment of God* in which the BwO, or the organism, undergoes judgment that uproots the organism from a place of immanence, making it into a signification or subject.

For Deleuze & Guattari this means that the organism has an understanding of what it means to cease being an organism that experiences "The judgment of God" or "signification". To explain how the BwO perpetually experiences swinging between the poles of pure immanence and signification, Deleuze & Guattari use the concept of a plane that the stratified BwO swings between. Since the BwO is a limit

that one is forever attaining, there are always more stratum that can be dismantled, explored etc.

Within an educational context, there is a strong pull from the educational institution to create a subject who identifies as “teacher”. Thus, perhaps, if this occurs, it may become more difficult to swing back to pure or absolute immanence in which immanence is substance or a life unto itself and consistent with Artaud’s ideas that life and art, body and mind should not be separated dualisms. However, in discussions with my own arts education students about being both open to developing oneself as an individual and as a relational being, I would suggest that one can experience signification and pure immanence while continuing to move in the liminal spaces/openings between the two if the individual can conceive of being a sort of crossroads betwixt and between the multiple levels and roads of signification and pure immanence. To be aware or conscious of choosing to move between poles continually as a crossroads suggests to me that one has found a way to exercise their personal agency in which an understanding of experiencing curricular openings or breaks allows one to be wide awake in all moments of one’s life.

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