

Preserving Life Force: Antonin Artaud and Zhuangzi on the Body

This essay examines the body paradigm in the late writings of Artaud, the ‘body without organs’ (‘corps sans organes’), in relation to the body ethics of the Chinese thinker Zhuangzi (ca. 400 BCE).¹ The reason I set up a comparative dialogue between Artaud and Zhuangzi—thinkers widely disparate in time and space—is that I find a proximity of thought in their shared concern for the body’s life force. As I will argue here, both Artaud and Zhuangzi understand the body as a holistic unit identified with its life force and consequently both demand an ethics of life that preserves the body and refuses to instrumentalise it for any teleological purpose. Therefore, through a distinctly non-Occidental perspective on Artaud’s ‘body without organs’, I intend to highlight the current problem underlying the reception of Artaud’s oeuvre and thought: that Artaud, championed by the major post-WWII critics such as Deleuze and Derrida, has unfortunately, for that very reason, become a figure that voices the (post-)structuralist concerns of schizophrenia, glossolalia and archi-writing rather than a voice that speaks for itself. The critical attention paid to Artaud’s ‘body without organs’, which is already very slight in comparison with that directed towards his theatre, has therefore followed upon these interpretative approaches and become dominantly poststructuralist, eclipsing alternative possibilities for seeing Artaud with new eyes. Because of the over-emphasis on language, the text and on the resistance of the ‘body without organs’ to economic value (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 11) in dominant criticism focused on Artaud, Artaud’s enduring obsessions with the materiality of the body, its vital energy and corresponding ethics are made relatively insignificant. Moreover, the views of Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida very problematically depend upon the thesis of madness (even though they champion madness), thus ignoring the vehement denials of any mental disorder which Artaud never ceased to make throughout his life. They give the impression that Artaud’s later writings, dating from his controversial internment in psychiatric hospitals in 1938, are the ravings of a psychopathic artist. Such an impression is misleading, nor should Artaud’s ‘insanity’ be taken for granted. I contest, rather, that madness is a motif that the ‘body without organs’ plays with and ‘has a theoretical content’ (Eliade 1964: 31); and

that consequently, the ‘body without organs’ is not in any case a pathological literary production but should be taken most seriously as the expression of Artaud’s indefatigable ethics of re-articulating, remaking and cultivating his body so that it would absolutely affirm life. By approaching Artaud’s body view from an alternative perspective—namely, the philosophical thought in Zhuangzi—that is free of the anti-Enlightenment intellectual context in which twentieth-century Western critics found themselves, I argue therefrom that Artaud affirms a life force found not primarily in the text or in ‘madness’, but in the concrete experiences and mindful practices of the body. In the following, I will first examine the notion of life force in the body, then discuss the preservation of life force as an ethical praxis that centres on the body. Finally I will compare my reading of Artaud to Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Body without Organs’ and to Derrida’s criticism that reads Artaud’s body without organs as an intranslatable text and body of ‘différance’, so as to demonstrate how an Artaud that is not appropriated by (post-)structuralism may come into view.

To begin with, for Artaud as well as for Zhuangzi, the first step towards an ethical life is synonymous with the preservation of life force in one’s own body. Now, we need to examine how life force is understood by the two thinkers, and precisely how it acts upon the body. According to Zhuangzi, life is a cosmic energy coinciding with the ceaseless flux of the Tao. The Tao—which literally means the ‘way’, implying change in time and space—is an ungraspable process of becoming. By its mutations, the myriad things and life come into being: ‘Mingled together in the amorphous [Tao], something altered, and there was the energy; by alteration in the energy there was the shape, by alteration of the shape there was the life’ (Zhuangzi 1981: 124). This life-giving energy is termed the ‘*qi*’, more accurately translated as ‘breath-energy’, or the ‘souffle’ in French. Providing the concrete basis of shape and life, breath-energy is the fundamental substance that animates all things; but in accordance with the Tao, it has no definite form, being ethereal, fluid and invisible. Zhuangzi often uses the metaphors of the currents of wind and water to visualise breath-energy, thus emphasising the importance of its continuity and wholesomeness. These characteristics reveal breath-energy to be closely

similar to Bergson's *élan vital*, the spontaneous movement of life force that seizes upon matter, 'une impulsion unique' ('a single impetus') that is indivisible (Bergson 2007: 271). So life is continuous and the body, being its animated material, cannot be analytically broken down as Cartesian mechanism purports to do. The whole body is not a sum of *partes extra partes*, that is each part external to and independent of every other part. Moreover, on the basis of the one substance of breath-energy that makes the body holistic, Zhuangzi explicitly refuses the hierarchisation of body parts, or organs, as advocated by Confucius, the philosopher of social morals. In opposition to the Confucian morality that 'the relationship between father and son is like that between head and feet' (Hwang 1999: 169), which indicates a top-down power system, Zhuangzi ripostes: 'Of the hundred joints, nine openings, six viscera all present and complete, which should I recognise as more kin to me than another?' (1981: 51). Not only should one understand that body parts are unclassifiable, and therefore inseparable, one also needs to see the body as a block of breath-energy circulating throughout. As Ishida points out (in Kohn 1989: 51), the water metaphor illustrating the flux of breath-energy can be replaced by blood, which 'thoroughly pervades the whole body'. For this reason, the mind, which exists as breath-energy exactly as the body does, flows in the blood and is identical to the body. In short, instead of a form, the body is fluid; instead of a body, it is more accurately a body-mind. Thus, Zhuangzi's body-mind of vital impetus significantly liquidates the Cartesian dichotomy of body and mind, and challenges the very idea of fixed organs in Western anatomy.

Likewise, Artaud's 'body without organs' contests the Cartesian and anatomical body thinking by taking a vitalistic stance. Like Zhuangzi, Artaud sees life as a kind of breath-energy, which he calls 'le souffle' ('breath'): 'La vie c'est ce que j'ai/dans le souffle' ('Life is what I have/in the breath.') (Artaud 1988: 368). In addition, life is an unbroken process: 'La loi de la vie est la continuité, la permanence infinie' ('The law of life is continuity and infinite permanence.') (Artaud 1990: 58). This continuous 'souffle' of life then finds an empty vessel ready to be imbued with energy in the 'body without organs', often visualised by Artaud as a 'malle' or 'boîte' ('case', 'box') (1994: 187). Far

from being a void body, the ‘body without organs’ is brimmingly full of the ‘souffle’. To eradicate the organs is precisely the prerequisite to the non-obstruction of life’s passionate dynamism inside the body. The filled ‘body without organs’ becomes an incandescent meteor, ‘une pile électrique’ (‘an electric battery’) of explosive energy with an insatiable ‘appétit de vivre’ (‘appetite for life’) (Artaud 2003: 66, 49). Such a body that never finds its life force in excess would inevitably loathe any kind of breakdown of the whole to parts, for in that case, its vital potential would be fatally reduced. This explains Artaud’s vehement attacks on anatomy and the body-mind binarism. For instance, he accuses anatomy of confining (‘enfermer’) the magic of life (Artaud 1994: 181), and denounces organs and organisms as enslaving the body to ‘automatismes’ (Artaud 2003: 61). The atrocity of anatomy is due to its logically cutting up the body to render it fully explicable, which is to say, exposed to the medical gaze. This physiological transparency is analogous to a violation of the body by scientific knowledge, which is no other than an institutionalisation of the body. Artaud’s hatred of organs is therefore the hatred of the subjection of the body to power facilitated by Cartesian mechanism, just like Zhuangzi’s detestation of Confucian taxonomy of the body according to social hierarchy. Such purely rationalising analyses of the body miss the crucial dimension of its animating life force, the unifying energy that makes a ‘corps-esprit’ (‘body-mind’) rather than a material body repressed by a soul that ‘ne dépend d’aucune chose matérielle’ (‘does not depend on anything material’) and is ‘entièrement distincte du corps’ (‘completely distinct from the body’) (Descartes 1954: 86-7). In the ‘body-mind’, which is the ‘body without organs’ full of the *élan vital*, everything is material, or energy, since matter and life and body are all one unit in the ‘souffle’. As Artaud declares ‘L’âme est la substance même’ (‘The soul is substance itself’) (1981: 97), revealing the mind and spirit as another part of the body, the substance of which is in constant metamorphosis, penetrated through and through by the ‘souffle’.

In sum, both Artaud and Zhuangzi understand life as a fluid energy which is the unique constituent of the body. The body is thereby identified with this non-dualist, irreducible force, existing as the ‘body without organs’ in the process of becoming rather

than the state of being. This identification of body with life thus makes the Artaudian body both physical and metaphysical: that is both the matter of the body and the principle of the actions and changes of this bodily matter. Consequently, if the importance of this vital puissance of the body is such, then simply having it in the body is not enough; one should make an effort to preserve it. Special emphasis is actually given by Artaud and Zhuangzi to this act of preserving life, the reason for which will be considered in what follows.

If the preservation of vital energy is essential to both Artaud and Zhuangzi, it is because life *qua* the body is seen to be of the highest value. This is demonstrated by a parable in Zhuangzi about a sage advising a Marquis who is entertaining the idea of expanding his territory by war:

‘Let’s suppose’, said [the sage], ‘that the empire were to draw up a document in my lord’s presence, and this is how it was worded: “If you grasp this with your left hand you shall lose your right, if you grasp it with your right hand you shall lose your left; but whoever does grasp it shall possess the empire.” Would you be able to do it?’

‘I would not.’

‘Very good. You may see by this that having both your arms is more important than having the empire. Likewise your whole person is more important than your two arms. [...] Are you really going to distress your person and do injury to life [for the land you are contending]?’ (Zhuangzi 1981: 226).

What the sage brings into focus here is the supreme priority of the body and life. Not only is their preservation necessary, it is asserted as an exemplary ethical choice, since to make this choice the Marquis must give up the possession of an empire. One may ask why Zhuangzi so resolutely affirms the living body. The answer will be that the body *qua* breath-energy is the site where one finds oneself directly connected to the Tao, which is the daimonic ‘principe d’efficience’ (‘efficient principle’) that sustains the myriad things by being immanent in them (Granet 1934: 303). Preserving the body is in keeping with

the nurturing nature of the Tao in the body. Preservation is thus essentially an ethical praxis, and whoever practices it 'is illumined' (Zhuangzi 1981: 272).

Turning to Artaud, one recognises in the 'body without organs' a body of maximum energy which results from the gathering and intensification of the *élan vital*. If the body is an explosive 'electric battery' then it must be fully charged instead of discharged, for the latter simply means life's depletion. To fill this 'battery', every single particle of the body is to be preserved, which means preserving bodily energy: 'Ne perdez pas une parcelle de vos excréments, ...de votre sperme, de vos crachats' ('Do not lose a single fragment of your excrements, ...of your sperm, of your spit') (Artaud 1984: 63). This is why the body must be absolutely closed, like the impervious egg body of Chaos. Such a body necessarily eliminates the organs and orifices that betray its vital essence by allowing the latter to escape from itself: 'le corps a besoin d'être fait sans escamotage, [...] trou, ouverture' ('The body must be made without subtraction, or holes, or openings') (Artaud 1988: 21-2). This extreme economy of body resources which may initially seem paranoiac does not, however, reflect a pathological narcissism on Artaud's part. Rather, it is due to Artaud's seeing the body and life in the same way as Zhuangzi does, that is as more important than anything else. If for Zhuangzi, the safeguarding of vitality is ethical because it follows the way of the Tao, for Artaud, it is ethical because life itself is the most profound reality: 'la vie telle qu'on peut la toucher et la voir est beaucoup plus au-delà de tout ce que la réalité coutumière en propose' ('The life that can be touched and seen surpasses all that conventional reality presents as life') (Artaud 1994: 75). So Artaud's emphasis on life preservation is not a wildly valetudinarian obsession but, when read in the light of Zhuangzi's parable, an ethical exigence of which the paradigmatic site is one's own body. The fundamental reason underlying the creation of the 'body without organs', which is above all a preservatory body, is Artaud's ardent solicitude to make the body ethical. To recognise this is important, because conventionally, Artaud has been seen to be a vehemently transgressive artist and thinker who scarcely relates to moral concerns. My reading conversely offers an understanding that shows him to affirm an ethics via and in the 'body without organs', a creative idea

that has important implications for the concretely experienced body, and an aesthetic project that also carries didactic meaning.

But all this still sounds very theoretical. How exactly is the preservation of life force to be carried out? And how can this highly imaginative ‘body without organs’, the very concept of which stretches the limits of understanding, be related to the concretely lived body which does have organs with different biological functions? Here I would argue that, far from an idealistic construction of theories about the body and life which can only exist in mental space, the real concern of both Artaud and Zhuangzi is precisely a practical one: how one concretely lives one’s own body. In fact, the practicality of life pervades all of their writings. This concern to eliminate the gap between aesthetics and praxis, art and life is certainly not new. Bürger (1984) has argued that this was one defining characteristic of the European avant-garde. This applies to Artaud to an extent, but his preoccupation was, rather than closing any a priori gap, to start instead by thinking and living his aesthetic ideas and life experiences as a whole. Moreover, that Zhuangzi also shares this concern of merging aesthetic ideas with lived experience also shows that this does not need to be particular to the avant-garde, that Artaud does not need to be specifically categorised as such but can be understood in broader terms as one of those thinkers and artists who felt the need to *live* their philosophical and aesthetic views, not only write them.

In response, I now consider this issue of praxis in detail. The preservation of life force is most importantly a somatic praxis that delineates two major principles for the conduct of life: first, the refusal to use the body for any exploitative telos; second, the cultivation of the body through physical exercises that directly work upon the materiality of things only to gather energy therefrom. The aim of the first principle is the elimination of life-depleting activities that cause the loss of the body’s integrity. Referring back to the parable of the sage and Marquis, Zhuangzi clearly rejects the exploitation of the body as a means to personal gain. The Marquis egoistically desires more land, which means, more power, and thereby reifies the land, its inhabitants and natural resources as objects to be

possessed and subjugated. But this reification of the other is fallacious, the sage points out, because it simultaneously reifies the self, the body, as a tool to be employed by the machinations of power. The document that proffers an empire at the cost of an arm shows that the moment the body is reified, it becomes subject to power, the result of which is detrimental to rather than enhancive of life. The desire to improve life by using the body to gain power can only end up being frustrated, for the body is appropriated by power and its life force exhausted in the process. In contrast to the body of teleological use, Zhuangzi advocates the unappropriable, useless body. He gives the example of a man born with a monstrously deformed body but who, because of his deformity, is spared from military service and lives out his natural lifespan (1981b: 74). The uselessness of the man's deformity makes it impossible for power institutions to appropriate his body, and allows him to live non-teleologically, for nobody and nothing. His only *raison d'être* is the impersonal life force within him, which is not directed towards any telos but is simply a transformative process: his life. In our contemporary context, this useless, non-teleological body accurately corresponds to the body that refuses commodification.

The refusal of body exploitation and commodification is prominent in Artaud's writings about the 'body without organs'. His *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* (*To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, 1947), for example, begins by denouncing the public practice in the United States of putting children's sperm into standing reserve to facilitate artificial fertilisation in case of a shortage of soldiers. The outrageousness of such a practice lies in the fact that it exploits human bodies by processing them as productive machines in order to manufacture new bodies as the 'produits de synthèse à satiété' ('synthetic products of satiation') (Artaud 2003: 27). Either as a usable resource or a manufacturable product, the body is reduced to an automaton, the exact antithesis of the body as vital impulse. The figure of the automaton or mannequin is recurrent in surrealist works, and are read by Foster as 'uncanny effects of mechanization and commodification' (Foster 1993: 129). Artaud clearly recognises this commodification, but he does not seek to react through stagings of traumatic bodies as Bellmer does, but through a thoroughly healthy, invigorating idea-as-body that resists psychoanalysis: the

‘body without organs’. To ethically counter this automatised body vampirised by capitalism and all other power systems, Artaud proposes the ‘body without organs’ as the remedy: ‘Lorsque vous lui [l’homme] aurez fait un corps sans organes, alors vous l’aurez délivré de tous ses automatismes et rendu à sa véritable liberté’ (‘When you will have made a body without organs for him [man], then you will have liberated him from all his automatisms and delivered him to his true freedom’) (2003: 61). Like the useless body that Zhuangzi favours, the ‘body without organs’ is the unappropriable and inconsumable body paradigm radically existing outside institutionalisation. It violently negates all imaginable forms of power: ‘pas de famille’, ‘pas de logique’, ‘pas de loi’, ‘pas de langue’, ‘pas de christ’, ‘pas de classes’ (‘no family, no logic, no law, no language, no Christ, no classes’) (Artaud 2004: 1336-9). The truly vital body is one that does not attempt to frame, and consequently deplete and deform life according to the limits of intellect, ideology, society and so forth. Like the man in Zhuangzi’s story, Artaud was monstrously deviant from society: a ‘corps-dépouille’ that is a husk of a body interned in psychiatric hospitals (Artaud 1986: 272), a drug addict ravaged by illnesses.ⁱⁱ Artaud’s drug addiction originated in his use of drugs as painkillers. The recreational drug use of many contemporary literary and artistic figures does not exist in Artaud’s case. But he endeavoured to live absolutely ‘par le corps avec le corps depuis le corps et jusqu’au corps’ (‘by the body with the body from the body and up until the body’) (Artaud 2004: 1335). He consequently rejected the ‘envoûtement’(2004: 1317)—the spell of life appropriation cast by power mechanisms, and his life irradiated a stunningly intense vital force, as Dumoulié comments (*Europe* 2002: 15): ‘c’est trop de vie’ (‘it’s too much life’). Thus, this principle of negation, of using the body *qua* life for any telos apart from its own, is the lesson of Artaud’s life.

But the preservation of the vital body does not only involve the refusal of harm; more importantly, vitality needs to be cultivated. So the second principle posits life preservation as life cultivation. In the eyes of Artaud and Zhuangzi, life is not a given and living has to be learned from somatic practice: ‘la route de la Vie...est l’apprentissage par le corps’ (‘The path of Life...is learning by the body’) (Artaud 1981a: 194). This learning

takes the form of exercising one's body by putting it into direct contact with concrete materials in quotidian life. This is illustrated by Zhuangzi in a parable about an artisan whose wooden bellstands are marvels. When asked about the secret of his ingenious craftsmanship, the artisan answers:

When I am going to make a bellstand I take care never to squander energy on it, I make sure to fast to still the heart. After fasting three days, I do not care to keep in mind [...] honours and salary. After fasting five days, I do not care to keep in mind your blame or praise, my skill or clumsiness. After fasting seven days, I am so intent that I forget that I have a body [...] only then do I go into the mountain forest and observe the nature of the wood as Heaven [Nature] makes it grow [and make the bellstand accordingly] (Zhuangzi 1981: 135).ⁱⁱⁱ

The working method and process of the artisan are significant in a number of ways. Firstly, instead of making designs to determine the construction of the bellstand, the artisan begins by exercising his body through regimen. Second, this regimen gradually eliminates all the factors that would distract him from the making of his *œuvre*, so that he arrives at a point of extreme concentration of energy. Third, he then follows the intuition of his energy to grasp the material he works with: he finds a piece of wood that *naturally* possesses the aptitude for a bellstand. In this manner, rather than 'squandering [his] energy' by forcefully cutting a bellstand from unsuitable wood, the artisan harmonises the spontaneity of his vital force with the willing nature of the right wood. Artisanal work, which demands the expenditure of energy, becomes on the contrary not only a preservation, but also a gathering of energy, and with the best result: the bellstand is a masterpiece. In this process, the artisan cultivates life both through his body and the concrete material his body interacts with, thereby making them his life's *œuvre*.

In Artaud's case, the preoccupation of his final years is the fabrication of the 'body without organs', the material of which is his own body. Like an artisan, Artaud saw himself doing physical work, a 'travailleur' (worker) (1986: 121), and paid utmost attention to exercising his body in various ways. For example, he followed a self-tailored diet and regulated his intake of drugs: '50 grammes de laudanum 3 fois par jour,/50 centgrms d'héroïne 4 fois par jour,/3 douzaines d'oursins par jour,/3 cakes par jour,/...½

kilog de pâtes d'amandes' ('50 grams of laudanum 3 times daily,/50 centigrams of heroine 4 times per day,/3 dozens of sea urchins per day,/3 cakes per day,/...1/2 kg of almond noodles') (Artaud 1990: 47). He also took care to train his breathing, the 'souffle' of vitality that first gained importance in his theatre writings and remained crucial to him from that point onwards: 'inspiration et expiration, comme un creuset, ...dans le but non de former un acteur mais de former un personnage d'homme' ('inhalation and exhalation, like a crucible, ...not in order to train an actor but to train a human person.') (1994: 103). These disciplinary techniques constitute a veritable praxis of *askésis* in the Foucauldian sense: the 'exercises' which transform and perfect oneself to produce an œuvre from an ethical lifestyle. The 'substance éthique' ('ethical substance') (Foucault 1984: 33) of this œuvre is then, for Artaud, the materiality of a body of non-excess that would not violently unleash and therefore lose its energy in any way: 'je ne fais aucun excès,/je ne dépense aucune force physique profonde' ('I do not do anything excessive, /I do not spend any deep-seated physical energy') (Artaud 1988: 225). By repeatedly practising such a body, a progressive accumulation of energy could be effectuated, to which the obsessive repetition of body images testifies: the body as a burning lump of coal, a bomb on the verge of explosion, an absolutely dense (or condensed) block of wood (Artaud 1984: 350). The redundancy of such references to somatic power and self-concentration makes some of Artaud's late works seem, as Morfee deplores, 'dishearteningly' boring and self-obsessed (2005: 122). Nevertheless, if seen from the perspective of artisanal exercise, repetition is exactly what is needed to cultivate one's skill. Practice inevitably repeats the same form and content of an exercise, just as Zhuangzi's artisan needs to fast continuously for seven days. But in each repetition, one makes progress, one evolves towards a purer, more intense corporeal state. This intensified state is what Artaud aspires to attain by means of his body. And like Zhuangzi's artisan, Artaud would eventually be totally intent on his œuvre, possessed by an intuitive 'ignorance' (XXIV: 217), and find within his body his masterpiece, the complete coincidence of the ingenium of life force with the apt nature of his body: the 'body without organs'.

To summarise the second principle of preservation, life is cultivated through repeated *askéses* of the body, which directly engage with the practitioner's physicality and the concrete matter of things. This method of cultivation is a praxis, in other words, *acts* that constitute an ethical life. In answer to the previous questions about the practicality of Artaud and Zhuangzi's ideas, preserving life force is shown to be not just theoretical, but primarily a pragmatic matter one should attend to in life. Artaud's 'body without organs' is not simply an idea but his own body in the culminating process of cultivation: a body that is both the fundamentally material body that is given a priori and the body of creation that constantly reworks and recreates itself, culminating in the very *œuvre* of vital energy.

Having read Artaud's 'body without organs' interactively with Zhuangzi's thought so far, I now turn to compare my reading to the Deleuzian and Derridean criticisms on Artaud in order to demonstrate the need to rethink these existing critical paradigms. Generally speaking, these existing paradigms emphasised the 'body without organs' as a creative method to explode thought, but do not in fact specify any particular way in which the 'body without organs' can be lived through concrete acts or life choices. To begin with Deleuze, this concentrative, material and vitalistic 'body without organs' of Artaud as considered above agrees only to a certain extent with the famous 'Body without Organs' of *Mille Plateaux*. Like the 'body without organs', the CsO (Corps Sans Organes) is a body of intense energy and dynamism: 'l'œuf intense qui se définit par...des tendances dynamiques avec mutation d'énergie' ('the egg of intensity that is defined by...dynamic tendencies accompanied by the mutation of energy') (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 189); it radically opposes totalising power organisms, be it capitalism, the system of signification, or fascism. But the CsO is also essentially different in a few key aspects. First of all, it is not primarily a body of preservation but one of *dépense* ('expenditure'). It has a multiplicity of strata, gradients, plateaus of intensities from which deterritorialising lines of flight flee; it is a rhizomatic mass of energy which disperses in the centrifugal movements of difference, 'fortuitous instances' in which identity, or rather, identities are disoriented and unmade (James 2000: 130). If the CsO's

intensity is at ground zero, that is the acme of energy where everything becomes possible, it is only to unsparingly expend energy, the Bataillean ‘part maudite’ (‘accursed share’) always in excess, always open to the outside (Bataille 1949). This unconditional *dépense* that aims for the greatest possible activity in its ‘véritable sens’ (‘genuine sense’) (Bataille 1970: 305) cannot be farther away from Artaud’s obsession with preservation, although for precisely the same reason. All the movements of Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ are ultimately centripetal, a return to the unity of the body instead of a ceaseless spiralling away from it. For example, Artaud insists that ‘vous verrez mon corps actuel/voler en éclats/et se ramasser/sous dix mille aspects/notoires/un corps neuf’ (‘You will see my present body/fly into fragments/and *gather together again*/in ten thousand striking aspects/a new body’) (Artaud 2003: 79, my emphasis). This ‘corps neuf’, which is the ‘body without organs’, operates only to *gather* and is really a closed system which debars any ‘déperdition’ of energy (Artaud 2004: 161). Because the vital energy of any particular body never exists in overabundance, it is actually never enough and the body is always hungry for life (Artaud 2003: 49). Thus, in this divergence, we can see that Deleuze and Guattari problematically overlook the basic function of energy preservation that Artaud intended his ‘body without organs’ to have.

The next point of difference is that, as critics such as Hallward and Foster have argued, the CsO is a fundamentally abstract and virtual body which is not immediately accessible in quotidian life, whereas Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ is embodied, material, practicable.^{iv} Deleuze and Guattari create a philosophical idea from the CsO which can engender by its centrifugal flux of intensities all sorts of fantastic concepts including nomadic desire, becoming-animal, schizoanalysis, among others. These abstractions can hardly be physically applied to the living body in any imaginable way, except on the plane of thought. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari’s CsO is not a concrete body at all. As Hallward points out, it is a ‘body subtracted from any bodily shape or norm’ (2006: 98). It is a ‘corps sans image’ (‘body without image’) (Deleuze and Guattari 1972/3: 14), a pure virtuality and the product of intellectual experimentation. Extraordinarily creative as it is, the CsO’s disembodiment goes against the grain of the

materiality of Artaud's 'body without organs'. For instance, Artaud explicitly states that with the body:

Il y a en moi un homme de cinquante ans...qui ne croit pas aux grands problèmes intellectuels mais/ seulement aux grande nécessités matérielles.

(In myself there is a 50-year-old man...who does not believe in big intellectual problems but/only in big material needs') (1986: 207).

The body that he is remaking is a matter of '*objets corporels concrets*' ('*concrete corporeal* objects') (1986: 112), not of metaphysics or anything divorced from the immediate forms and experiences in life. So the very idea of disembodiment would trigger violent remonstrance from Artaud: 'je suis une bête brute corporelle et je ne peux pas ne pas avoir de corps' ('I am a corporeal and simple beast and I cannot not have the body') (1981b: 215). Again, the CsO is found to depart markedly from Artaud's 'body without organs'.

Finally, although Deleuze and Guattari claim that the CsO is vitalistic ('tout est vie' ('everything is life') (1972/3: 26)), this vitalism does not seem to oppose mechanism as Artaud's 'body without organs' does. The destratification inside the CsO operates by 'coupures' ('cuts'), rendering it into independent parts that can fly away to connect with anything else (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 16). Moreover, although 'les machines-organes ont beau s'accrocher sur le corps sans organes, celui-ci n'en reste pas moins sans organes' ('the machine-organs try in vain to attach themselves to the body without organs, the latter does not become any the less organless'), the repulsion between the CsO and machinery is 'effectively reconciled' by the mediation of yet another machine: the 'machine célibataire' ('bachelor machine') (Deleuze and Guattari 1972/3: 22-4). So the CsO, functioning in an assemblage of *partes extra partes*, is like a machine of pure desire with heterogeneous machine-organs playing freely inside. In Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the machinic and the action of assemblage, the opposition between vitalism and mechanism seems to be dissolved. In contrast, Artaud's 'body without organs' clearly opposes any mechanistic approach to the body. The machine is an anathema: 'Là où est la *machine/c*'est toujours le gouffre et le néant' ('Wherever there is the

machine/there is always the abyss and void’) (Artaud 2003: 104). This is why the abundant images Artaud uses to visualise the ‘body without organs’ are mainly natural images of simplicity, such as the beast, the tree, the stone. Therefore, the ‘vitalism’ of the CsO seems doubtful, or at least not the same kind of vitalism as in Artaud. From the comparison above, it is understood that instead of being concentrative, material and vitalistic as Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ is, the Deleuzian-Guattarian CsO is disseminative, abstract and machinically vitalistic. It can be said that the CsO is an inspiration from rather than a reading of Artaud, for it is different from Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ in certain fundamental aspects. Indeed, the CsO does illustrate the Deleuzian creativity in reading literature and creating concepts, since it reads Artaud in a non-Artaudian way and is no longer bound to Artaud’s aesthetic and philosophical views. But the CsO has, for this very reason, become misleading for later readers because it has become integrated in the very way Artaud is viewed. In other words, it has rendered Artaud Deleuzian. This need not be viewed pessimistically. But if our understanding of Artaud cannot escape the shadow of Deleuze (and Derrida, Foucault or Kristeva), and Artaudian criticism inevitably has to reflect upon or associate itself with these canonical criticisms, then our understanding of Artaud will have become homogeneous and lacklustre. It would be most unfortunate for the fire, vigour, and fluidity of Artaud’s thought, which could inspire so many different possibilities, to be dulled in this way. And it would equally be unfortunate for the poststructuralist readings of Artaud, which were creatively inspired by Artaud from the start, but which, if treated as the canonical reading, would lose their inspirational character as well.

With regard to the Derridean reading in the early essays ‘La parole soufflée’ (1965) and ‘La clôture de la représentation’ (1966) which posits the ‘body without organs’ as a textual body, it may be said that this approach diminishes, or even excludes the lived dimension of the body that is fundamental to Artaud’s ethics. Despite Derrida’s argument that life is always already encoded in ‘archi-writing’, the latter still retains a non-lived abstractedness because it resists presence (1967a: 104). This abstractedness is antithetical to Artaud’s ‘body without organs’, which most down-to-earthly ‘mange...et chie’

(‘eats...and shits’) (XXIII: 112). To say that the ‘body without organs’ ‘n’existe que par l’écriture’ (‘exists only through writing’) (Dumoulié 1996: 121), or that Artaud’s screaming writings demand an ‘illisibilité’ (‘unreadability’) that ultimately discovers the conditions of the possibility of readability as such (Derrida 1967b: 363), is very penetrating but accidentally, if not intentionally, purifies the ‘body without organs’ from its viscosity of life (Scheer 2004: 8): its life force, scatological biology and vibrating flesh become words, nothing more than signifiers. Here, I argue that although the ‘body without organs’ is undoubtedly a product of writing, it is not only textual; indeed, it is not even primarily textual. In fact, Artaud demands that words must live: ‘Les mots ne veulent rien dire: ils doivent vivre’ (‘Words do not say anything, they should live’) (XXIII: 140). Writing is above all an *act*, the text only being its necessary by-product. So the textual ‘body without organs’ which we now can access is like the footprints left by Artaud’s lived ‘body without organs’. And to use Zhuangzi’s view, one cannot adequately know the shoe simply by studying the footprint (1981: 133).^v This textual body posthumous to Artaud’s life can only tell us in the most incomplete form how Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ was written, acted out, and lived. By simply focussing on the text, any reader or critic of Artaud is free to, and inevitably does ‘betray’ Artaud (Derrida 1967b: 347). To delineate a ‘body without organs’ that is above all Artaud’s body by and for itself, we need to recognise its thorough contamination by Artaud’s lived body which was consciously perpetuated by Artaud throughout his final years.

As for later Derridean criticism on Artaud, which shifts to examining the drawings and spatial organisation of Artaud’s notebooks from his Rodez internment, Derrida’s change of emphasis from the linguistic and textual to the visual and vital can be seen when he observes that images defy language so fundamentally (‘détrui[t] l’autorité du langage’) that they cannot even be considered ‘intraduisible’ (untranslatable) because an image exists in itself and has no translatability as such (Derrida 1987). Derrida’s relation of Artaud’s neologism ‘subjectile’ to the projection, or better, ‘throwing out’ (*iacere*) of life force and vital energy such as blood, also points towards the importance of lived corporeality and vitality for Artaud (Derrida and Caws 1994: 168). Regrettably,

Derrida does not further develop this line of thought explicitly or sufficiently. The projection of life force, as I have argued here, is not simply a paroxysmal expulsion of vitality as Derrida argues, but more importantly, an expulsion that does not drain the expelling agent of his life force but expresses the *jouissance* and ecstasy of concentrated energy that explodes *only to* re-merge into one, as is seen in the above citation: ‘vous verrez mon corps actuel/voler en éclats/et se ramasser...un corps neuf’ (Artaud 2003: 79). Derrida, like Deleuze and Guattari, emphasises the aspect of expenditure rather than the aspect of preservation, the body splintering into fragments rather than the body being a holistic unit. He consequently neglects the non-dichotomous nature of Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ which ultimately does not seek contradiction but harmony: life flows on abundantly despite its expenditure, the body is nonetheless whole even when projected. This idea of *coincidentia oppositorum*, not only favoured by Artaud but also by many avant-gardists, is succinctly expressed by Breton:

Il existe un certain point de l’esprit d’où la vie et la mort, le réel et l’imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l’incommunicable cessent d’être perçus contradictoirement.

(There is a certain point in understanding at which life and death, the real and imaginary, the past and future, the communicable and incommunicable cease to be seen as contradictory) (1929: 1).

To conclude, both Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ and Zhuangzi’s Taoist body are demonstrated to be bodies that preserve life force in the first instance. This preservation is the initiation into the ethical life, of which the physically existing body constitutes the site of cultivation. The body emerges as a concrete source of therapeutic material which, in Artaud’s case, reveals the ‘body without organs’ to be very different from the CsO of Deleuze and Guattari, and much more concrete as well as much less textual than Derrida’s interpretation. The life therapy that stems from one’s bodily resources thus heals the body of the detrimental effects of instrumentalisation and lack of energy, and opens the body to its maximum potential of life force. This reading of Artaud in relationship to Zhuangzi’s thought therefore argues for a material ethics of preserving the body. And reflecting upon the dominant Artaud criticism that focuses primarily upon

madness, virtuality, the *dépense* of energy, and the body as text (albeit unreadable)—aspects that are antithetical to and reductive of Artaud’s views on the ‘body without organs’, I propose that a profound rethinking of Artaud’s life and work is necessary.

(All translations of French citations are my own.)

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i The text *Zhuangzi* is of course a syncretist collection of writings made by various people over a stretch of time from the late Warring States (late 4thC BCE) to the Han dynasty. But for convenience's sake I use 'Zhuangzi' to denote the persona that the text is supposed to represent. My use of the name 'Zhuangzi' does not mean an overall uniformity or single authorship of the text itself.

ii Artaud's drug addiction originated in his use of drugs as painkillers, the recreative drug use of many contemporary literary and artistic figures does not exist in Artaud's case.

iii The idea of 'Heaven' (tian) is too complex to elaborate upon here. Various critics such as Angus Graham, Liu Xiaogan and Wu Kuangming have understood it as 'nature', the inevitable, natural disposition. These understandings more or less encapsulate what 'Heaven' denotes in this passage.

iv Although Deleuze argues that the virtual and actual planes flow into each other, it is an ongoing debate whether this virtuality does concern concrete life; for critics like Hallward (2006), with whom I agree, Deleuzian virtuality is contemplative but does not engage with actual daily life.

v This absence is different from the Derridean trace: it does not indicate an origin that is the absence of origin (Derrida 1967a: 90) but an origin that is non-originary in the sense of neither having been created nor can be destroyed, that is the immanent life force that is always already there, which annuls the question of origins.