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CORPOREAL DISINTEGRATION AS LAST-GASP VOCAL ACT

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The distinctive form of a final, last-gasp, last-breath monologue illuminates distinctive aspects of the final works of theatre artists and choreographers. Such a monologue, which expires at around the same time that the body which expels it also expires, often constitutes a manifestation of a practitioner's work in its most intensive form, while intimating qualities of corporeal and linguistic disintegration and fragmentation, and offers insights that span theatre, dance and performance art.

I began to think over the question of a 'terminal monologue', and its status in theatre history and contemporary performance cultures, during a performance in 2014 by the Japanese choreographer Ko Murobushi, which took place in the grounds of a large military memorial-park cemetery, in Berlin. In that dance performance, Murobushi conducted an improvised vocal monologue while he danced, concerned with the multiple presences of the dead that he appeared to be experiencing while he was dancing. Among those presences was that of his own dead body, since he was ill and dying as he danced, and it proved to be one of his last performances, since he died soon after. Murobushi enacted a form of narrative monologue poised on the point of lapsing, and whose subject matter materialised out of that imminent expiring.

Such a performance may possess many theoretical contexts extending beyond the habitual critical framework for performance. In the case of Ko Murobushi's work, for example, as I learned from conversations with him, that context was partly that of ecological theory, especially 'dark ecological' theory, associated with the environmental theorist Timothy Morton and his books such as *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013). Such works argue that irreversible damage has already now been done to global eco-systems, with the result that new forms of art and performance will need to focus upon, and to anticipate, the future extinguishment of eco-systems, and of human and animal populations, while that ongoing and future process of disintegration unfolds.

In whatever form it takes, a 'terminal monologue' always narrates something, and its capacity to narrate a sensation, memory or event is transformed through the sense of crisis or urgent upheaval that is being

experienced. Before looking at three specific examples of this narrative process, I would like to propose several possible characteristics of this particular form of monologue.

Firstly, it is always corporeal and marked by the body, as that body undergoes some kind of collapse or mutation in consciousness. Secondly, it narrates an event, which can fluctuate in scale, extending from very wide-ranging and engulfing crises - relating to social, urban or ecological structures - right down to small details of individual physical malfunctions, such as the inability to stand upright (a particular preoccupation of *ankoku* butoh dance performances, such as those of Murobushi). Thirdly, it is often bound-up with questions of memory and oblivion, since such a form of expiring monologue often needs to articulate itself, and its subject matter, by narrating a memory, shortly before that memory vanishes and loses its coherence, as through a fall into unconsciousness or a state of coma. Fourthly, that form of monologue, whatever its subject matter, is often motivated by a state of anger or contestation, and as such may deploy a narrative form which is abbreviated, dense and urgent, in order to articulate that sense of injustice or fury.

This distinctive form of last-gasp or last-breath monologue, which appears to demand experiments with new narrative forms, possesses a very long history, from ancient theatre cultures through to familiar twentieth-century works such as those of Samuel Beckett, along with the plays of Jean Genet, such as *The Screens*, as well as his last book, *A Loving Captive*, which has been adapted for performance on several occasions since its publication very shortly after Genet's death in 1986. *A Loving Captive* is preoccupied with its own monologic unfolding during the process of dying, as its author narrates his memories of his political involvements, with the Palestine Liberation Organisation and other movements, before reaching that narrative's extinguishment with the final words: 'This last page of my book is transparent.'⁽¹⁾

Such narratives invariably entail autobiographical elements, but may also require the displacement of autobiography, through the invention of other figures, as well as the voice's merging with filmic or digital media, as for example in the contemporary work of the Lebanese performance artists, Lina Saneh and Rabih Mroué.

That form of expiring, final monologue is always aware of its own imminent expiring, together with its own memorial histories, and its potential futures once the body that emits it has lapsed. This essay will probe those memories

and residual manifestations through three examples of such monologues (two contemporary ones and one historical one): firstly, Murobushi's last performance in Berlin; secondly, the final radio monologue by Antonin Artaud, from November 1947, which formed the concluding part of his final, censored work, *To have done with god's judgement*; thirdly, one of the final works before his death of Patrice Chéreau, in the form of an on-stage vocal monologue performance of a published text by Pierre Guyotat, *Coma*, in which Guyotat narrates events leading up to his fall into a near-fatal coma from which he was resuscitated.

The monologue performed by Ko Murobushi, at Treptower Park in Berlin in June 2014, was one of his final performances before his death in Mexico City soon after. Murobushi trained in Japan in his early twenties as a mountain monk, a 'Yamabushi': training that involved long, arduous mountain-journeys and periods of silence. But during that same period, in the late 1960s, he also became involved in Japanese experimental dance, and especially in the work of the choreographer and dance-theorist Tatsumi Hijikata, who had already devised the *ankoku butoh* ('dance of utter darkness') dance form at the end of the 1950s; that dance form was initially seen as being provocative in the context of Japanese dance and arts cultures of the time, and involved confrontational elements, as well as extremely slow and exacting movements. Hijikata often described such movements as embodying and evoking the world of the dead. *Ankoku butoh* is also centrally concerned with the ageing body and with the body in a state of disintegration; one of Hijikata's key collaborators, Kazuo Ohno, continued dancing until his late nineties, when he was confined to a wheelchair and suffered dementia, and even then, continued to dance and perform publicly. Murobushi collaborated intensively with Hijikata, and as well as presenting their work in the context of Japan's experimental art scene, they also performed in erotic cabarets together, and both appeared in a feature-film produced for the Japanese horror-film genre, entitled *Horrors of Malformed Men*. But from the early 1970s onwards, Murobushi ceased collaborating with Hijikata, and instead performed solos, or worked with small groups of dancers. He was one of the first *ankoku butoh* dancers to perform in Europe, notably in Paris in 1978, when Japanese newspapers reported that the audience members included Genet and the poet Henri Michaux, at a time when *butoh* was still widely perceived as a poetic performance art. Murobushi's work often involved the incantation of a spoken monologue while dancing. Hijikata himself died in 1986, and Hijikata's death formed the ostensible subject-matter for Murobushi's final dance and monologue in Berlin in 2014.

That performance, undertaken on two successive days, took place within the context of a event devised and overseen by the French choreographer and dance-historian, Boris Charmatz, *20 dancers for the XX Century*, one of a series of ongoing events with that title staged in different cities, with the aim to create a 'museum of dance'. The Berlin variant of that sequence of events took the form of many simultaneous performances arranged across specific sites around the immense space of the Treptower Park war-memorial, which had been constructed in the second half of the 1940s with spectacular monumental statues; it formed the mass-grave cemetery for around 7,000 Soviet soldiers, out of the 80,000 killed in battles in the Berlin region at the end of the Second World War. The site was originally designed to be able to hold large volumes of visitors or spectators, and several thousand spectators attended both evenings of Boris Charmatz's dance event. In that context, the event's audience experienced a very different or contrary form of engagement to that of the monument's original, war-memorialising conception, as they witnessed dance performances which were mostly intended to memorialise or appropriate dance works or styles of the twentieth century, from Meyerhold's biomechanics of the 1920s-30s, to 1980s 'voguing' styles.

The space allocated to Murobushi's performance was at one corner of the monument's main avenue, alongside the last in a row of steles on which texts attributed to Stalin narrated the events of the Second World War. Rather than re-staging the history of his 1960s collaborations with Hijikata, Murobushi instead noted in the event's programme that he would be focused specifically on remembering Hijikata's death through his dance.

During the three-hour span of each evening's event, Murobushi remained present throughout, sitting on a bench alongside one of the memorial steles, smoking cigarettes, and choosing his own time to give his performance, which he undertook twice on the day I saw it, each time for a duration of around twenty minutes. Murobushi's dance movements evoked gradual corporeal decelerations and also outlandish, feral elements, performed as a series of fragments with intensive concentration; alongside them, Murobushi undertook a vocal monologue, also in the form of narrative fragments, ranging from clearly spoken elements, to gasped exclamations and increasingly exhausted utterances in whispers, as the performance elapsed. Both his dance movements and his monologue appeared to be, at least in part, improvised. His monologue concerned 'the dead': among them, Hijikata's death, but also

his own death (still in the near future), and the many thousands of the dead interred directly under the ground he was performing upon.

While watching and listening to the performance, I made a few rapid notes, writing: 'Murobushi accompanies his dance with a gasped monologue commentary of vocal fragments which his spectators now have to move closer in order to hear, and in which he says that, in Berlin, in dancing, he is thinking of someone who has died, and his fragments of dance project a plethora of dead bodies, or spectres, or ghosts, that are unable to move, or to manifest themselves, except through that dance, his own dance, those "presences of the dead" expelled from their usual incapacitation, into this space, through the medium of his body, which simultaneously resists those spectres of the dead, but also serves as a kind of opening or aperture for them, back into the world.' At the end of his performance, Murobushi abruptly abandoned his dance movements and vocal monologue, and retreated to his bench, appearing somewhat distanced from the rest of the event.

In describing this performance as a last-gasp monologue, enacted shortly before the body's extinction, one factor which appears especially notable is that there now remains almost no visual trace or record of Murobushi's performance, even though it took place relatively recently, in front of an audience who were mostly carrying iPhones and cameras, but did not use them to record the performance.

In scanning the many hundreds of thousands, even billions of images of dance, archived on Google or other sites, only one or two images of Murobushi's performance can be located. By contrast, many photographs exist of the wider performance space in the memorial-park, and of other elements of the event, *20 Dancers for the XX Century*. A distinctive characteristic of Murobushi's monologue, in part enunciated directly towards the group of spectators surrounding his performance, was that his audience felt in some way prevented or impeded from photographing it or filming it, either for use for their own future memories, or else as documentation for photographic archives and social-media sites. The performance of that monologue, with its narrative fragments of the dead, and its occasional elements of the speaking dancer's eye-contact with the audience, appeared to have blocked that capacity for representation; another explanation is that the spectators were so absorbed in the performance that they simply forgot about the impulse to record it.

Murobushi's performance raises the wider question of whether a performed monologue possesses a very particular relationship to processes of representation. That relationship may be rendered still more challenging, or even impossible, when the monologue is one poised at the moment before its own expiring. Such questions recall the statement by Rabih Mroué, in his recent work, *The Pixellated Revolution*, that it is always impossible to film, or to represent, the moment of death itself, only the surrounding events and incidents. He is referring to the killings, in the cities of Syria in 2012, by snipers, of protestors holding iPhones to film those snipers. Mroué asserts: 'We don't see the moment of death, only what comes in the moment before and after. The moment of death cannot be located. It seems that recording the moment that separates life from death is impossible.'(2)

The question of the representation of narrative monologues, as they expire towards death, may be usefully illuminated by the historical example of the concluding vocal monologue, from 1947, by Antonin Artaud, for his final work, *To have done with the judgement of god*, undertaken with the firm theoretical intention to combat and even to negate the process of representation.

While Artaud was preparing his performance of that radio project, which had been commissioned by the French national radio station, he wrote a short polemical text about his ideas for active resistance against processes of representation; the text resonates with his influential performance theories of the previous decade, the 1930s, around the planned instigation of a 'Theatre of Cruelty'. Artaud's ideas appear contemporary ones, connecting in vital and immediate ways with a current sense of urgent unease with the immense power of digitised media forms of representation in the contemporary world. In his preparatory text from 1947, Artaud writes:

'There is nothing I abominate and execrate so much as this idea of spectacle, of representation,

that is, of virtuality, of non-reality,

attached to everything which is produced or that is shown....

I come back to this idea that all of this radio broadcast was created solely in order to protest against this so-called principle of virtuality, of non-reality, finally of spectacle,

inextricably attached to everything which is produced and that is shown, as if it were intended in that way to socialise and at the same time paralyse monstrous presences, and to channel - through the stage, the screen or the microphone - the possibilities of explosive deflagration that are too dangerous for life, and that are thereby turned away from life.'(3)

The most contrary aspect of Artaud's ideas of combating representation is that he intended to do it through the form of a performance. That work would take the form of an expiring vocal monologue, presented explicitly by him as his last work, since he was aware that he was ill and would shortly die from illness or from suicide. His monologue's performance had to be corporeal - marked by the body - and also had to act instantaneously, to the maximum possible extent, thereby eluding the channels and media of representation to which he was opposed. He was also preoccupied with these questions in the many drawings he undertook during that same era, with titles such as *The projection of the true body*.

Artaud's final radio project resulted from the engagement in French radio culture of that era in commissioning challenging or experimental vocal work, in this case for a series entitled 'The voice of the poets'; that commission appealed to Artaud because he was especially interested during that last phase of his work in being able to transmit his preoccupations directly to large audiences, as with those that existed for radio programmes in that era. Once Artaud received his radio commission, he devised a project which combined monologues with dialogues. Rather than writing his monologues, he vocally dictated them to one of his collaborators, to be transcribed, as he had often done with earlier projects; the monologues were created directly in a vocal form, then transcribed in order to be read-out or memorised, for the live performance itself which was to take place in a recording studio.

As well as the two monologues voiced by Artaud which both open and close the radio project, he also undertook several passages of dialogue, in a glossolalic language of cries and screams, with Roger Blin, then a young actor and director who, twenty years later, directed the first production of Genet's play, *The Screens*. Several other texts were recorded by Artaud's collaborators, including one on his experiences with the Tarahumara population of northern Mexico in 1936, titled *Tutuguri* (read by the Spanish actress Maria Casarès). At least one other monologue was prepared to be read by Artaud but then had to be excluded so that the radio broadcast would not over-run its allotted time.

Shortly before the planned transmission of Artaud's radio project, in February 1948, it was abruptly censored and banned by the director of the radio station, and not heard for many years, though it survived because Blin kept a copy of the recording, and it is now very easily accessible on CDs and

websites. Artaud protested bitterly about that last-minute silencing of his radio project, writing in a letter to a friend:

'you won't hear the sounds,

the sonorous xylophone

the cries, the guttural noises and the voice,

all of which would have constituted finally a first grinding-out of the Theatre of Cruelty.

It's a disaster for me.'⁽⁴⁾

In many ways, this silencing of Artaud's work - into a form of non-performance, and un-hearing - resonates with his initial misgivings about the status of representation, and especially with his ideas from the start of his preparatory work on the project, about the capacity of representation to induce 'paralysis'. The radio time-slot that had been allocated to Artaud's monologic performance was not actually left silent in the end; instead, the radio station simply filled the time by transmitting a documentary programme on American popular culture, which encouraged the young population of France to engage with that culture, in the era of the Marshall Plan. Artaud's protest against the censorship of his work involved organising an event at a cinema auditorium in Paris, at which an audience of invited spectators gathered to listen to the work; but he then died a week or two later.

Artaud's final, expiring monologue in that radio recording appears at the end of its forty-minute duration, and its narrative content takes a very unusual form. It emerges from a monologic voice which constantly interrupts itself and its own narrative, assuming the form of a divided monologue, in the form of fragments. The monologue is internally split with contestations. Artaud's monologue encompasses two voices, his own, as well as a voice which is intended to convey either that of the audience listening to the broadcast during its transmission, or else a voice of social authority which opposes the work's very existence. This particular form, of a monologue divided by its own contestation, appears a very prescient form for more recent monologic writings, such as those of Sarah Kane. In Artaud's monologue, its internal sub-voice accuses him of proposing ideas which are delirious and mad, saying: 'You are proposing very bizarre things there, Mr. Artaud... You're delirious, Mr. Artaud, you're mad... Whichever way we approach you, you're mad, mad and ready to be tied-down.' In order for a final, expiring monologue to embody contestation and fury, as with this last work of Artaud, it can articulate itself through a strategy of disintegration - effectively, of self-disintegration - in which its performer takes on the role of the narrator who is trying to propose

ideas, alongside the presence of an opposing voice that interrupts those ideas, and which the narrator then has to overrule, with anger, in order to finally focus on manifesting those ideas.

Artaud's narrative content, when it is eventually vocalised, in the monologue's closing passage, is one closely concerned with a narrative of the human body and its future. Because a radio recording cannot entail the actual physical presence of the performer materialising in front of its audience, it is necessarily concerned, to some degree, with the absence of that performing body. In allocating such pre-eminence in his monologue's narrative to the status of the human body, and to corporealities, Artaud generates a fissure of tension and contradiction in his monologue which, again, resonates with his resistance to the processes of representation. His narrative concerns a human body which has been constrained and placed in a state of incapacitation. Artaud's narrative proposes a solution to that incapacitation of the body: 'by placing it one more time, and this time, the last time, on an autopsy table, to remake its anatomy

I am saying: to remake its anatomy'.

This process will generate the 'body without organs' (the 'corps sans organes' which fascinated Deleuze and Guattari, among many other theorists) that serves to resolve the corporeal incapacitation which Artaud perceives.

His monologue's narrative finally proposes a new form of performance that will emerge out of that process of corporeal reduction, and manifests itself specifically as a dance performance:

'When you have made of it a body without organs...

Then you will teach it once more to dance back to front

as in the frenzy of dance-halls

and that reversed place will be its true place.'

Artaud's envisaged dance form, articulated in those very last words of his monologue, appears as an amalgam of the many dance forms he had witnessed in his life, from then-contemporary popular dance-hall forms in post-Liberation Paris, to the 'Tutuguri' dance associated with peyote rituals which he had apparently witnessed in the Tarahumara mountains of Mexico in 1936 (though a number of contemporary anthropologists believe that Artaud fabricated his accounts of the 'Tutuguri' dance, having arrived in the region at the wrong time of year to witness it), and also the Balinese dance performances he had attended at the Paris 'colonial exhibition' in 1931. His monologue's narrative ends abruptly, in a vision of dance.

In contemporary performance culture, the distinctive form of an expiring monologue, pitched at the point before death or before the end of consciousness, is exemplified by Pierre Guyotat's text *Coma*, published in 2006, which then became the final performance work of Patrice Chéreau, in 2013. An especially striking aspect of this particular monologue and its narration is that it was generated by one person, but then recited by another, since its author considered its autobiographical narrative content too traumatic and intimate to recite, so that a second person, or intermediary, then felt compelled to take it on, and assume it in a corporeal way, to present it to public audiences with the stated intention, as Chéreau asserted, to 'protect' it. That sense of compulsion implies that a monologue in its textual form cannot fully exist until it is performed in some way.

Guyotat wrote his monologic text in the years up to 2006, evoking a crisis he had actually suffered twenty-five years earlier, in 1981. The monologue is therefore already a work of memory and of the active memorialisation of that earlier self; the text oscillates, in its narration, between those two points in time, decades apart. Guyotat is best-known for a novel he wrote about his experiences as a very young French soldier in the Algerian War of Independence, which ended for him with his arrest, and lengthy incarceration, for desertion and sedition. That novel, *Tomb for Five Hundred Thousand Soldiers*, was adapted by Antoine Vitez for a production staged in Paris at the end of 1981, at the same moment that Guyotat suffered the crisis which led to his being re-animated from a near-lifeless state, and then spending a period unconscious, in a deep coma, before eventually recovering. His collaboration with Vitez was only one of his many collaborations with theatre directors and choreographers, including the celebrated choreographer Bernardo Montet, who trained for several years in *ankoku butoh* dance in Japan with the dancer Kazuo Ohno.

Guyotat's text, *Coma*, is itself deeply preoccupied with the experience of performance, and with incidents of performance. The monologue begins with an evocation of attending a dance performance in Paris in 1999, at the time when he was beginning his work on the text, which then extended over several years:

'It's now the end of one of the last afternoons of the last century of the millennium, I'm with a friend, originally from Leeds and just returned from Hokkaido, we're in the Foyer of the Odeon Theatre of Europe, in the waiting line for a unique performance by actors, dancers and musicians from Bali, from the villages of Peliatan and Abianbase - descendants of those - then from the

imperial Dutch East Indies - witnessed by Antonin Artaud, in summer 1931, at the Colonial Exposition of Vincennes... We're now positioned up on the second balcony of the red and gold auditorium - almost directly above and to the right of the stage, which we see at an acute tangent - profiles of bodies, of objects and instruments... I immediately start shaking for every one of the artists that I see between the moving curtains, their moments of reflection and wilful self-abandon before they appear on the stage. Even before I make the effort of imagining their lives, their genealogy, their training in their art form, their brains, their hearts, each of them, every one of them - female and male - right down to those whose work is solely to be servants to the performance - I am already less than she or he... The work that I do is a representation of absence, in the language of that absence. I work every day to explode that fatality.'(6)

The distinctive texture of that monologue, with its fragmentary character, and its sense of immediacy, intimate that it was originally composed vocally, dictated, and then transcribed into written form by one of Guyotat's associates, in a parallel way to Artaud's monologue intended as the conclusion for his 1948 radio broadcast.

The narrative content of *Coma* concerns a sequence of depressive crises which Guyotat suffered around the end of the 1970s, and which are evoked and incanted in the text, along with the many journeys he undertook while enduring those crises, especially around the Mediterranean coasts. The recounting of those journeys takes up most of the text, in the form of a sequence of corporeal disintegrations which gradually accumulate to a point of breakdown and silence. In the final part of that narrative, Guyotat's crises intensify, and he ceases to eat or to function, eventually being discovered in his apartment already close to death and having to be resuscitated at the last moment by the ambulance service. The text's final pages then evoke what he experienced in his subsequent state of coma, especially memories or sensations of childhood, before eventually re-awakening and being transferred from the hospital's 'resuscitation' section to its 'rehabilitation' section, and eventually recovering the capacity for speech.

Although Guyotat has given performances of many of his other texts, in theatres and art museums, he has not performed *Coma*, which is an exceptional instance of an expiring monologue in that the monologue's author may have died ('technically' died), but then came to survive that death, after being unexpectedly resuscitated. It has the narrative form of a terminal monologue, heading into silence, but then surpasses itself, so that future

monologues can and will be generated, as in the performances that Guyotat has undertaken since then and through to the present day. A point of rupture exists in the usual transition between the formulation and invention of a monologue, and its author's subsequent performance of it for a public audience; in this case, that rupture is one which exceeds the capacity for public representation by its author, rendering it impossible.

Patrice Chéreau began to perform *Coma* from 2008 onwards, firstly at venues in Greece and Italy, and then in Paris, as a series of occasional performances, around fifteen or twenty in all, which extended up to his performance of the monologue as the closing event at the Avignon Festival in July 2013, two months or so before his own death, in the autumn of that year. As noted earlier, Chéreau said that his intention was to 'protect' the original text, which he perceived as being vulnerable and isolated; that is, protecting it, by performing it. The staging which Chéreau chose for the performance was extremely stripped-down; he decided to perform it in the largest auditoria possible, and commented in a France Culture radio interview in 2009: 'For this, I wanted bare stages - large and bare stages which prevent me from feeling fear, and I found that was the best location so that my voice could exert itself, and that the text could take on a body.' He also spoke of a 'physical projection' of the text.(7)

Those monologic performances each lasted around ninety minutes and consisted solely of the performer's body, barefoot, with just a wooden chair, and the habitual machinery at the back and sides of the stage all visible. Although Chéreau had (as he asserts in his radio interview) memorised the entire text, he also took it onto the stage with him, in the form of a sheaf of typed sheets of paper rather than the published book.

Such a performance may constitute a form of direct collaboration between the instigator of an autobiographical monologue, and that monologue's performer positioned before a public audience; Guyotat attended several of Chéreau's performances. Chéreau appeared exceptionally tense, and frequently stumbled over passages as he tried simultaneously to remember and to perform them. He spoke in his interview with France Culture about the sense of a burden, together with physical punishment and commitment, which the performance demanded, with that experience eventually dissolving into one of liberation at its ending. In some respects, Chéreau's performances of *Coma* appear a perverse and contrary project, in delivering a monologue which

is intended to exhaust itself, and consign itself to silence. Such a performance is closely implicated in the resistant forms of representation itself.

Surprisingly few visual or memorial traces appear to subsist of Chéreau's performances of *Coma*, as with the spoken monologue and performance by Murobushi in Berlin. Although one performance was recorded and transmitted live by France Culture, otherwise the performances seem not to have been filmed, except for one short sequence recorded during a performance in Seville. That dearth of documentation again indicates the difficulties in representing an expiring monologue which may not be conducive to generating its own memory, or its own visualisation or archiving. Such a form perhaps possesses its own distinctive life, which consumes itself - and its narrative - as it is performed.

A performer's final, last-gasp, last-breath monologue - as with those of Murobushi, Artaud and Chéreau - is always intimately aware of its imminent expiring into silence. Such a monologue always pivots upon the body of its performer, as a contested or ailing presence, and even when the body appears absent from the performance in its representation, as with Artaud's radio recording, that body remains intentionally embedded within the performance, through the monologue's insistent preoccupation with corporeal transmutation.

Although rooted in memory, this 'last-gasp' monologic form also allows its future implications to be traced. In their fragmentary outbursts, monologues often resonate with the forms of future-oriented prophecies, predictions, anticipations, or warnings. As well as comprising accounts of ongoing corporeal disintegration, such monologues may also take on the form of manifestoes. This characteristic is especially at stake in the work of Artaud, who had published an anonymous manifesto entitled *The New Revelations of Being* in 1937, predicting global apocalyptic events, and which he then travelled to the Aran islands, off the western coast of Ireland, in order to witness, as a spectator anticipating the events of his own monologic prophecy. However outlandish its narrative form, a monologue may acquire the accelerating momentum necessary to anticipate potential acts of catastrophe, whether of global ecological turmoil, or of warfare and conflict, or of wide-scale crisis. In that sense, it may well have compelling contemporary and future subject matters.

While a last-gasp, last-ditch form of monologue is often intended to be experienced as having emerged from a space of profound physical isolation, it is also a medium that works actively to interrogate the forms of human bodies and their futures, such as their forming into new communities or their capacity to enact new forms of movement. While a monologue may be preoccupied with the articulation of its own ongoing solitary crisis, through its final vocal projections, it will also indirectly reveal other corporeal dimensions and actions. In terms of performance, a monologue which anticipates its own final expiring will often adopt an experimental form, which disregards boundaries between art forms or weaves between them in order to narrate or to project its urgent subject-matter. Beyond the performance of the voice, it also integrally engages with other media, and with the capacities and resistances of representation.

Notes

1. Jean Genet, *Un Captif Amoureux*, Gallimard (Paris), 1986), page 504.
 2. Rabih Mroué, filmic document of *The Pixellated Revolution*, performance work staged in numerous cities, 2012-14.
 3. Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, volume XIII, Gallimard (Paris), 1978, pages 258-59.
 4. Ibid (letter to Jean Paulhan), page 139.
 5. Artaud, extracts from the sound recording *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*, 1947-48.
 6. Pierre Guyotat, *Coma*, Gallimard (Paris), 2006, pages 15-16.
 7. Patrice Chéreau, recorded interview with France Culture, 2009, conserved in Guyotat's archive at the Bibliothèque de France, Paris.
- Translations from French into English are by the author.