

**Directing ‘The Absolute’: Towards destabilising the  
victim/perpetrator binary in Sam Shepard’s *A Lie of  
the Mind* (1986)**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate and directorially apply Antonin Artaud's concept of The Absolute in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary between the characters Beth and Jake in Sam Shepard's play text, *A lie of the mind* (1986). Previous theoretical analyses of Beth and Jake in *A lie of the mind* frame them as victims of their circumstances and as victims and perpetrators of violence (Bottoms 1998:16). I will explore the violent relationship between them in the context of the victim/perpetrator binary set up in the original play and re-imagine this binary by creating a radical reinterpretation of the relationship between the characters in a theatre production titled  $\pi$  (2015). I argue that a directorial treatment of The Absolute assists in destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary present in Beth and Jake's relationship.

To reinterpret Beth and Jake's relationship, I explore René Girard's notions of violence, victimisation, and scapegoating, as well as the Artaudian notions of Cruelty, The Absolute, and the Theatre of Cruelty. I apply the Girardian concepts and vocabulary to a reading of the relationship between Beth and Jake. I also discuss the ways in which Artaud and Girard conceptually relate to one another. I then provide a practical exploration within the framework of the Theatre of Cruelty by creating an original production,  $\pi$  (2015), in which The Absolute facilitates the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary that exists between Beth and Jake. In  $\pi$  (2015), the relationship between Beth and Jake is reconceptualised and reinterpreted through taking cognisance of the Artaudian-Girardian framework.

This dissertation concludes that Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and the notion of The Absolute are able to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary between Beth and Jake by replacing sexual desire in their relationship with transcendental love, and reconstructing and reimagining their relationship accordingly.

KEY CONCEPTS: The Absolute, Theatre of Cruelty, violence, victimisation, scapegoating, desire, and transcendental love.

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# DECLARATION

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Directing 'The Absolute': Towards destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary in Sam Shepard's "A Lie of the Mind" (1986).

I declare that this thesis / dissertation / mini-dissertation is my own original work. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Chapter Introduction

This study aims to investigate and directorially apply Antonin Artaud's concept of The Absolute in a radical reinterpretation of Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind* (1986) in order to destabilise an existing victim/perpetrator binary. Specifically, I explore the violent relationship between the play's protagonists; Beth and Jake, in context of the victim/perpetrator binary set up in the original play text between them. I argue that a directorial treatment of The Absolute may assist in destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary present in Beth and Jake's relationship, as it stands in *A lie of the mind*.

I conduct my investigation using a provided vocabulary structured by René Girard's notions of violence, victimisation, and scapegoating, and apply this vocabulary to Artaud's notion of The Absolute in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary. In order to investigate what I set out for myself in this study, I created the production  $\pi$ , which premiered in the Lier Theatre at the University of Pretoria and ran from the third until the fifth of September in 2015. I use this introductory chapter to specifically provide background to, and contextualisation for, my chapters to follow. For the sake of clarity, I leave the elaboration on all theoretical and practical notions to chapters dedicated to these.

Previous theoretical analyses of Beth and Jake in *A lie of the mind* frame them as victims of their circumstances and as victims and perpetrators of violence (Bottoms 1998:16). This study intends to frame the violence present in the text as an essential process in achieving The Absolute in the study's directorial approach and theoretical analysis. This study also explores the theme of transcendental love in the reinterpretation of the play text, as a driving force in the newly constructed narrative and that, which, in the context of The Absolute, destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary in Shepard's play text (as discussed in Chapters Two and Four). The combination of Artaud and Girard provide this study with an innovative and conceptual theoretical

framework that, from Chapter Four onwards, aims to facilitate a critical exploration of Beth and Jake in and apart from Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind* (1986).

Sam Shepard (1943 -) is an American playwright, director, and actor, whose work centres on the deterioration of social and cultural systems (Bloom 2003:12). Shepard's plays portray a sense of community that goes beyond traditional notions bound by the institutions of family and milieu. The primary focus in Shepard's plays is the notion of identity. He states that the question of who individuals are is of utmost importance. Shepard is interested in discovering the motives of the hearts and souls of human beings (Biggsby 2002:9, 24). In my understanding, and in the context of this study, this links directly to Artaud's notion of The Absolute, where an identity apart from worldly institutions is sought after.

As Chapter Four will demonstrate, *A lie of the mind* is the one play text in Shepard's oeuvre that may, for the purposes of this study, successfully integrate Artaudian notions, specifically The Absolute (as Chapters Two and Four will motivate). The central themes in *A lie of the mind* that are relevant to this study are violence, binary positioning, love, and deterioration (of language, of the body, and social constructs). Out of all the characters, Beth and Jake embody these themes and ideas most clearly for me. Thus it is imperative that they are the characters that are extracted and reconstructed for this study and reinterpretation of the text (discussed further in Chapter Four). Beth and Jake signify the potential to deconstruct victim/perpetrator binaries as approached through the complimentary lenses of Antonin Artaud and René Girard.

Thus, by using a vocabulary and theoretical understanding provided by Girard, and looking at the objectives of The Absolute, this study will break down the existing constructs within *A lie of the mind* in order to re-construct Beth and Jake without the presence of the victim/perpetrator binary.



Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) is widely recognised as a revolutionary theatre practitioner and is considered by some to be one of the most influential forces of the development of Western theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Esslin 1976:10). His influence and phenomenologies remain present in the works of various contemporary theatre practitioners, as Chapter Two will discuss in more depth. Artaud's work is inundated with what Albert Bermel (1977:8) describes as, "ecstatic visions of what theatre might be". Mark Fortier (2016:55) acknowledges a statement Jacques Derrida made, concerning Artaud; that Artaud managed to push and expose the boundaries of western metaphysical thought further than any of his theatrical contemporaries (Fortier 2016:56).

Artaud was writing and practising theatre at a time when the role and identity of an audience and performer was being redefined from active to restrained by dominant modes of theatre (Crano 2010:51-52). Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty encourages a sense of "total theatre", incorporating the body, mind and soul of the performers, audiences and creators.<sup>1</sup> Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty aims to stimulate every facet of a person's responsiveness to a theatrical event. It encourages active involvement from its audience, which aims to incite an organic emotional release from both the performer(s) and audience (Artaud 1977:66). *The Theatre and its Double* became Artaud's official literary publication that included his visions for theatre, specifically, his *Theatre of Cruelty* manifestoes.

René Girard analyses violence, victims, and scapegoats from an anthropological paradigm. His fundamental argument is religious in its nature. He provides illustrations from myths and dramatic tragedies to explore his theories around the 'mimetics of desire' and how violence may be a result of two individuals pursuing the same desire, as well as how violence itself is desired in the action of violence (Girard 2013:164). He acknowledges the deterioration of religion in current society and discusses the influence (negative and positive) it has in both its presence and absence (Girard 2013).

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<sup>1</sup>Artaud (1977:66) gives no definite explanation of what he defines as a 'soul', but based on the context he provides, I interpret that he uses the concept as part of the three defining parts of a human being, the soul being the non-tangible component that works alongside the mind and body.

While my interest in the source does not lie in Girard's beliefs of The Second Coming or the ultimate European contribution to the end of the world, the 'clarity' the text provides on violence and the "possibility of an end to the Western world" (Girard 2010:ix) as an institution is relevant in my theoretical and practical approach to The Absolute and Theatre of Cruelty that ultimately disregards notions of societal structures.

It is Artaud's fascination with alternative ways of creating and performing theatre that interpellates me as a scholar and theatre practitioner into supporting his visions of possibility. Artaud's philosophies of theatre echo my own focus and motives in directing, which constitute Artaud's call for a visceral theatre that speaks to the social issues of one's time (Artaud 1977:64). Artaud's ideas have inspired a generation of post-structuralist writers and thinkers in France and the United States of America (USA) across a variety of disciplines (Scheer 2004:2).<sup>2</sup> Alongside this, I am interested by Girard's understanding of violence and the scapegoating mechanism, and how understanding these two conjoined ideas may destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary, when read alongside Artaud's theatre philosophies, and his Theatre of Cruelty as a mode of theatre.

Now that I have briefly contextualised the abovementioned three materials that are used within this study, I present my problem statement and discuss my research methodology.

## **1.2. Problem statement**

My review of scholarship for this study shows that The Absolute as an aim in Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is under-researched. Furthermore, I have not yet found evidence to suggest that contemporary directors engaging with a Theatre of Cruelty work have applied the notion of The Absolute. Additionally,

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<sup>2</sup> Post-structuralism is a movement stemming from the 1960s that re-evaluated the meaning of human existence. Post-structuralism moved away from existentialist schools of thought, and instead argued that the meaning of human existence is based in the structure of language, of economic systems, and of the examination of the psyche of an individual. Post-structuralism combines the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Derrida. A critical figure within the post-structuralism movement is French philosopher and theoretician Michel Foucault (Jones [sa]:[sp]).

available scholarship in print and electronic format do not provide a framework for the practical application and implementation of Theatre of Cruelty, specifically with *The Absolute* as a primary intention. Moreover, Theatre of Cruelty as a mode of theatre may have been misinterpreted, and often abandoned, due to the perception that it contains outlandish and harmful approaches to theatre and performance.

Barring Laurens De Vos's (2011) research, I have not yet come across studies of theatre in the Artaudian tradition that utilise a complementary Girardian framework to read and develop character relationships in theatre performance. There is also a paucity of research on Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind* compared to his other play texts, and there is no analysis of the relationship between Beth and Jake that explores the relationship as anything other than one dictated by gender violence.

With the continuous development of theatre as a mode of storytelling, I approached this research and study with the intention of exploring a directorial approach that, as Artaud aimed to do in the 1930s, "wakes up the heart and nerves" (Artaud 1977:64). Artaud's seemingly out-dated goals and visions for theatre resonated with my contemporary visions and aspirations, both as a creator, and as a scholar of theatre and theatre performance. This approach, and the abovementioned opportunities for research will be explored by using practice-as-research within a qualitative research framework, which I now discuss.

### **1.3. Research approach**

This study makes use of practice-as-research as a methodology of qualitative research. Practice-as-research as part of the qualitative research methodology encourages creativity as a problem solving method, and openly encourages research questions that do not have straightforward answers. The success, therefore, of a practice-as-research study, cannot be measured by systems adopted by quantitative research methodologies; it is a process of

discovery, rediscovery, trial, error and reflection. It should be viewed as an opportunity to explore creative “breakthroughs” (Carter 2010:18).

Qualitative research does not necessarily follow one stipulated methodology. It is a combination of different methodologies and research philosophies, combining “ethnography, case studies, grounded theory” and practice-as-research as a holistic research approach (Generic Qualitative Research Chapter 6 2014:2). It seeks to explore, discover and/or understand a phenomenon, process, perspectives and worldviews. Qualitative research asks the researcher to collect and analyse information that may be gathered from interviews, theoretical analyses, observations, or all three (Generic Qualitative Research Chapter 6 2014:4). My study specifically uses theoretical analyses and observations (of an independent praxis).

As such, qualitative research has become a popular approach in contemporary research within the humanities. Although qualitative research can be a combination of several methodologies and research philosophies, it still follows a rigorous procedure that ensures a researcher does not stray from the objectives of their research (Generic Qualitative Research Chapter 6 2014:3-4).

Mark Fortier (2012:20) supports a qualitative research approach in the performing arts. He argues that theory can no longer solely be justified by a theoretical approach when the contemporary nature of academia finds itself on the basis that theories have a limited life span, essentially existing for a limited period of time. Qualitative research provides provocative possibilities: it uses theoretical underpinnings in order to find an approach to directing, and in turn, have the approach to directing influence a different way of viewing theory. This study employs these provocative possibilities through a practice-as-research methodology within a qualitative research approach.

Mark Fleishman (2012:29) addresses the importance of practice-as-research within qualitative research in the performing arts, stating that implementation of theory into a performance (which this study does), provides an “alternative

way of knowing”. This is not to say that such an approach displaces other methods of research within the performing arts, or that it deems itself more important than; practice-as-research within the performing arts allows for an exploration of knowledge which becomes embodied through performance.

This application of knowledge then facilitates an engagement with theoretical frameworks that other methodologies may not achieve as successfully within the performing arts (Fleishman 2012:30-31). Harry Feiner (2012:125-126) echoes Fleishman, discussing the established body-mind connection and how this gives rise to embodied learning. Feiner acknowledges the importance of theoretical manifestation in creative expression, and suggests how this may texture theory with further and deeper components than isolated intellectual engagement would within the performing arts.

A practice-as-research approach within qualitative research allows the researcher to discover new findings and research in the actual process of creating art out of existing literature. In this respect, the creative practice facilitates/is research. Through making art or creating a work, answers to/perspectives on the research questions emerge. New discoveries are generated in the creative process *per se*. Practice informs the methodology, content, context and conceptual frameworks of the research and the documentation of the practice and/or the practice itself becomes part of the written research.

The actual creation – my production,  $\pi$  - will be my research methodology in order to answer and engage with my research question. Thus, the answer to my research question will come from my process and product – which will be primarily informed by an existing text and relevant literature, as advised by Allan Munro (2012:59-60) in a practice-as-research approach.

In order to answer and engage with my research question in accordance with my chosen methodology, I highlight three guidelines that may help structure a practice-as-research study: “It has to describe a forming situation. It has to

articulate the discursive and plastic intelligence of materials, and it has to establish the necessity of design” (Carter 2010:21).

Within my study, I look at the following three conditions provided:

1. “It has to describe a forming situation” (Carter 2010:21):

The Absolute, as defined by Artaud, has thus far proved to be only accomplishable at what may possibly be described as a point of no return. Beth and Jake within *A lie of the mind* have been framed as possibilities for further research. The provided Girardian theoretical analysis (and its re-reading) will motivate the change of academic engagement with *A lie of the mind* and in turn, my application of The Absolute.

2. “It has to articulate the discursive and plastic intelligence of materials” (Carter 2010:21):

By applying what Artaud defined in theory regarding Theatre of Cruelty and The Absolute, by using a source text as an inspiration to create an original performance, and by developing a new understanding on the presentation of violence within the source text, I aim to frame the theory in accurate practical application.

3. “It has to establish the necessity of design” (Carter 2010:21):

By following a directing toolkit provided to me by Antonin Artaud in his Theatre of Cruelty manifestos, I will be able to follow a clear theoretical guideline in light of my choices as a director (and researcher), so as to explore The Absolute within my directorial approach.

This study has a practical component to compliment the theoretical research that will allow interrogation of the character dynamics between Beth and Jake from *A lie of the mind* (Shepard 1985). The practical component is an original

Theatre of Cruelty work that reinterprets Beth and Jake's relationship within *The Absolute*, which aims to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary. I now discuss my research questions and sub-questions that will be answered in this study using the abovementioned practice-as-research approach.

#### 1.4. Research question and sub-questions

Considering my research methodology and problem statement, I constructed the following question and sub-questions that will be interrogated within this study.

How can Artaud's 'The Absolute' destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary in *A lie of the mind* (Shepard 1986)?

- What is the Theatre of Cruelty?
- What is *The Absolute*?
- How does René Girard frame violence?
- How can the binary positioning of victims and perpetrators of violence be destabilised in order to attain *The Absolute*?
- How can Girard's ideas be used to generate an appropriate vocabulary to analyse the violence in Beth and Jake's relationship in Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind*?
- How can the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary aid in obtaining *The Absolute*?
- How can I integrate the Artaudian notion of *The Absolute* alongside a Girardian vocabulary, into an appropriate directorial approach that will enable me to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary set up in the relationship between Beth and Jake in a theatrical production?
- How can *The Absolute* act as a directorial tool to re-imagine the relationship between Beth and Jake?

These sub-questions are addressed in Chapter Two. I specifically provide a detailed analysis of Theatre of Cruelty and misconceptions thereof. I discuss Artaudian cruelty as a concept, how The Absolute is intricately linked to Theatre of Cruelty, and the notion of The Absolute:

- What is the Theatre of Cruelty?
- What is The Absolute?

I answer the following sub-questions in Chapter Three, establishing a clear link between certain Girardian notions such as mimetic desire, violence, vengeance, victimisation, the scapegoating mechanism, and sexual desire. I then link these to appropriate Artaudian concepts:

- How does René Girard frame violence?
- How can the binary positioning of victims and perpetrators of violence be destabilised in order to attain The Absolute?
- How can Girard's ideas be used to generate an appropriate vocabulary to analyse the violence in Beth and Jake's relationship in Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind*?

The last sub-question here is further explored in Chapter Four, which also addresses the following sub-question:

- How can the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary aid in obtaining The Absolute?

This sub-question in Chapter Four focuses on applying the provided Girardian vocabulary in order to engage with Artaud's notion of The Absolute. This leads me into Chapter Five, which addresses:

- How can I integrate the Artaudian notion of The Absolute in Theatre of Cruelty, and Girard's vocabulary around violence, victimisation, scapegoating and perpetrators of violence, into an



appropriate directorial approach that will enable me to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary set up in the relationship between Beth and Jake in a theatrical production?

- How can *The Absolute* act as a conceptual tool to re-imagine the relationship between Beth and Jake?

These sub-questions in Chapter Five are answered by delving into my creative decisions implemented in the praxis of this study. By providing context for the sub-questions asked in this study, I now proceed to discuss my chapter breakdowns, and provide a summary of their contents.

## **1.5. Chapter Outlines**

### **1.5.1 Chapter One: Introduction**

This current chapter introduces the aims and scope of this study, and positions its conceptual and theoretical spine at the intersection of Antonin Artaud and René Girard's notions and philosophies. It discusses my research question, sub-questions, and research methodology.

### **1.5.2. Chapter Two: Antonin Artaud: Cruelty and The Absolute**

I provide a biographical overview of Antonin Artaud to contextualise his theatre philosophies. I further elaborate on the Theatre of Cruelty and The Absolute as central to my research. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty manifestos provide a practical toolkit that will later frame my production,  $\pi$ , and my directorial choices, that I will discuss in Chapter Five.

### **1.5.3. Chapter Three: René Girard: violence, victimization and scapegoating**

This chapter discusses the relevance of René Girard's concepts to my research, and frames his work on violence, victimisation, and scapegoating as central to the theoretical framework that is necessary to reconstruct the

relationship between Beth and Jake. I also address his notions of the mimetics of desire, doubling, and vengeance. I then provide theoretical intersections between Girard and Artaud, weaving together critical points discussed previously in Chapter Two. This is done in order to create a framework, which I elaborate on in Chapter Four, in relation to Sam Shepard's play text, before practically applying this framework in Chapter Five.

#### **1.5.4. Chapter Four: Beth and Jake in *A lie of the mind*: towards destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary**

This chapter interrogates the original play text with regard to the prominence of violence and the theme of identity, which connects to *The Absolute*. In this chapter, I motivate the decision to use Beth and Jake apart from the other characters in Shepard's original text. I reframe Beth and Jake in accordance with the provided Artaudian and Girardian framework and vocabulary. This chapter analyses the existing binary of victim/perpetrator that exists within Beth and Jake's relationship, in order to motivate my directorial use of *The Absolute* in the reconstruction of the relationship, which leads me to the practical component of this study.

#### **1.5.5. Chapter Five: Directing *The Absolute*: creating and staging $\pi$**

This chapter discusses the praxis of this study,  $\pi$ . I analyse how my directorial framework for the re-imagining of Beth and Jake's relationship attains *The Absolute* and through this, destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary. The directorial framework is based on the theoretical premises discussed in Chapters One, Two, Three, and Four. In this chapter, I discuss my directorial choices within the production in relation to the framework set out to me by my research methodology. I also discuss how I depict and stimulate *The Absolute* in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary, and provide a critical reflection on my process. I discuss key moments in the production that may be cross-referenced with the provided video footage and digital documentation.

### **1.5.6. Chapter Six: Conclusion**

In this chapter I critically reflect on my directorial framework and study in relation to the production, and suggest possibilities for further research. I look at the strengths and weaknesses that the study presented and uncovered. I also reflect on the challenges I faced during the study and analyse it retrospectively. Chapter Six reflects on premises set out in this, the Introductory Chapter, concluding the study.

### **1.6. Conclusion**

This chapter provided an introduction to this study and discussed my research question, sub-questions, and research methodology. I briefly discussed the three key components that this study deals with, namely Antonin Artaud's notion of The Absolute and his Theatre of Cruelty; René Girard's notions of violence, victimisation, and the scapegoating mechanism; and Sam Shepard's original play text, *A lie of the mind*, which is the creative impetus within this study.

I provided breakdowns of each chapter that will follow in this study, and highlighted important ideas that will be discussed accordingly. By examining the chapters to follow, alongside my research question and sub-questions, I aim to clarify the method and process I will follow in order to interrogate how The Absolute can destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary within *A lie of the mind*.

## CHAPTER TWO: ANTONIN ARTAUD: CRUELTY AND THE ABSOLUTE

This chapter provides background and contextualisation to theatre practitioner Antonin Artaud (1896-1948). It focuses on his notions of the Theatre of Cruelty and The Absolute that frame the theoretical and directorial focus of this study. Theatre of Cruelty, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter, is a mode of theatre that Artaud developed in response to the theatrical norms and conventions of his time. He sought to revolutionise the way theatre was understood and practised (Artaud 1977:64). Theatre of Cruelty was originally named Theatre of the Absolute (Esslin 1976:37).<sup>3</sup> Artaud's notion of The Absolute may be seen as the essential force in any Theatre of Cruelty work (Scheer 2004:5; Jannarone 2010:192).

As referred to in section 2.2.3 of this chapter, The Absolute is a state of existence that is dependent on a unity between an individual's body, mind and soul. For Artaud, this unity is only achievable once an individual has rejected any connection to how they have been constructed by the world around them (De Vos 2011:41).<sup>4</sup> Research about The Absolute in English (and Afrikaans) print is limited, and documented material on the practical implementation of The Absolute in Artaud-inspired productions is virtually non-existent (Scheer 2004:5).<sup>5</sup> Scholars and practitioners considered the implementation and practical execution of the Theatre of Cruelty and The Absolute previously impossible due to their metaphysical nature. Both can be likened to prophecies - giving hope to future possibilities, but not providing a method of application (Bermel 1977:11).

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<sup>3</sup> When Artaud first introduced his intentions to change theatre in 1932 in a published letter to *L'Intransigeant* (a French newspaper), he debated with his long-time colleague Jean Paulhan (a fellow French writer, literary critic and editor at *Nouvelle Revue Française* (a literary magazine that Artaud was also associated with) on the correct title for Artaud's theatre; amongst the considered, was Metaphysical Theatre and Theatre of the Absolute. However, the letter published at the time labelled it *Theatre of Cruelty*, which eventually became his theatrical trademark (Esslin 1976:37).

<sup>4</sup> Please see section 2.2 for an elaboration on Theatre of Cruelty. Please see section 2.2.3 for further information on The Absolute.

<sup>5</sup> This observation is further emphasised and supported by my contemporary review of scholarship, which at the point of research provided limited engagement with The Absolute. I acknowledge that many of Artaud's works are still currently being translated, and that in future, other documentation on The Absolute may come to light.

Chapter One stated that the purpose of this study is to explore what a practical engagement with *The Absolute* may consist of in a contemporary theatrical production. I aim to use *The Absolute* in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary in the relationship between Beth and Jake in Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind* (1986), which I further discuss in Chapters Three, Four and Five of this study. This chapter will specifically address *The Absolute* and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty as informing my directorial approach. This chapter thus investigates the following sub-questions provided in Chapter One:

- What is the Theatre of Cruelty?
- What is *The Absolute*?

I will now contextualise Artaud's work and philosophies in order to establish what may constitute, in my perception, an Artaudian approach to theatre, theatre language, and directing.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.1. Background and contextualisation of Antonin Artaud

Artaud's personal life and his theatrical philosophies cannot be separated, for he saw life as theatre and theatre as life (Esslin 1976:44).<sup>7</sup> As such, the detail I present below frames his ideas on theatre and where they are thought to have originated. Eric Sellin (1968:ix) describes Artaud as a visionary who saw a future for Western theatre beyond the conventions and preconceived ideals of his time. Artaud's concepts of theatre, often described to be metaphysical (or rather, as Sellin (1968:ix) calls them, visions), persisted beyond Artaud's lifespan and Sellin's 1968 publication, allowing contemporary researchers to continue exploring and developing Artaud's theatrical concepts and philosophies.

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<sup>6</sup> For this study, I rely mostly on English translations of Artaud's work, as well as secondary sources. A substantial portion of Artaud's work is still undergoing translations from French. I use Martin Esslin's 1976 and Eric Sellin's 1968 publications for a great deal of my background research, for although the publications are not contemporary, all publications since of Artaud's personal background make reference to both Esslin and Sellin's research, but are not as in-depth as either of these two publications.

<sup>7</sup> Within this chapter, I discuss Artaud's personal and life philosophies often without constantly theatrically framing them. I do this as Artaud saw life and theatre to be intrinsically linked.

Artaud formulated his philosophies when Europe faced social and political chaos. World War One (WWI), which began in 1914 and lasted until the end of 1918, left much of the continent in turmoil. Europeans found themselves on a precipice of both new socio-political revelations, and the beginning of more horrors to come. The aftermath of the war left many countries in poverty and depression. The brutal violence and senseless deaths resulted in the collapse of religious ideologies, and gave rise to feelings of purposelessness and existential doubt (Jannarone 2010:31-32).

In response to the war, artistic movements across central Western Europe between 1920 and 1930 became characterised by “violent metaphysical pessimism” that often reflected “apocalyptic fantasies” (Jannarone 2010:34). Artistic movements such as Expressionism, Surrealism, and Art Deco superseded Romanticism and strands of Realism, which were previously dominant in visual art specifically (*Art movements of the 1920s* 2014:[sp]).<sup>8</sup>

This newfound abstract pessimism in Europe and the corresponding shifts in the visual arts are crucial socio-political moments that influenced and shaped Artaud’s theatre philosophies, and it contextualises the negative reception he often faced from critics. Artaud’s philosophies and methodologies reflected a revolutionary way of thinking. For Artaud, drastic measures must be taken if theatre was to progress beyond the complacency of his time (Jannarone 2010:31-32, 84). I now provide a personal history of Artaud which contextualises his theatre philosophies and sections that follow in this chapter.

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<sup>8</sup> Expressionism is an artistic response to widespread states of anxiety within Germany at the time of the war. This anxiety resulted from the disillusionment in spiritual belief systems. Expressionism was a revolt against Impressionism and art made for academic purposes. Expressionist visual art encourages the deterioration of traditional form and the use of bright colours in order to convey the states of anxiety faced by both the general public and artists (Expressionism 2015:[sp]). Surrealism is an artistic movement that is still considered as the biggest influence of the avant-garde movement. Surrealism began in European literature and later spread to other visual art forms. Its philosophy is grounded in nihilism. Surrealist work aimed to create new and original imagery that was inspired by the “unconscious mind” of the artist (*Art movements of the 1920s* 2014:[sp]). Art Deco began in France in between the two World Wars. It is rooted in visual design and is a component of what is now considered to be modern art. Art Deco embraced all different types of art, including craft. Art Deco encourages the use of smooth lines, streamlined forms and overtly bright colours (*Art movements of the 1920s* 2014:[sp]).

### 2.1.1. Antonin Artaud: a personal history

Antonin Artaud was a French poet, actor, playwright and director born in 1896. He hailed from Marseilles, the son of a wealthy Greek shipping agent (Esslin 1976:15). As a toddler, Artaud contracted meningitis and was left with a “nervous disability” that plagued him until his death in 1948 (Esslin 1976:17). He schooled at *Collège du Sacré Coeur* (College of the Sacred Heart) and left at the age of 18 (Bermel 1977:113), at which point he became severely depressed and destroyed all the writings of his youth (Esslin 1976:17).<sup>9</sup>

A year later he was admitted to an asylum in Rodez. He was institutionalised for a mental breakdown he sustained after being stabbed in the streets of Marseilles (Esslin 1976:17).<sup>10</sup> While undergoing rehabilitation, Artaud developed a severe distrust in and of sexual desires (Esslin 1976:18).<sup>11</sup> He spent a total of eight years and eight months in asylums around France, yet managed to produce some of the most influential theatre philosophies in recorded history (Scheer 2004:1).

Artaud moved to Paris in 1919 (Esslin 1976:18) and made his first appearance as a stage actor in Henri de Régnier’s 1921 *Les Scrupules de Sganarelle* (The Scruples Sganarelle). It was performed at the *Theatre de L’Oeuvre*, which hosted many different symbolist theatre productions.<sup>12</sup> The founder and director of the theatre, Aurélien Lugné-Poë, noticed his talents and unconventional methodologies (Esslin 1976:19). Artaud continued to train as an actor and began corresponding with Jacques Rivière, who became a long-time colleague. Rivière was the editor at *Nouvelle Revue Française* (a

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<sup>9</sup> Artaud began writing poetry at 14 under the penname *Louis des Attides*. His influences were Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire (Sellin 1968:1).

<sup>10</sup> Artaud’s nurse at Rodez, Sylvère Lotringer, describes him in an interview with Jacques Latrémolière as a paranoiac who was delusional and contributed nothing to society (Lotringer 2004:22).

<sup>11</sup> This distrust formed the foundation of his notion of The Absolute (Esslin 1976:18). He wrote a letter to one of his therapists stating that God was not responsible for producing the sexual organs and desires of human beings; that they came directly from an Anti-Christ (Esslin 1976:55). For a more in-depth analysis on Artaud’s disdain for sexuality and its connection to religion, see Chapter Three.

<sup>12</sup> According to my research, there is no English title for this theatre space. Roughly translated, it becomes: The Theatre of Work. I interpret and understand ‘work’ here to connote the collection of works relating to any one particular artist at a given time.



literary magazine) from 1919 until 1925. He published his correspondence with Artaud in the magazine in 1924, which positioned Artaud as an influential contributor within the world of the French intellectual elite (Esslin 1976:25-26).

Shortly after Rivière published his letters, Artaud formally joined the surrealist movement in Paris, and in 1925 he was selected as the editor for the third edition of *La Révolution Surréaliste* magazine (The Surrealist Revolution).<sup>13</sup> He used the opportunity to make public his opinions on religion and the way the Western world should move forward in light of post-war traumas. He announced on the publication's cover that the era of Christianity had come to an end. At the same time, he wrote letters to Buddhist schools and the Dalai Lama, pleading for their help with the eradication of Western logic, which for Artaud was connected to the way Western theatre is made and understood (Esslin 1976:27).<sup>14</sup> It was also in 1925 that he released published collections of his essays and poetry titled, *L'Ombilic des limbes* (The Umbilicus of Limbo) (Stout 1996:1).

His most important connection within the surrealist group was a playwright named Roger Vitrac. They found in one another a kindred spirit, and in 1926 decided to open *Théâtre Alfred Jarry*.<sup>15</sup> This theatre combined surrealist thinking with the avant-garde; it displayed "... the fantastic and grotesque... dream[s] and obsession[s]", which became a thematic and aesthetic through-line in Artaud's work (Esslin 1976:27-28). Unfortunately, the surrealists saw Artaud and Vitrac's theatre endeavour as a capitalist and commercial venture, far removed from the group's support for Marxism and its communist ideologies. The surrealists expelled Vitrac, and Artaud left by his own volition

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<sup>13</sup> Artaud was attracted to the Surrealists because of a supposed shared desire to "penetrate and understand hidden realities" in humans and the universe, and a rejection of philosophies presuming to understand essential human nature (Greene 1976:188).

<sup>14</sup> Western theatre, prominent in the western world - which, according to Douglass North and Robert Thomas (1973:1-8), encompasses Western Europe, and all other countries and continents that were infiltrated by European colonies - built itself around principles that stem from Greek and Elizabethan theatre. Western theatre concerns itself with presentation; an audience observes action on stage that is a presentation of events, either realistic or non-realistic. It is accepted by both the audience and the performers that whatever is being presented is only a show. Western theatre favours text (both literary and dramatic), writing and intellectual engagement. In western theatre, the director is often understood to be the key figure in any theatrical endeavour (Pavis 1998:396-397).

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Jarry is generally recognised as the first absurdist playwright. He is known for his play *Ubu Roi* which premiered in 1896 at the *Théâtre de L'Oeuvre* (Alfred Jarry 2014:[sp]).



not long after (Esslin 1976:29).<sup>16</sup> In 1929 Artaud released another publication of collected essays: *L'Art et la mort* (Art and Death) (Stout 1996:1).

While visiting a colonial exhibition in 1931 in Paris, Artaud witnessed Balinese dancing and was enticed by its non-verbal artistic form. Balinese dancing foregrounded the physical language Artaud felt western theatre required. Artaud later called theatre that communicates primarily through a physical language (such as Balinese dancing) “total theatre” (Esslin 1976:35).<sup>17</sup> Artaud (1977:36) describes Balinese dancing as an “independent” and “creative” theatre that values every aspect of process from conception to performance. He was inspired by the dance’s ability to communicate metaphors and emotions with its audience without using verbal dialogue. He noted the dedication of the performers and their acute attention to all aspects of the performance. He perceived it as an ethereal experience that filled him with awe and wonder (Artaud 1977:36-40).

Artaud then began constructing manifestoes for his *Theatre of Cruelty*, with Balinese dancing as the practical example of what he wished to achieve. Artaud’s first manifesto of the *Theatre of Cruelty* was published in October of 1932. At the time, psychological realism was the preferred theatrical genre, which meant that Artaud’s mode of theatre was received with hesitance (Esslin 1976:37). Realism favoured ‘well-made’ play texts that featured the dominance of spoken word, characters that express rational motivations for their actions and thoughts, a plot propelled by cause and effect, unity of time, place and action, and the illusion of the fourth wall, separating the audience from the action ‘on stage’ (Byckling 2007:926-927).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Artaud never possessed the buoyancy and humour the surrealists had. He asserted aggression in his work that did not echo the ultimate beauty they saw prevalent in life, despite the political chaos that ensued Europe. He was frustrated by his difficulty in adequately expressing himself creatively, while the surrealists did not share his frustration (Jannarone 2010:44-45).

<sup>17</sup> Total theatre is theatre consisting of the performer’s body, mind and soul, not just a rational interpretation of a text. Theatre of Cruelty is considered by Artaud to be total theatre because it demands a three-dimensional approach from the performers and spectators; it forces sensory participation because of its unique use of techniques and methodologies. It presents itself as a life-event, not one of commercial and entertainment purposes (Jannarone 2010:112).

<sup>18</sup> Naturalism, realism, and psychological realism, refer to genres and modes of performance related to the genres that were explored in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were influenced by Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekov, Konstantin Stanislavsky, and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (influential realist dramatists of the time) (Byckling 2007:926-927). These genres impacted significantly on 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre. At the same time, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of experimentation in theatre that challenged the

These aspects of realism were all seen as necessary components for a theatrical play and supported particular conventions that encouraged a one-dimensional character approach. Realism focused specifically on the psyche and rationale of characters in order to address socio-political conditions at large (Byckling 2007:926-927). This approach to characterisation and theatre represented everything that Artaud advises against in his *Theatre of Cruelty*. For him, realism was not an accurate reflection of life and what he considered as real.

Despite the theatrical prominence of realism and all its branches in the early 1900s, Artaud continued developing the *Theatre of Cruelty* and published *The Theatre and its Double* in 1938. The title of the book summarised Artaud's view of theatre: "[F]or [Artaud] if the theatre is a double of life, life is a double of true theatre. The double of the theatre is the reality which today's [people] leave unused" (Esslin 1976:44).<sup>19</sup> Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* aimed to affect theatregoers beyond the conventions of realism and psychological realism, and beyond the traditional theatre experience.

From 1937 onwards an important final transformation took shape in Artaud's life: he sought to explore and develop a love that pursued a metaphysical manifestation with his Belgian romantic partner, Cécile Schramme. This pursuit stemmed from the distrust in sexual desire he developed while institutionalised in Rodez. Schramme became frustrated and discouraged by his negative attitude towards sexual desire, and he loathed her for thinking sexual desire was an appropriate expression of love (Esslin 1976:46-47). Artaud understood sexuality as a destructive and dark force. Sexual passion for Artaud equalled a lust for physical death; to be sexual was to be connected to the world, and Artaud did not desire either (Stout 1996:88). This

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'dominant' – Artaud's experimentations formed part of this. The difference between psychological realism and realism is: psychological realism delves into the psyche of different human beings and focuses mainly on the mental and psychological state of (specifically) the protagonist of a play. The focus and aim of realism is to portray a text as life-like as possible, focusing on more than just the inner state of a human being (Trumbull 2009:[sp]). Naturalism and realism share many different stylistic characteristics; a major difference between the two was conceptual in terms of the locus of decision making relation to character's lives. The genres often fused, problematising clear classification of plays/productions. Characteristics of both could exist in a single play/production (*Naturalism and realism* [sa]:[sp]).

<sup>19</sup> The edition of *The Theatre and Its Double* I use in this study was published in 1977.

experience marked Artaud's move towards conceptualising The Absolute in his Theatre of Cruelty (discussed in section 2.2.3. of this chapter).

It was around this time that Artaud also rejected his birth name, insisting that he would rather be referred to in print by three asterisks (Esslin 1976:46-47). The rejection of his birth name is linked to a personal theory of his that his previous existence had collapsed. It was his intention to 're-make' himself according to his newfound self-understanding and image. In *Les nouvelles revelations de l'etre* (The New Revelations of Being) (1937), Artaud wrote about his new theory:

I have struggled to try and exist, to try and consent to the forms (all forms) with which the delirious illusion of being in the world has imbued reality. I no longer want to be deceived by illusions. Dead for the world; to that which for all others constituted the world; fallen at least, fallen, risen into the void which I had rejected. I have a body which experiences the world and spews out reality. He who is speaking to you is one who has truly despaired and who has known the happiness of being in the world only now when he has left the world, when he is absolutely separated from it. Being dead, the others are not separated. They are still circling around their own corpses. I am not dead. But I am separated (Artaud in Esslin 1976:48).

The constant reference to death and the body expresses Artaud's desire to exist outside of his body. It is a need to be 'reborn' in a new identity.<sup>20</sup> Artaud was articulating his desire for a new way of living and experiencing life, one that was not dictated by the worldly institutions that (often unconsciously) stipulate the parameters of one's reality. It was only by destroying worldly institutions, as Artaud understood them, that spiritual salvation could be possible (Esslin 1976:49). He sought to do this in his personal life and in theatre.

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<sup>20</sup> This symbolic death and ultimate 'rebirth' is what the notion of The Absolute essentially explores. (Esslin 1976:50). Artaud declared his body to be dead, for he saw his previously understood body as one that harboured impurities (relating to sexual desire, hunger and defecation as sins) (Esslin 1976:55). For the purpose of clarity, the discussion around how he understood death is further elaborated on in sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 of this chapter.

Artaud saw the moment of birth – when the body of a newborn begins to exist as a distinct entity in the world – as a problematic event that causes individuals to be products of the world and not of themselves. From the first moment of coming to be, an individual is handed a name and cultural label, which comes with its own set of ideals and method of identification. This identification is not their own, as this identification is determined by societal forces and dominant cultural values. For Artaud, a person cannot be their own construction if someone or something else already put an expectation on them (De Vos 2011:39).<sup>21</sup> He aimed to find a way to link the body, mind, and soul, so that thoughts and feelings could be relayed without the filter of convention, socially expected rationality, and the regulations that come with language (Esslin 1976:66-68).<sup>22</sup>

Artaud's body of work only became influential once the aftermath of the Second World War (WWII) shook theatrical convention and art around the world. The rise of Theatre of the Absurd between the 1950s and 1960s stressed the importance of Artaud's visions and concepts (Sellin 1968:49).<sup>23</sup> Artaud, amongst others, is credited as being responsible for the development of post-structuralist thinking in both France and the USA in the 1960s and 1970s. Post-structuralist thinking, amongst others, encourages destabilising binary structures in human behaviour (Scheer 2004:2). Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and its 'physical language' (discussed shortly) is also connected to the development of physical theatre, a prominent and growing theatre genre since 1980 (Ryan & Ryan 2014:[sp]).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Laurens De Vos's research on Artaud is conducted through a Lacanian framework (De Vos 2011:18). Artaud publically expressed his hate for Lacan, for he wished to be done with and separated from the logic and rationalisation that Lacan's work provides (De Vos 2011:17). I thus acknowledge the existing link between Artaud and Lacan, but such a focus falls beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>22</sup> The understanding of body, soul, and mind in Artaud's time was dualist (Esslin 1976:66-68).

<sup>23</sup> Theatre of the Absurd is a term founded by Martin Esslin in an essay he wrote in 1960 titled *Theatre of the Absurd*. The essay reviews playwrights that incorporated absurdity in their plays and all its components because of a re-evaluated view on the world that WW2 had influenced. It found theoretical backing from Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which he wrote in 1942; focusing on a search for meaning in a world that Camus felt was devoid of a Divine power and was ultimately meaningless. It introduces the philosophy of the absurd, which can be drawn back to nihilism and Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of existentialism. Additionally, there is a clear link between the thoughts of Nietzsche and Artaud (Sellin 1968:12; Sontag 2004:91).

<sup>24</sup> For an articulate demonstration of physical theatre, see the work of Lloyd Newson from DV8 Physical Theatre Company (available online), who coined the term "physical theatre". I do not discuss it here as it falls beyond the scope of this study. See also *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* (Murray & Keefe 2007).

Before I discuss Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty manifestos, I must provide further contextualisation of the Theatre of Cruelty specifically and his understanding of both Cruelty and violence in order to frame my understanding of his philosophies and methodologies.

### **2.1.2. Mapping Artaud's theatre: a move towards the *Theatre of Cruelty***

Cruelty, as Artaud uses the word, must not be taken for its literal and primary meaning that indicates brutality, and more often than not, abuse. For Artaud, cruelty seeks to "destroy" (in other words, undo) what has been accepted as being 'true' in how language is used and understood, how logic and rational thinking rules over the body and mind, and how this logic and rational thinking is influenced by external factors such as religious conventions, social norms, expected gender behaviour and political stipulations (Jannarone 2010:1). I briefly define the term cruelty here, in order to give context to Artaud's type of theatre. The concept of cruelty will be further unpacked in section 2.2.2 of this chapter.

Martin Esslin (1976:95) states that since Artaud's death in 1948, Western theatre began echoing what Artaud foretold. Theatre became closer to life, and life, in turn became, from a Western paradigm, more theatrical. It is this vision of increased alignment between life and art, alongside his other philosophies, that Susan Sontag (1976:xx) calls Artaud's most significant contribution. He left his inheritors what she describes as – a "phenomenology of suffering" – manifestoes that guide innovation in order to produce what he was unable to in his lifetime. I now unpack and discuss how Artaud's personal endeavours led to this vision and his theatrical manifestoes.

As mentioned earlier, Balinese dancing is most commonly connected to Artaud's theatrical beginnings, but Eric Sellin (1968:15) and Martin Esslin (1976:37) explain that it was the combination of Mexican culture, and so-called Oriental theatre (including Balinese dancing), that ultimately shaped

Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.<sup>25</sup> Artaud discovered in both Mexican cultures and in Oriental theatre a sense of 'flow' that did not echo the certainty and concrete ideas of right and wrong present in Western theatre at the time (Sellin 1968:18).<sup>26</sup> As with his wish to combine the body, mind and soul in theatre, he sought to blur the distinctive boundary between what is perceived as right and wrong in theatre (both in characterisation and in technical approaches to theatre).

*The Theatre and its Double* (1977) is immersed in the metaphysical, in sensory explanations and manifestations of life and theatre (such as his focus on physical deterioration in *The Theatre and the Plague*). The metaphorical nature of his work is what provoked the ire of his critics, reminding them of out-dated and discarded practices that spoke more to alchemistic desire than a realistic viability (Sellin 1968:28). Bersani (2004:98) suggests that critics could not align themselves with what Artaud understood as metaphysical, for Artaud was not always clear on what the metaphysical meant. Metaphysics for Artaud has an alchemic quality; he does not use the term to define philosophical speculation, but to refer to a sense of tangibility that needs to be artistically approached beyond the limits of logic, possibility, and language (Bermel 1977:20).

According to Bersani (2004:98), Artaud was unable to break away from language and its restrictions; he failed to achieve the metaphysical pursuits he aimed for. In his correspondence with Jacques Rivière, Artaud expressed that language often failed him. Rivière, who felt that Artaud was appropriately articulate, dismissed his colleague's concern (Esslin 1976:65). Rivière misunderstood Artaud, in that Artaud was speaking of how language would ultimately fail him as an artist and his theatre; he was not expressing a sense of failure in purely personal terms. Julia Kristeva (2004:119) states that

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<sup>25</sup> I acknowledge the contemporary move away from the term "Orient" and its negative associations, but I continue to use it in this study in context of Artaud's socio-political timeframe. It must also be noted that Artaud favoured Eastern philosophies, and saw Western practices as inferior. The use of the term here does not connote colonised ways of thinking.

<sup>26</sup> Although Artaud was inspired by Oriental theatre, he did not wish to replicate supposed oriental mystique as it was portrayed on a Western theatrical platform. He did not support replication and repetition, and therefore used Oriental theatre alongside his own Hellenistic background to find his own archetypes with which to form a dramatic language (Sellin 1986:53).



Artaud's pursuit of the metaphysical came into conflict with language and how it shapes what is understood of the world and how it is then interpreted and expressed. This is possibly why Artaud's use of 'metaphysical' is often vague. Kristeva states that for Artaud, the metaphysical principally centred on an "exteriority of language" (2004:119); the experiences that constitute the meaning of each word in spoken language, thus, not the word itself, but the experience that gives life and meaning to words is important for Artaud.<sup>27</sup>

### **2.1.3. Language, poetry, and the metaphysical**

Artaud travelled to Mexico in 1936 and found a connection to knowledge he already possessed: the word-symbols he came across in the Orient and Occident echoed symbols in Mexico. This inspired him to think of how the body could present these symbols on stage instead of using verbal language to make meaning (Sellin 1968:15, 18).<sup>28</sup> Artaud was aware that symbols are not able to create sound or movement as grammar, punctuation and figures or speech do within written text. However, symbols can "communicate proportion, stance, gesture, and tension" (Sellin 1968:21) – which for Artaud – created rhythm. This was enough to convince him that it is possible to re-interpret verbal language into something symbolic (Sellin 1968:21). Artaud wanted to use verbal language metaphysically; he envisioned a theatre where verbal language would serve a purpose other than its literal use (Artaud 1977:34).

For verbal language to become metaphysical, Artaud noted that it must aim to convey what it does not literally imply. Verbal language must play on sound and meaning; Artaud envisioned verbal language to be closer to incantations than fluent dialogue. He feared that if theatre makers were not able to understand that words can take on different meanings, the idea of 'true'

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<sup>27</sup> The "exteriority" suggested here by Kristeva speaks to Michel Foucault's notion of "exteriority", which suggests that any one definable subject (such as a word) is the sum of all experiences around it and meanings that constitute its core structure (Olssen 1999:62).

<sup>28</sup> Hieroglyphs (in their literality) are often misinterpreted as a primary focus of Artaud's work. To address this misinterpretation, I include this information, as confirmed by Sellin (1968), as essential in understanding that these symbols only served as an inspiration for his focus on non-verbal communication on stage and nothing more.

theatre would be lost.<sup>29</sup> In the parameters of realism, conscious interpretation and perception within language restricted theatre makers. Artaud wanted to abolish these restrictions (Artaud 1977:35) and he was acutely aware that in order to accomplish this abolishment, he would need to be careful not to mimic existing theatre practices. Artaud believed that through mimicry and repetition, his theatre would move away from the life-event ('true' theatre/total theatre) he wanted theatre to be, and this would only result in another already existing form of theatre, lacking innovation and vision (Bersani 2004:98).

Therefore, Artaud suggested that the spoken word must be left to literature and urged theatre to adopt a physical language, which he defines as "everything filling the stage" (Artaud 1977:27). Physical language appeals to the senses first, not intellect, as verbal language supposedly does: "... there must be poetry for the senses just as there is for speech" (Artaud 1977:27). Artaud describes physical language as "spatial poetry" that creates visual interpretations and replaces the function of words. Spatial poetry is feasible through "music, dance, plastic art, mimicry, mime, gesture, vocal inflections, architecture, lighting and décor" (Artaud 1977:28-29). Creating and expressing this poetry is indispensable in realising the metaphysical (Artaud 1977:32-33).

Artaud (1977:30) acknowledges that because verbal language is the dominant mode of expression, it is able to define characters for an audience far more succinctly than what a physical language may do. Nevertheless, he states that theatre as a form of expression is adaptable, and with enough exposure, audiences will eventually become literate in physical expression. It was this commitment to a metaphysical impetus that made him appear increasingly psychotic to his critics, but which also served as inspiration for his Theatre of Cruelty works (Sellin 1968:28). I will now briefly discuss works of Artaud that pertain specifically to his Theatre of Cruelty.

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<sup>29</sup> 'True' theatre refers to the total theatre that Artaud wished to achieve, as discussed in footnote 17, combined with the philosophy that life cannot be separated from theatre.



#### 2.1.4. Artaud's own Theatre of Cruelty productions

Artaud began experimenting with Theatre of Cruelty long before his manifestoes on the matter were published. His first 'unofficial' attempt at a Theatre of Cruelty production was an adaptation of a work by Roman playwright and Stoic philosopher, Seneca (4BCE – 65ACE). The story focused on the myth of Thyestes, where themes of sacrifice and violence attracted Artaud. He saw the myth as a story that embodied the ideals of his theatre.<sup>30</sup> There is no date provided for this work (Sellin 1968:62). Another short work by Artaud in 1925, *Le jet de sang* (The Fountain of Blood), is described as being thematically aligned with Theatre of Cruelty aims (Antonin Artaud 1896-1948 2014:[sp]).<sup>31</sup>

*Les Cenci* (The Cenci) is the only 'official' Theatre of Cruelty work Artaud managed to stage in his lifetime. It premiered in 1935 as a historically inspired account of an Italian nobleman (Count Cenci) who raped his daughter (Beatrice) and was murdered by her (Sellin 1968:42). *Les Cenci* received negative criticism and the play was discontinued after a very short run (Sellin 1968:112). Edward Braun (1982:188, 190) provides a brief account of *Les Cenci* through research he conducted based on reviews of the production.<sup>32</sup> Braun deduces that the production was filled with a bombardment of visual and sound effects, which, according to the reviews, managed to elicit a sensory response from Artaud's audiences. Braun suggests that the element of sound was fundamental to the production's design. He states that the play seemed to have been spatially and structurally inhibited, due to Artaud's decision to have it done on a proscenium arch stage. According to Roger Blin

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<sup>30</sup> The myth of *Thyestes* follows both him and his brother *Atreus* (*House of Atreus*) and their bloody pursuit for the throne of Mount Olympus, or in some versions of the tale, the throne of Mycenae. Atreus kills Thyestes' sons and feeds them to him. Thyestes then rapes Atreus' daughter, who bears Aegisthus, who then kills Atreus (Thyestes 2014:[sp]). This myth provides the backstory for the *Oresteia* trilogy written by the Greek playwright Aeschylus.

<sup>31</sup> I have only mentioned works within this chapter that speak directly to Theatre of Cruelty and The Absolute. For a full and accurate bibliography of Artaud's work and publications, see Artaud's biography provided online by the Poetry Foundation: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/antonin-artaud>

<sup>32</sup> Since Artaud did not believe in scripting his plays and did not support conventional directorial methods, there are not sufficient records currently available in English or Afrikaans that would allow me to adequately analyse his method and process. The majority of his work is still in the process of translation, and it is possible that in the future, new information on his process may come to light.

(2002:129) who analysed Artaud's personal letters and critical reviews, Artaud's *Les Cenci* was the first stage production that used stereophonic sound.

Artaud's final attempt at a Theatre of Cruelty work was a radio drama called *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (To have done with the judgement of God) in 1947. It never aired on public radio due to its unsettling and blasphemous nature (Antonin Artaud 1896-1948 2014:[sp]), yet critics believe that this recording is the closest he came to achieving what he envisioned the Theatre of Cruelty to be in his manifestoes.<sup>33</sup> The radio drama is a lengthy recording of Artaud's voice shrieking and crying out in agony, coupled with instrumental bangs and blasphemous proclamations in French (Sellin 1968:112).

Sellin (1968:110) argues that research into the Theatre of Cruelty is cumbersome and paradoxically shallow due to the many misinterpretations thereof, as well as it being a theatre form that was never successfully practically implemented. Therefore Sellin (1968:102) posits that research into the Theatre of Cruelty should instead be an estimation of assumed ideals. Nonetheless, much research has taken place on Artaud since Sellin's 1968 publication, and many theatre practitioners, philosophers, directors, and film theorists have been inspired by his philosophies (see the work of Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Sarah Kane).<sup>34</sup>

Sellin (1968:53-54) suggests that Artaud's dismissal of Judaeo-Christian religion, including God and Christ as higher guiding forces, is significant in understanding why his work was considered to be unsuccessful at the time of staging. The focus of a work that is devoid of God is essentially read as a work devoid of hope and purpose, and is instead filled with what Sellin (1968:55) describes as "crushing defeat".<sup>35</sup> But it may be exactly because of

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<sup>33</sup> Artaud personally stated that *Les Cenci* was not a successful Theatre of Cruelty production. He deems it to be a transitional work, preparing him for Theatre of Cruelty (Blin 2002:133).

<sup>34</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida were French philosophers who contributed works and theories to art and literature in the 1960s. Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Sarah Kane are the names of theatre practitioners.

<sup>35</sup> Sellin's use of "crushing defeat," reads as relating to nihilism and nihilist schools of thought.

the denouncement of God in his work that Artaud inspires an unconventional sense of hope and wonder. It is possibly through this denouncement that the prospect of a reconstructed and independent fate can be found (Sellin 1968:55).

Edward Scheer (2004:5) reflects on the critical failure of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty works and questions whether or not Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is at all achievable, considering its metaphysical nature and the possibly misconstrued absence of religious purpose in the works. Helga Finter grapples with the practicality of Theatre of Cruelty in her essay, *Antonin Artaud and the impossible theatre: the legacy of the Theatre of Cruelty* (2004:47-58). Finter (2004:49-50) states that theatre began to incorporate and make possible what she calls "The Real", which is when real objects and subjects are present on stage as opposed to signifiers, both abstract and literal.<sup>36</sup> The Real incorporates real life within theatre, by taking away the mechanism of representation. This is what Artaud aimed for (Finter 2004:49-50).<sup>37</sup> In her 2004 publication, Finter posits that The Real offers a sensory experience that affects all those involved in a theatrical event on a physical and imaginative level. Finter's Real echoes what Artaud observed in 1938:

In the anguished, catastrophic times we live in, we feel an urgent need for theatre that is not overshadowed by events, but arouses deep chaos within us and predominates over our unsettled period (Artaud 1977:64).

Finter's reflections in 2004 show possibilities within a theatre mode that aims to "wake up the heart and nerves" (Artaud 1977:64). Mark Fortier (2012:23) supports the development and continuation of the Theatre of Cruelty, specifically in a contemporary time that is increasingly technologically driven. He states that historically, Western theatre has not managed to be politically radical (the politically radical here relates to the ideological deconstruction and

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<sup>36</sup> Finter (2004:49) makes a practical reference to the 1994 work, *Delusional* by performance artists Marina Abramović and Charles Atlas, where they had live rats on stage with them.

<sup>37</sup> This notion of The Real is not to be confused with the Lacanian Real, which has to do with a separation from language (The Real (Lacan) 2002:[sp]).

reflection of socio-political motives in certain times and spaces). However, he encourages the sentiment that “radical contemporary live performance” may achieve this goal, and speak to the catastrophes and unrest of a contemporary time far more effectively than traditional theatre may have spoken to its own time(s) (Fortier 2012:23).

Fortier (2012:23) explains that the Theatre of Cruelty and theatre forms inspired by Theatre of Cruelty present a “pathology of hope” (the hope of a reconstructed self, discussed above) which allows theatre to be more than entertainment, and is therefore not fuelled by the crushing defeat and purposelessness that Sellin (1968:55) describes as being commonly associated with Artaud’s work.

Now that I have contextualised and detailed Artaud’s philosophies and the background of Theatre of Cruelty, I discuss the Theatre of Cruelty in relation to Artaud’s metaphor of the plague. I also discuss the notion of The Absolute within a Theatre of Cruelty framework, and foreground its relevance in the directorial approach within this study.

## **2.2. Unpacking the Theatre of Cruelty**

The only primary source authored by Artaud that contains both Theatre of Cruelty manifestoes is *The Theatre and its Double* (1977). The particular edition of the publication I use for this study contains essays on theatre and letters Artaud sent to Jacques Rivière. *The Theatre and its Double* opens with the essay, *The Theatre and the Plague*, which serves as an introduction to his vision of theatre. Kimberly Jannarone (2010:32) marks this opening essay as an avant-garde manifesto that proposes to change the existing artistic and social conventions of his time: “*The Theatre and the Plague* is less an explanation of a program than an initiation into the worldview upon which Theatre of Cruelty rests” (Jannarone 2010:37). *The Theatre and the Plague* exemplifies *The Theatre and its Double*’s poetic, often illogical, emotionally and spiritually charged nature (Jannarone 2010:56).

### **2.2.1. *The Theatre and the Plague***

Artaud uses a legend of a 1720 ship expedition connected to the bubonic plague to describe plagues as psychic entities. He states that although doctors manage to explain how plagues internally infect a person, they offer no explanation of precisely how a plague becomes an epidemic (Artaud 1977:10-13). Artaud argues that a plague is epidemic because a plague is actually spiritual and metaphysical in nature. The manifestation of a plague uncovers what has always been present in humankind on a psychic level: a corrosive corruption that stems from worldly institutions (Jannarone 2010:44).

Artaud (1977:14) analyses the spread of a plague and the deterioration that transpires in its wake. Hierarchical social structures disappear in the event of a plague, in the wake of death and individual concern for safety and self-preservation. Resources become scarce as a result of higher demands and quarantine. Emotional and spiritual deterioration follows as a result of mass and senseless death, which then finally sets in motion mental deterioration. Survivors of the disease suffer mental instability and resort to violent outlets that, under any other condition, would be illegal or morally absurd. The value of life and regard for others' well-being becomes worthless because the moral centre of an infected city or space is no longer enforced (Artaud 1977:15).

Artaud explains the connection between the plague and theatre by comparing survivors of a plague to actors; actors purge feelings and mental states "without any benefit or relation to reality" (Artaud 1977:16-17). Artaud is of the opinion that theatre, like the plague, is an epidemic: "Theatre, like the plague, is made in the image of slaughter... It unravels conflicts, liberates powers, releases potential and if these and the powers are dark, this is not the fault of the plague or theatre, but life" (Artaud 1977:21). Theatre must use what is seen as destructive and 'dark' to rebuild itself and make what real life has divided through worldly institutions, into something whole and constructive.

Theatre should seek to purify, just as the plague does (Bermel 1977:19). Jane Goodall (2004:67) likens Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty to a volcanic eruption,

where molten lava causes permanent change to anything it touches. Just as people can no longer differentiate themselves in the outbreak of a plague, so can no-one affected by Theatre of Cruelty separate their conscious self from their inner drives and desires.

There is no cure for the plague; it attacks the body, causing considerable suffering. Should an infected individual survive the plague, the plague will nonetheless force a physical and metaphysical reconstruction of the individual. This is what theatre must also do; it must facilitate the reconstruction of an individual (Jannarone 2010:43). The outcome is inevitable: one must either die (exist in a system as it stands) or become purified (change and exist in a reconstructed system). For Artaud, purification is the only way to rid oneself of society's ills and enforced codes. It is this purification that motivates theatre to become an extension of life (Jannarone 2010:47).

Now that the metaphor of the plague has been unpacked in relation to theatre, and Artaud's ideas around the use of language are explained, I explain Artaud's use of the word cruelty.

### **2.2.2. Cruelty within the Theatre of Cruelty**

As mentioned in section 2.1.2, cruelty has little to do with violent bloodshed or the unjust torture of individuals as the noun traditionally connotes (again, this illustrates Artaud's wish for language to take on new understandings and meanings). Cruelty suggests a return to the fundamental concerns of theatre; questioning existence, mortality, and exposing people as products of "desired conditions" (Artaud 1977:60-61).

Cruelty is connected to the metaphor of the plague and the concept of drastic change and purification. Artaud (1977:65-80) posits that "everything that acts is Cruelty" - because cruelty demands an approach that encourages consciousness, as one would carry out actions in life (since theatre is an extension of life). Artaud sees cruelty as an amplification of an already

present consciousness. Cruelty is, “...in all its naked and embodied realisation, an exposed lucidity” (Blau 2004:78).

On defending the use of the term cruelty: life has made a lot of ugliness and evil, which are both natural and man-made. Instead of shielding spectators from their impact he [Artaud] would expose them, put them through the experience of a danger and then free them from it. He went to great pains to explain that his theatre was not a form of torture, but a facing of the worst that could happen, followed by a refreshing release from it. At the end the spectator would feel relieved, as if awakening from a nightmare, the evil and terror cleansed away (Bermel 1977:22).

Bermel here echoes Blau’s (2004:78) understanding that cruelty is a conscious engagement with all aspects of the world, specifically the “ugliness and evil[s]” of it (Bermel 1977:22). Jannarone (2010:1) explains that Artaud aimed for the consciousness that is cruelty to act as an awakening for individuals, as something to shock individuals outside of their reality and complacent existence.<sup>38</sup> Emphasising the psychology of cruelty, De Vos (2011:54) explains Artaud’s cruelty as releasing suppressed desires. He states that cruelty is a primary state of impulse and reaction that is not tainted by anything external, but is discovered and understood once the self is independent and developed as a single entity, moulded only by spiritual impulses that stem from the self (De Vos 2011:54). It is therefore not the violence in Theatre of Cruelty that must be focused on, but the desolation that violence presents and its aftermath (Jannarone 2010:41).

Cruelty is self-annihilation in order to facilitate self-reconstruction; it needs a consciousness from individuals that requires a separation with one’s current self-identity in order to evoke the change that the Theatre of Cruelty commands. This self-reconstruction is the ultimate goal of Artaud’s theatre,

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<sup>38</sup> Kerri Ann Considine (2011:2-12), in her Masters paper, references Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty in connection with the work of dramatist Caryl Churchill. In this paper, Considine echoes my understanding and interpretation of cruelty, stating that Churchill’s body of work uses Artaudian principles within her work in order to promote socio-political consciousness, transgressing oppressive hegemonic boundaries in order to address feminist and racial issues. Considine (2011:4-6) states that Churchill’s plays present a sensorial and physical experience that arouses an awakening in its viewers, directly in line with Theatre of Cruelty’s outcomes as discussed in this section.



foregrounded in *The Theatre and the Plague*. In 1926, Artaud published a work titled *Letter to the Clairvoyant*, where he called this new understanding of self, “The Absolute”.<sup>39</sup> Here Artaud describes his own “appetite for not existing” and how he seeks to establish a freedom from the social and political demands of his time (Jannarone 2010:192). *Letter to the Clairvoyant* is linked to personal changes that took place in Artaud’s life from 1937 onwards (as mentioned in section 2.1.1 of this chapter) (Esslin 1976:46-47).

### 2.2.3. The Absolute and the Theatre of Cruelty

As mentioned briefly on the first page of this chapter, The Absolute is a state of unity between an individual’s body, mind and soul. This unity may only be achieved once an individual rids themselves of all previously held conventions of identity within a particular time, space and life-world (De Vos 2011:41). Jacques Derrida describes Artaud’s notion of The Absolute as, “eternal being”: existing outside of the conventions of time and space (O’Conner 2010:56). For Artaud, identity is constructed via socio-ideological paradigms that he broadly labels as “worldly institutions”.<sup>40</sup> These worldly institutions are ultimately dictated by language and religion. An individual who aims to exist in The Absolute must divorce from these worldly institutions, including the belief that God is the divine father figure, and centre Jesus Christ as a saviour; and the way language previously helped them identify and connect to the world around them (De Vos 2011:41).

For societies that overtly and covertly apply religious principles as a guiding framework for codes of moral and social behaviour, the rejection of religion evokes immense danger and simultaneous moral independence. In such an approach, there is no prescriptive system of behaviour and eternal reward in an afterlife, so decisions are driven by innate impulses and desires instead. The sense of danger (and exhilaration) lies in a de-centred self (a self that does not have a god figure as the centre of their human existence)

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<sup>39</sup> I have not found an original French title for this publication.

<sup>40</sup> Again, for Artaud, theatre cannot be separated from life. He discusses life as theatre and theatre as life. His theatre philosophies are the same as his ‘life’ philosophies (Esslin 1976:95).



(Jannarone 2010:192). The freedom comes from a symbolic “self-immolation”.<sup>41</sup>

On page eight of this chapter I refer to Artaud stating that death is the ultimate good (Esslin 1976:50). The death he refers to is the death of one’s previously constructed identity. The original self must be sacrificed in order to achieve The Absolute, which requires an existence outside of language and its associations, for language dictates how the world is understood, and for Artaud, religion is the supporting act, standing as a behavioural guide in the world as it is understood (Jannarone 2010:192).

Furthermore, Artaud intensely hated the physical body and its biological functions. His disdain for sexual desire has already been discussed in this chapter (Esslin 1976:55), but he also disdained all organs and body parts involved in the process of the consumption of food and defecation. In his move towards The Absolute, Artaud maintained that the human body must do without certain organs. He desired the human anatomy to be remade in order to further serve the reconstruction of identity that would then permanently reject physical desires (the desire for sex and the desire for food; the two basic physical needs in order to ensure the survival of the human race (Esslin 1976:105).<sup>42</sup>

It is in reconstructing the physical body that conflict arises between the conceptualisation of The Absolute and its practical execution. I mention in section 2.1.2 that Artaud failed to implement his metaphysical pursuits due to his inability to fully separate himself from language and the ways in which language shapes one’s epistemologies (Bersani 2004:98). Artaud’s vision of re-thinking and re-understanding identity had not yet found appropriate

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<sup>41</sup> Self-immolation is when individuals offer themselves as a sacrifice, usually by burning themselves. It is common in political and religious protests (The burning monk, 1963 2015:[sp]).

<sup>42</sup> I acknowledge Artaud’s dismissal of the female due to his view that females are responsible for the cycle of life and death (bearing a womb), and them being only a part of man (Eve coming from Adam’s rib) (De Vos 2011:43). However, seeing as though The Absolute rejects any notions of worldliness, this belief is no longer applicable since the rise of feminism and contemporary research on gender (see the work of Judith Butler 1990 and Raewyn Connell 1995). Bermel (1977:35) argues that Artaud never consciously encouraged gender division and this is why he adamantly hoped to destroy romanticised notions of sexuality.

linguistic expression. Artaud described the frustration at not being able to truly express himself through language as a feeling that he did not exist at all (Esslin 1976:65). In the pursuit of *The Absolute*, Artaud came into a perpetual conflict with the idea of a de-centred, reconstructed self (De Vos 2011:97).

De Vos (2011:97) states that people are only able to mentally grapple with the world through the language used to describe it. People understand themselves based on the language they think and communicate in (echoing Artaud's problem with language, as discussed in section 2.1.3 of this chapter). As Bersani states, "words articulate the self" (2004:102). A move towards *The Absolute* thus requires a reconstruction and re-understanding of physical sex, gender, race, the conception of time, rational thinking, verbal communication, emotions, desires, needs, and cultural ideologies (to name just a few components of identity).

Artaud states that *The Absolute* rejects any predetermined identity (De Vos 2011:109-110).<sup>43</sup> According to Jannarone (2010:192), postmodern and post-structuralist thinking suggest that a "de-centred self" can exist and is possible through *The Absolute*. Jannarone acknowledges that since theories of Deconstruction and Anti-Humanism emerged, alternative ways of theoretically approaching *The Absolute* were made possible.

An example of such thinking comes from philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who were inspired by Artaud's notion of *The Absolute* in the 1960s. They used *The Absolute* to formulate their notion of *Body without Organs* (BwO), which adapts Artaud's notion of a reconstructed body without physical organs. The idea of a BwO is a body that is constructed by the self.

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<sup>43</sup> De Vos (2011:15) suggests that out of all Artaud's successors, British playwright and dramatist Sarah Kane (1971-1999) came closest to practically implementing *The Absolute*. Her plays are brutally violent and grotesque. While her followers and critics are continuously revolted by her plays, her work is described as theatrically transformational, due to its unconventional use of language, staging and character development. De Vos (2011:107) notes the similarities between Artaud and Kane and their quest for *The Absolute*. Both felt *The Absolute* would only be possible in their physical deaths, and after a copious amount of suffering that was understood by them to be caused by splitting from worldly institutions. A considerable amount of suffering and anguish pursued both Kane and Artaud before their deaths: Artaud underwent severe physical and mental deterioration before he passed away in his sleep, while Kane suffered from intense depression and eventually committed suicide. The characters in their works also experience gruesome ends, and are dismembered or torn apart and left for dead.

The 'Organs' refer to an abstract concept, identifying a body of socio-political power structures that influence the self. Thus, a BwO would denote a body that is not subject to worldly institutions (Scheer 2004:6).

Deleuze (2004:29) states that critics of Artaud's work are unable to think progressively and therefore discredit his ideas, but Deleuze proposes that what is perceived as 'logical' constantly undergoes change. It is far easier for critics to label Artaud as psychotic and senseless than to find a way of thinking that allows The Absolute to be implemented as a functional component within the Theatre of Cruelty. De Vos's research (2011:18) suggests an alternative way of thinking of and achieving The Absolute in theatre practitioners' attempts at Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty: channelling the Absolute within a Theatre of Cruelty performance through the theme of transcendental love (see section 2.2.3).<sup>44</sup>

I discussed earlier in this chapter an important phase of Artaud's life that is connected to his notion of The Absolute (1937 until his death). He wrote to his partner Cécile Schramme, seeking to develop a love that surpassed sexual desire and moved towards something transcendental (Esslin 1976:46). It is in this event that the importance of transcendental love may be read into The Absolute. The rejection of sexual desire positions the physical body outside of worldly institutions for Artaud.

By positing transcendental love – love that surpasses worldly institutions – as a driving force, De Vos (2011:18) indicates that creators of a Theatre of Cruelty work will be able to viably attempt a move towards The Absolute. He sees the use of transcendental love as a creative strategy in approaching and constructing character relationships within a Theatre of Cruelty framework.<sup>45</sup> De Vos (2011:94-96) acknowledges that the pursuit of transcendental love may be a destructive desire that affects everything in its path for characters.

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<sup>44</sup> De Vos (2011:18) motivates this as being viable due to Sarah Kane's theme of transcendental love present throughout all her play texts. It is argued that it is this theme, and not the presence of bloodshed and violence, that made Kane into the most successful Artaudian prodigy.

<sup>45</sup> De Vos's theories on The Absolute are based on character and narrative analyses, and are purely literary and theoretical.

Transcendental love has the potential to be brutally violent since it impairs the ability to reason logically for those affected by it. Characters affected by transcendental love become emotionally heightened. These emotions are then instinctively acted on. De Vos (2011:94-96) nonetheless states that sensory and primal responses are necessary, for without this emotional intensity and instinctual release; The Absolute may never be attained.

Now that the Theatre of Cruelty and The Absolute as a primary driving force Artaudian theatre has been unpacked, I discuss his two manifestoes that provide directing guidelines for the Theatre of Cruelty.

### 2.3. Directing the Theatre of Cruelty

*The Theatre and its Double* (Artaud 1977) provides guidelines that advise theatre makers how to approach a Theatre of Cruelty endeavour. While Artaud provides these guidelines, he affords no instructions on how to implement them precisely.<sup>46</sup> I now theoretically unpack the guidelines as provided and unpacked in the same order they appear in, in *The Theatre and its Double*, to provide the conceptual framework for the practical application of the guidelines in Chapter Five.<sup>47</sup>

**Audience:** An audience is indispensable to the Theatre of Cruelty.<sup>48</sup> Spatially and structurally, the “show takes place around them” (Artaud 1977:62). The relationship between the audience and performer(s) must consequently be wisely considered (Jannarone 2010:134). It is noted that while audience responses are not applicable for the purposes of this study, a creator of a

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<sup>46</sup> Earlier in this chapter, I discuss misconceptions surrounding Theatre of Cruelty and its meaning. While there are no guidelines for the implementation of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, the intent and purpose of Theatre of Cruelty and the Artaudian principles must be clear. Throughout my research, I noticed the clear failures of theatre practitioner Peter Brook whenever he undertook a Theatre of Cruelty project. These failures are most clearly summarised by Clive Barker (1996:130-135), who reviewed a Theatre of Cruelty season at LAMDA theatre, which was facilitated by Brook and Charles Marowitz in 1964. In his summary of the season, Barker states that the performances were almost narcissistic acting experiments that did little to display focus, technique, consciousness, or any sense of awakening within an audience that the Theatre of Cruelty demands.

<sup>47</sup> It must be noted that these are direct guidelines according to Artaud’s lifetime and the original time of publication. Therefore, his stipulations for lighting and sound specifically must be read and understood in context of technological limitations.

<sup>48</sup> This study concerns itself with a directorial approach, focusing on the creation of a Theatre of Cruelty work, and does not concern itself with audience data or feedback.

Theatre of Cruelty work needs to make decisions around blocking, spacing and tonal value of the show while keeping an audience in mind. This is challenging in a Theatre of Cruelty work, as there is no clear separation between the audience and the actors.

**Staging:** The literal space where the action takes place must be so constructed that both the performers and audience are “physically force[d]” into the space of the show. Spatially, there should be no separation between the audience and the performers (Jannarone 2010:89). Non-traditional theatre spaces, such as barns or hangars that are circular in structure, are appropriate venues for this purpose (Jannarone 2010:74, 89). Performers are encouraged to make direct contact with the audience, involving them as part of the performance. In terms of the ‘staging’ process, there is no difference between a director, writer, producer and editor. A single “Creator” exists, merging all roles into one (Artaud 1977:72, 74).

**Technique:** Theatre of Cruelty must not be directed or performed as an imitation of life. A shift in perspective must be adopted, where the Creator and all involved understand that the production has a reality of its own and a life world no different to the reality they experience offstage (there is no difference between theatre and life). The technique must be approached as though it spurts forth from an innate source. Ideas about reality and the way it is shown on stage must be deconstructed, rebuilt, and understood through imaginative and poetic interpretations. A new understanding of the importance of one’s dreams and their manifestations must be experimented with. A sense of the surreal and metaphysical must be created. These understandings and findings must be infused with an internal energy from the performers and director that is applied to the performance (Artaud 1977:70-71).

**Subjects and Inner Meaning:** Transcendental experiences and questions must provoke and involve an audience. Theatre of Cruelty productions may be adaptations, ‘inspired-by-real-events’ stories, or narratives that are driven by thematic content (Artaud 1977: 71-72, 76). Themes and subjects must be chosen according to the “unrest of the time” that the production is created in.

It must aim to bring a fresh approach to appropriate and serious matters back to theatre. Themes must not be culturally specific but transcend cultural contexts (Artaud 1977:81-82).<sup>49</sup>

**The Show:** The show must incorporate physical language as informed, for instance, by Artaud's experiences of Balinese theatre and Mexican word symbols. This physical language must touch its audience beyond entertainment and thus draw on, and embody, the metaphysical and transcendental. All aspects of the production (from technical to costume to theme and content) must work together to create "harmony", experience and tone.<sup>50</sup> The production must become a sensual, tactile experience (Artaud 1977:72). The production should never be repeated, for repetition will create a language that can be latched onto and will give signs and symbols meanings that can be recreated and made into a rationalised language. Thus, the performance should be a completely organic process that plays for one night only (De Vos 2011:45).

**Stage Language:** Verbal language must be reframed and reconceptualised. Conventional scripts may not be used in the rehearsal process. An alternative way must be found for performers to learn their actions and sounds. Language should be physical and the body must have clear intent. If the spoken word is used it may not be used in a conventional sense; words must take on other meanings and purposes (Artaud 1977:72). Action is encouraged to be chosen carefully and executed with utmost precision and consideration in order to create and arouse appropriate interpretation and response. Action should not imitate life-like processes; they are their own process, taking place in the space (Artaud 1977:62).

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<sup>49</sup> That themes should not be culturally specific points to the notion of universality, which in itself must be acknowledged as being problematic, for the concept of universality proposes a model of collective thought and a singular truth (Uduigwomen (2005:[sp])).

<sup>50</sup> Artaud's use of the word 'harmony' may read as contradictory, as his own Theatre of Cruelty endeavours - such as *To be done with the judgement of God* - uses contrasting sounds that are unmelodic by nature. However, I understand the use of the word harmony to function similarly to cruelty; there is still the possibility for harmony, in terms of consistency in contradictions that weave together to create an unconventional tapestry of experience. The use of the word harmony should not be understood by its conventional literary use. Visually and audibly Artaud emphasises that everything works in harmony. Chaos and disorder is encouraged in content. How it is shown must work together for him (as he makes clear on pages 72-73 in *The Theatre and its Double*).

**Musical Instruments and sound:** All instruments should become a part of the set and must not be hidden from view in an attempt to create a further illusion. The means and mechanics of the production should not be masked. Rather than using classical and traditional instruments, new instruments should be designed (Artaud 1977:73-74). All sounds, be it vocal or instrumental, build on one another even if they contrast, to create harmony. Sounds should be chosen based on their vibrational qualities and unique sound production (Artaud 1977:62).

**Lighting:** Lighting equipment and modes of lighting design that support realist theatre is not appropriate for Theatre of Cruelty productions. Innovative ways of lighting should be explored; lighting must be able to create its own imagery apart from the physical language of the performers. This imagery highlights how lighting gives new shape to space, creates a feeling of new space and different depths within the performance space. Lighting must be subtle (Artaud 1977:62) and tonal qualities of lighting must be utilised; the lighting must create an emotional climate that aims to stimulate a sensory recall for the audience (Artaud 1977:74).

**Costume:** Garments must be selected based on their relevance and the importance they carry for the Theatre of Cruelty piece being performed. However, a sense of timelessness is also sought; costumes should not suggest a specific culture, period or location, for Theatre of Cruelty goes against conventions and unity of time and space, and needs to transcend cultural contexts. Contemporary clothing is therefore to be avoided, or at best, done away with (Artaud 1977:74).

**Objects, masks, props and décor:** Props of “strange proportions, exaggerated masks and objects that highlight the physical language should be made use of” (Artaud 1997:75). Conventional objects and props should not be used (for example, sets that allude to theatrical realism, such as tables and chairs that are used as tables and chairs are normally used). An encouraged alternative is symbolic props and objects (Artaud 1977:75-76). Physical bodies, objects, props, instruments and lighting design should make the



primary décor of the production. Décor should be symbolic so as not to allude to realism (Artaud 1977:76).

**The Actor:** The actor (or rather, performer) is seen as the primary carrier of meaning within the production, as well as a facilitator figure for the audience, involving them and guiding them through the production. It must be clear that the performer is denied any “individual initiative” during the process, but is responsible for the Creator’s message when the production is finally performed. It is imperative that actors used in Theatre of Cruelty productions are highly technically trained in order to take on the demands that Theatre of Cruelty requires of them (Artaud 1977:76).<sup>51</sup>

**Form:** Within Theatre of Cruelty productions, the entire theatrical space should be explored; depths, widths, heights and breadths are all used in the performances to their full extent. While conventional Western theatre makes use of all these dimensions, they are not required to use them to their spatial extremes, which Theatre of Cruelty does. Theatre of Cruelty encourages imagery in every aspect of its creation in order to stimulate spectators on an intrinsic level (Artaud 1977:82-83).

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, these guidelines that I have unpacked form part of my directorial framework that will be discussed in Chapter Five as implemented in the praxis of this study. I now summarise the content of this chapter in order to conclude it.

## 2.4. Conclusion

This chapter provided a background and contextualisation for Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and the notion of The Absolute. It delved into his personal background and his work, linking his life together with his unconventional philosophies and methodologies. By unpacking and positioning The Absolute as an integral part of Theatre of Cruelty, I may now

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<sup>51</sup> Artaud never specifies what type of training these actors should have.



continue to further motivate how it is going to be applied directorially in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary within the existing relationship between Beth and Jake from *A Lie of the Mind* (Shepard 1986).

Having constructed this Artaudian framework, Chapter Three will examine René Girard's notions of violence, victimisation and scapegoating. It will provide a comparison of differences and similarities between Girard and Artaud, and construct a framework of violence that serves to reframe Beth and Jake's relationship so that they may be adequately reinterpreted in the original production, *π* (De Wet 2015), without the presence of the victim/perpetrator binary. This will then be critically discussed in Chapters four and five.

### CHAPTER 3: RENÉ GIRARD: VIOLENCE, VICTIMISATION AND SCAPEGOATING

Chapter Two provided a background and contextualisation for Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and the notion of The Absolute in order to frame the directorial approach that will be used in this study. This current chapter uses the work of René Girard to generate a vocabulary with which to read the victim/perpetrator binary in the relationship between Beth and Jake from *A Lie of the Mind* (Shepard 1986). This vocabulary will then be applied to the analysis of their relationship and the play text in Chapter Four, and motivate directorial choices that are discussed in Chapter Five.

In this chapter, I specifically discuss Girard's notions of violence, victimisation, scapegoating, perpetrators of violence, and the connection between violence and sexual desire. In addition, I briefly discuss the religious context of his work, as well as the mimetics of desire, in order to contextualise Girard's analysis of violence in *The Violence and the Sacred* (2013).<sup>52</sup> This chapter also draws comparisons between Artaud and Girard's ontologies and epistemologies; focusing on their respective ideas of violence, sacrifice, the plague as a metaphor, myth, desire, and the relationship between Artaud's notion of The Absolute and Girard's understanding of the apocalypse. This comparative analysis will demonstrate conceptual and theoretical touch points to support the use of the two selected frameworks in this study. This chapter interrogates the following sub-questions provided in Chapter One:

- How does René Girard frame violence?
- How can the binary positioning of victims and perpetrators of violence be theoretically destabilised in order to attain The Absolute?

In addition, this chapter sets up a response to the sub-question that Chapter

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<sup>52</sup> *The Violence and the Sacred* was first published in Paris in 1972 by Bernard Grasset as *La Violence et le sacré*. John Hopkins University Press published the first English edition translated by Patrick Gregory in 1977.

Four will address:

- How can Girard's ideas be used to generate an appropriate vocabulary to analyse the violence in Beth and Jake's relationship in Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind*?

### 3.1. Background and contextualisation

René Girard's studies span multiple disciplines including philosophy, anthropology, literary criticism, psychology and theology; Girard's multidisciplinary reach gained him international recognition with notable contemporary theologians (Andrade 2012:[sp]). Girard's influence lies in his ability to draw parallels between literature and religious texts, finding how they influence the way people understand and connect to the world (Adams & Girard 1993:9). This correlates with the way Artaud created his philosophies by using world events and his own relationship to the world around him as narratives to draw from (Jannarone 2010:34; Esslin 1976:25-26).<sup>53</sup>

Girard received numerous accolades for his work on literature, religion and violence. In 2005 he joined the Académie Française, France's highest intellectual honour. There are only 40 members at any given time and they are often referred to as "the immortals" (Haven [sa]:[sp]). In 2008 Girard won the Modern Language Association's award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement. He continues to influence scholars across the humanities on matters of religion, anthropology and literature (Imitatio 2015:[sp]).

#### 3.1.1. Rene Girard: a personal history

René Girard (1923-2015) was born in Avignon, France. He began his academic career in Paris and later moved to the USA, but remained an active

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<sup>53</sup> While Girard makes use of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, he denounces any fundamental Freudian insights into his work due to Freud's refusal to acknowledge the scapegoating mechanism in his theories on violence. It must also be noted that Girard and Artaud rejected any Lacanian connection to their work. For Girard, this was due to Lacan failing to acknowledge violence within his theories and philosophies. For Artaud, it was Lacan's rational and intellectual relationship with verbal language (Reineke 2007:81).

figure in French politics. He pursued an academic career and lectured European literature across the USA until his retirement in 1995 (Andrade 2014:[sp]), after which he remained as a Professor Emeritus at Stanford University (Imitatio 2015:[sp]). Girard was most inspired by the work of Marcel Proust, and from this, published his first acclaimed title, *Mensonge Romantique et Vérité Romanesque (Deceit, Desire and the Novel)* in 1961.<sup>54</sup>

This publication is a critique on influential European novelists and contains the first explanation of his theory of mimetic desire (see section 3.1.2.). Girard developed his mimetic theory around similarities between the characters in Proust's novels. Before Girard, scholars would only study the differences between characters. Finding similarities was not encouraged as it contradicted the romantic novelties of characters and their relationships (Adams & Girard 1993:12).<sup>55</sup> Before the publication of *Desire, Deceit and the Novel*, Girard was agnostic. He converted to Christianity after discovering similarities between himself and the characters of Russian novelist and philosopher Fyodor Dostoyevsky while writing his book (Andrade 2012:[sp]).<sup>56</sup>

His second publication in 1972, *La Violence et le Sacré (The Violence and the Sacred)* gained him public attention. *The Violence and the Sacred* addresses his research on violence.<sup>57</sup> In 1978 he published *Des Choses Cachées Depuis la Fondation du Monde (Things hidden since the foundation of the world)*. Here, Girard publically expresses his Christian faith for the first time and how it influenced his philosophies, just as Artaud previously had (even though Artaud denounced Christianity). Since the 1970s, Girard published

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<sup>54</sup> Marcel Proust was a French novelist and literary critic. His most famous work is *In Search of a Lost Time* (1913), which was a novel released in seven volumes.

<sup>55</sup> The similarities that Girard discovered enforced the idea that characters shared identity traits, which contradicted the romantic illusions that novels upheld, where characters were praised for their differences and how they managed to come together, despite these differences (Adams & Girard 1993:12).

<sup>56</sup> Dostoyevsky's novels are known for their moral themes and messages, such as *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Idiot* (1869). His novels carried a conservative moral undertone that was preached by the Russian Orthodox Church (Fyodor Dostoyevsky – Biography 2015:[sp]). The Russian Orthodox Church had great political and spiritual influence over the Russian population at its height. Its systems and values were fought against during the communist revolution, at which point the church was overturned. It has since then never managed to hold majority influence (The Russian Orthodox Church 2015:[sp]).

<sup>57</sup> Both Girard and Artaud make use of the plague as a metaphor; for Girard its significance lies in violence, for Artaud, it is the metaphor of the plague that relates to theatre. This is discussed in Chapter Two and again later in this chapter.

books and articles that are based on and informed by a Christian religious foundation.

Girard is criticized for his theological influence but addresses his critics in the journal article *Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard* (Adams & Girard 1993:14). Girard states that his strongest influence is in movements that encourage avant-garde and revolutionist thinking, like Artaud. Girard confirms that his theories do not stem from French Catholic traditions, which is the general assumption. Instead, he argues that his readings of the Gospels are from a literary perspective only and illuminate narrative motifs of violence in human behaviour (Adams & Girard 1993:20-21).<sup>58</sup>

Using these narratives, Girard positions the Christian faith as a solution to the epidemic of violence. He motivates that religion is a protective mechanism against violence, and should not be pigeonholed as an oppressive system. He does this by analysing the connection between religion and violence and problematises existing preconceptions that misconstrue violence as a by-product of religious paradigms. He states that both religion and violence must be re-understood in order to eradicate the negative connotations between the two (Girard 2013:354). Girard is best known for this theory of mimetic desire, which I now briefly discuss in order to contextualise his work on violence, victimisation and scapegoating.

### 3.1.2. Girard's notion of mimetic desire

A succinct understanding of Girard's notion of mimetic desire is necessary to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary in the relationship between Beth and Jake in *A lie of the mind* (Shepard 1986). Mimetic desire is connected to violence, victimisation, and scapegoating, as it is used in this study in connection with Artaud's notion of The Absolute. For Girard (2010:x), mimesis

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<sup>58</sup> A prominent critic of his work is Catholic philosopher John Milbank, who critically interrogates Girard's theological standpoints in his publication, *Theology and Social Theory* (1990) (Adams & Girard 1993:20).

is a process of human imitation that leads to the development of shared behavioural patterns. Thus, mimetic desire is desire through imitation. Mimesis is a result of the “openness of humans to others” (Palaver 2013:36); mimesis is ultimately inescapable, for human beings are social entities and are in continuous contact with one another.

However, Girard states that people should be aware of mimetic behaviour by recognising it as an oppressive system and understanding how mimetic behaviour works in a systemic sense. For a systemic mechanism like mimesis to cease functioning, every living person would have to stop participating in and propagating the system. Girard concedes that a complete evacuation of participation is logistically impossible. He instead encourages a means of dealing with similarities between people, which if left undealt with, may result in violent chaos (Girard 2010:ix). Here, Girard conceptualised a way of understanding mimesis in the theory of mimetic desire.

The theory of mimetic desire addresses how desire for the same object(s) manifests between people and analyses desire’s destructive potential (Girard 1994:288). Girard views desire as a human drive towards self-sufficiency, which paradoxically causes individuals to imitate one another (Humbert 2013:254). The theory of mimetic desire hypothesises that individuals do not know what to desire, so they look to others, in order to imitate their desires. The nature of mimetic desire is as welcoming as it is threatening, promising objects of desire as well as rivalry. Similarities between individuals in a community may encourage the idea of belonging due to, for instance, similar interests, but it may also pose a serious threat to notions of individuality and independent thought (Telotte 1983:44-46; Palaver 2013:35-36).

Desire should be seen as “endemic”, and not as an “epidemic”. Girard’s theorisation of desire does not suggest that desire is an epidemic (noun), since only the effects of the manifestation of desire, such as violence, would be appropriately described as epidemic. The endemic presence of mimetic desire facilitates the epidemic of violence. The manifestation of desire almost always results in violence (Girard 1994:288), which is why the theory is

contextually essential to this study.

Desire is sustained and propagated through the process of mimesis. In capitalist societies, objects are given value based on how highly they are desired and how exclusive they appear. In certain cultures, the most valued objects are often prohibited because of the threat of mimetic rivalry (often manifesting as violence) they pose – Girard provides examples of “sacred objects, totemic foods [and] female deities” (Girard 1994:76). Desire has its own logic; implementing reason and rationality in an attempt to analyse desire will not aid in correctly understanding it and trying to calm the ‘epidemic’ of it (Girard 1994:283, 295, 298).

In the pursuit of one’s desire(s) there is a triad of dynamic interaction between the following constituent variables: a subject (the person wanting to achieve their desire); an object (what is desired); and a rival (the obstacle in between what is desired and obtaining it). It is assumed then that conflict occurs because of the two-person pursuit for a single object. Girard suggests that conflict is present because what the subject desires is only desired because it is desirable to the rival (Girard 2013:163).

Desire thus exists through association. This association, in turn, causes the loss of difference to become apparent between the subject and the rival, and finally results in violence and chaos. It forces individuals into a confrontation that nullifies their individual identities (Girard 2013:56). In this regard, people tend to look to others to shape their own needs and wants – to inform and shape their desire – in order to shape themselves. The person looked to is called the model, and the individual who looks to the model is called the disciple (Girard 2013:192).

Mimetic desire, with its model-disciple dynamic, is a pattern that begins in childhood between children and their caretakers. Mimesis is recognised in child psychology, but according to Girard, adults rarely acknowledge its presence in their own lives for fear of realising it means they lack independent thought and an ‘own’ identity. All adults want to be models and sometimes

overtly encourage others (often their children) to imitate them in order to fuel the illusion that they have graduated from being a disciple (Girard 2013:164).<sup>59</sup>

Girard (2013:166) uses the psychological concept of the “double bind” to best explain how the model-disciple relationship works.<sup>60</sup> The double bind displays itself in adults (learnt in their childhood) and is often responsible for patterns of contradiction in human behaviour. Girard (2013:166) states that the double bind occurs with such frequency among individuals that he finds it to be the basis of all human relationships. Children are not able to apply cognitive dissonance, thus constructive and destructive behaviour is learnt from parents and unconsciously carried through into adulthood, shaping many of the child’s social patterns (see sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4 for the double bind in relation to scapegoating).<sup>61</sup>

As stated in the beginning of this section, desire almost always results in violence, and eventually, the relationship becomes reciprocal: at the height of suppressed or denied desire, violence takes over in order to procure the necessary desire, and then it is only violence that is further desired (Girard 2013:163).

The mimetic character of violence is so intense that once violence is installed in a community, it cannot burn itself out. The mimetic attributes of violence are extraordinary – sometimes direct and positive, at other times indirect and negative. Violence is like a raging fire that feeds on the very objects intended to smother

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<sup>59</sup> Although the model wants to be followed, they are often surprised to find themselves in eventual competition with the disciple for their model-like status. In here lies an irony: all models were once disciples (Girard 2013:165).

<sup>60</sup> Adapted by Girard (1994:292), this term comes from American theorist Gregory Bateson’s work surrounding schizophrenia. Bateson states that schizophrenia is developed in a communication channel between a child and their mother, when the mother’s actions and reactions contradict one another. For example: when a mother actively gives physical affection and love to her child, but then when the child responds in turn, she stops reciprocating the affection and unconsciously becomes cold. Thus the child loses faith in what they are told and in the long term cuts itself off from language (being one of the several signs of schizophrenic behaviour) (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland 1956:3-10).

<sup>61</sup> Cognitive dissonance is a term given to a state of tension wherein an individual becomes aware of contradicting actions, beliefs or behaviour, which more often than not results in an unpleasant disruption. The recognition of contradictions ideally leads the individual finding a way to restore balance between the contradictions. The cognitive dissonance theory was proposed by Leon Festinger in 1957 (McLeod 2014:[sp]).



its flames (Girard 2013:33).

In the above quote, Girard (2013:33) positions violence as an intense force that has both positive and negative effects respectively. He states that once violence is present, the chances of eradicating it are near impossible. He compares it to a wildfire that cannot be contained. A 'wildfire' in this sense has a destructive, yet cleansing capability.

Mimetic desire is perhaps the origin of all, if not most violence, according to Girard (2013:167). For religious societies, it is more politically functional to speak of desire than admit to a deeply rooted problem of violence, which is why religious systems suppress desires or forbid them. This system works on a basis of fear and moral retribution. It failed when religion started implementing violence to stop the very violence it tried to prevent (Girard 2013:167).

### **3.2. Girard's notion of violence**

Girard (2013:28) states that physical violence is self-propagating: its presence is bound to encourage more of it (2013:53), which is what makes violence a prime example of mimetic behaviour (Girard 1994:300).<sup>62</sup> Violent conflicts amongst people serve as a fatal threat to all working systems within any given social establishment. Thus, its prevention is of grave concern to all those wishing to maintain peace and ensure the continuation of social institutions (Girard 2013:106).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Girard (2013:1) uses the institution of human sacrifice to introduce his theories on violence, victimisation and scapegoating. Ancient religious institutions used human sacrifice as a control mechanism against violence; a single person was put to death in order to protect an entire community from the spread of violence. Sacrifice was not classified as violent because it was accepted that if someone was sacrificed, it was not the same as criminal murder. The idea that sacrifice is/was not the same as criminal murder is a misconception that aided sacrifice's functionality. However, it could no longer sustain itself as moral systems became liberal and inclusive (Girard 2013:7). Today, contemporary studies show that there is no difference between violence that is sacrificial and violence that is not. Violence is violence, regardless of the framework it operates in (Girard 2013:45); and this is what this study focuses on – henceforth this chapter will solely refer to violence in itself (making reference to the presence of sacrifice only if absolutely necessary)

<sup>63</sup> Contemporary studies show that violence is a collective phenomenon, and not something that varies between individuals across cultures, races and eras (Girard 2013:2). Studies prove that people from different genealogies and historical backgrounds respond in exactly the same way to violence in the moment of reckoning (Girard 2013:52).

Girard (2013:31) describes the mimetic nature of violence through the metaphor of a plague. Violence displays itself as an illness does, and is treated the same way someone administers a vaccine for an illness or cuts out a malignancy.<sup>64</sup> If one is to avoid contracting a disease, one avoids contact with sick individuals in quarantine; similarly, in order to avoid violence, one will avoid violent individuals and situations (Girard 2013:34). To revisit an earlier statement: if desire is the endemic, then violence is the epidemic. It is this understanding of violence that encourages the belief in certain non-western, 'non-liberal' societies to advocate violence as "sacred" due to its plague-like nature (something that cannot be understood or controlled and is left to run its destructive course) (Girard 2013:16-17).<sup>65</sup>

Girard (2013:36) advises caution in approaching the plague metaphor. He warns that because no one is able to identify the 'origin' or exact biological cause for the outward action of violence, it is also increasingly difficult to contain and study it. Violence has thus benefitted from certain 'immunity' in many countries and places that still see this lack of definable identity as a reason to continue to mystify or justify violence. However, this immunity is not necessarily consciously formed by the given society.<sup>66</sup>

Violent behaviour is often framed as something that is apart from and outside of an individual. It is seen as a threatening force that comes to take over logic and one's senses in order to spread – which is what makes it precisely the "heart and soul of the sacred" (the unexplained, the mystified) (Girard 2013:34). While it is the aftermath of violent effects that Antonin Artaud was interested in, he too was captivated by the threat violence possesses and how it overrides an individual's faculties of reason; that is, why violence is

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<sup>64</sup> Girard experiences the mimetic nature of violence as Artaud (see Chapter Two section 2.2.1) experiences the plague: both violence and the plague are epidemics, with positive and negative effects.

<sup>65</sup> Girard (2013:16-17) defines western countries as countries that make use of judicial systems. It is unclear as to whether he considers countries that follow Roman-Dutch law to be western. Roman-Dutch law is practiced in South Africa but was rejected by Western Europe (Giesken [sa]:[sp]). Throughout *The Violence and the Sacred* (2013), Girard refers to societies that are not western or contemporary as primitive. I reject the use of this term in this study on the basis of its negative connotations with biases of limited development as measured against an abstract Western ideal of 'development' and 'civilisation'.

<sup>66</sup> Wolfgang Palaver (2013:35) argues that Girard's theory of violence does not support the view that violence is a naturalised part of human behaviour that must be left to run its course. Palaver states that Girard seeks to quell violence through conscious engagement with the concept and the myths surrounding it, while simultaneously acknowledging the difficulty of such a task.

mystified, and inexplicably destructive (Jannarone 2010:44).

Making violence appear outside of one's control suggests a lack of agency and participation, which ultimately results in a refusal to shoulder responsibility for one's own behaviour. This apparent lack and refusal is false; Girard (2013:81) makes it clear that all individuals are responsible for the presence of violence because all individuals participate in the destruction of order, whether in silent participation or in the physical execution of violence.

Girardian discourse primarily deals with physical violence. I must at this point acknowledge contemporary philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who identifies two different types of violence in his book *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008:9-14) that are present in *A lie of the mind* and therefore essential to this study. Žižek speaks of "subjective" and "objective" violence. He labels subjective violence as overt violence that is physically tangible. This is violence such as physical abuse and murder; it is violence carried out against the body. Objective violence is covert violence that is either symbolic or systematic; it is embedded within language (for example, verbal abuse) and ideologies (for example, oppression through patriarchy and class struggles) (Packman 2009:4). In light of Žižek's two different classifications of violence and Girard's detailed study, violence that is covert (objective) is just as impactful and important as overt (subjective) violence.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, violence is described as mimetic and self-propagating (Girard 1994:300) and thus, often any action to prevent it from spreading is considered, even if it means naïvely trying to remove oneself from a role of responsibility or position of accountability (Girard 2013:106). Girard (2013:18) notes that in the preventative measures taken against violence, it is often the threat of vengeance on an act of violence that is most feared and calls for the most direct pre-emptive measures.

### 3.2.1. Vengeance as further violence

Girard (2013:18) suggests that societies are more terrified of acts of vengeance than of random acts of violence, and it is vengeance that must be restrained (2013:4). Vengeance perpetuates a cycle of violence: if a death is avenged, then that death must also be avenged. In this cycle of vengeance, there can be no distinction between “the act for which the killer is being punished and the punishment itself.” This duality highlights the irony of vengeance; it continuously perpetuates the violence it aimed to put an end to initially (Girard 2013:15-16).

Many communities have judiciary systems that prevent the recurrence of vengeance, and regulate violence.<sup>67</sup> Judiciary systems manage to hone the idea of vengeance into one controlled necessary action (Girard 2013:16). This system works on notions of guilt, innocence and an ingrained respect for a collectively held moral that must be upheld (Girard 2013:23). Moral here connotes human decorum, a moral standard, which legally prohibits acts of violence as a means of peacefully coexisting. Societies that do not make use of a judiciary system inevitably turn to rites that are similar to (or are) sacrifice.<sup>68</sup> These rites are then classified as “private vengeance”, whereas a judiciary system and systems of law enforcement are considered “public vengeance” (Girard 2013:16-17).<sup>69</sup>

The perpetuation of violence and the cyclical nature that vengeance proposes not only encourages people to find a preventative cure, but also brings to mind the implications of a mob mentality that may emerge from communities in the absence of a cure. Mobs succeed when everyone is a participant in violence or vengeance, either in presence or action (Girard 2013:152). This

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<sup>67</sup> Judiciary systems do not always liberate and serve blind justice. The political system essential for the operation of such a judiciary system is often the same system that is responsible for biased oppression within a society (Girard 2013:25).

<sup>68</sup> Girard (2013:19-20) understands why sacrifice is still used in places where judiciary systems fail or are not present but is under no illusion that this is an adequate replacement. Inevitably, whether a religious or non-religious approach towards violence is taken, it may be seen that both have the same aim: to take practical action against the spread of violence in acts of vengeance (Girard 2013:35).

<sup>69</sup> In principle, there is little difference between judicial justice and the traditional archaic idea of revenge. The notion of judicial justice offers a legally monitored and socially accepted framing of vengeance (Girard 2013:26).

stance towards violence and a lack of accepting responsibility and accountability is personified and explained through the process of victimisation.

### 3.2.2. The role and purpose of a victim

In a desperate attempt to prevent violence and vengeance, the collective community seeks a victim in order to protect themselves from further outbreaks of violence. Violence can never be suppressed or disallowed; it must find something to be exerted on (similar to sacrifice, but the notion of victims here are discussed beyond sacrifice). Girard acknowledges that violence can ultimately not be quelled, which causes a permanent strain on a community's need to find a preventative cure. Again, the cyclical nature of violence is then emphasised, but now between the community and each of their selected victims (Girard 2013:4).<sup>70</sup>

The victim is not a substitute for some particularly endangered individual, nor is it offered up to some individual of particularly bloodthirsty temperament. Rather, it is a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its *own* violence (Girard 2013:8).

In its protective aim, the sacrifice is essentially an act of purging in order to maintain social cohesion. As mentioned above, the victim is chosen as the preventative (but always impermanent) cure. Girard (2013:8) points out that in understanding the role of the victim as he unpacks it, one would be misguided if one were to imagine a scene of violent individuals taking part in a medieval form of accusation and torture.

Victims are selected from minority groups either within or outside of the community (Girard 2013:12). Girard (2013:13) identifies types of people that

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<sup>70</sup> In his research, Girard speaks of surrogate victims and ritual victims. However, he cautions against differentiating between the two types of victims in a thorough study of violence. Thus, I discuss a victim as an all-encompassing entity. For further information on victims, consult pages 23 and 115 of *The Violence and the Sacred* (Girard 2013).

could be selected as victims: children, the unmarried, people with disabilities, slaves, captives, prisoners, social outcasts, and people of nobility. These victims are selected based on their inability to form or experience social connections that sustain the social fabric of the community at large due to their age and/or what their personal circumstance(s) inhibit.<sup>71</sup> Girard (1994:123) points out that victims are also known to have a physical difference that encourages ridicule from others. These victims are seen as ailments that must be removed from society as they rupture the coherence of the self-narrative experience (the self as part of a combined collective whole) and representation of a community (Girard 2013:107).

By taking a sacrificial victim from a minority group, there is no risk of their death being avenged. Their lack of social integration is directly responsible for the lack of empathy and agency by the respective community when the victim is sacrificed. By framing an event as a sacrifice, and that this sacrifice will serve the interest of the social group from which the victim is selected, it is accepted through the social fabric that there cannot be vengeance to follow this act of violence (Girard 2013:14). This is why individuals turn to sacrifice when they desire violent impulses that are directed to people closest to them (Girard 2013:14-15).

Everyone in the community must be unanimous in the selection of the victim, for the sacrificial ritual depends on the victim's elimination in order to 'cure' their community of the ills of violence. Everyone must buy into the illusion of the sacrifice if it hopes to work; "the resolution serves as the framework of the [illusion]...", keeping peace and harmony intact (Girard 2013:94). Therefore, a victim holds two purposes: the first is to embody the antagonist (all community members) to restore non-violent order. The second purpose is then to be a saviour for the community. It is through the victim's compliance (the victim must be willing) and sacrifice that a community may be rid of any threat of

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<sup>71</sup> Girard (2013:13) acknowledges that patriarchy not only positions women as vulnerable, but also exploits this vulnerability when women are victims of violence. This exploitation is perpetuated and enforced by communities that view women as inferior both socially and physically (Palaver 2013:304). Girard states that it is the perpetuation of this that makes women "quasi-sacred"; they are desired and must therefore be integrated into the community but simultaneously disdained for their otherness to men. Their status as victims therefore fluctuates (Girard 2013:160).

disruption. The community therefore owes their entire state of freedom from violence (or rather the illusion thereof) to the willingness of the victim and the sacrifice the victim makes (Girard 2013:97).

Without a victim, the pursuit of desire results in violence and destroys all those it touches. The victim acts as a guide that helps individuals' reason with their desire and the presence of violence, for now all blame may be shifted, and all accountability transferred to the victim. Due to this shift, victims are better understood as scapegoats (Girard 1994:311).

### 3.2.3. The victim as a scapegoat

Historically, the term scapegoating was generally only used in conjunction with sacrificial rituals (Girard 1994:132-133).<sup>72</sup> Now, Girard (2013:90) proposes that any space touched by violence or the threat thereof immediately begins searching for a scapegoat. A scapegoat is an individual that acts as a cure for the possible destruction within a community and embodies the community's faults.<sup>73</sup> Girard (2013:81) proposes that victims are actually scapegoats, due to the community's inability to take responsibility for violent impulses (see above).

In order for scapegoating to be effective, both the community and the victim must perpetuate the illusion of the victim's guilt (Girard 2013:119). This illusion manages to fuel the mystification surrounding scapegoating. If this illusion is broken, society faces the possibility of exposing itself to mimetic conflict with little chance of resolution (Girard 2010:xiv). The victim as a scapegoat is the embodiment of substitution, as one subject is chosen to

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<sup>72</sup> The word scapegoat is roughly derived from the Greek term Apompaios; an individual "who wards off illnesses." The biblical translation of the term is Septuagint, derived from Hebrew and means "destined to Azazel." Azazel is said to be a demon that lives in a desert and is referred to in Leviticus 16, 21-22 as a demon that forms part of a sacrificial goat ritual (Girard 1994:131).

<sup>73</sup> The notion of an individual taking collective sin upon her/himself is the driving point of the Christian faith. God chooses to forgive the violence of human beings through the sacrifice of his Son (Girard 2010:x). The ultimate sacrifice (The Passion) demystified sacrifice and showed violence for what it is (Girard 2010:xi). Many archaic religions do not explain the ritual sacrifice that the founding of the religion was based upon (Girard 2010:xiii). This sacrifice destroys all conceptions of scapegoating – for Jesus Christ is known to be innocent of all sin (Girard 2010:xiv). On the first page of her magisterial *Fields of Blood* (2014), theologian Karen Armstrong acknowledges Girard's contribution of the scapegoat to explaining certain links between violence and religion.



embody the violent urges that everyone feels towards one another within the community (Girard 2013:111).

By making one person solely responsible for all of a society's present ills, not only is the threat of a violent epidemic contained, but the collective consciences of the community are also kept clean. The joint desire to believe in and frame guilt, as well as execute violence, turns everyone into "doubles" of one another (Girard 2013:88-89); the entire community begins to resemble one another in the midst of their mob mentality. They become an extension of someone that they are imitating in the cycle of victimisation and scapegoating (Telotte 1983:46).

David Humbert (2013:254-255) states that doubling is interconnected with mimetic desire, for when people desire the same objects, they begin to resemble one another (Humbert 2013:256).<sup>74</sup> Doubling is prevalent not only in the relationship between the rival and the subject, but also in the outbreak of violent epidemics within societies, for everyone becomes alike in their desire for violence; neighbours turn upon each other, and so continues a cyclical event of vengeance and perpetual doubling (Humbert 2013:258). Therefore, the process of doubling can be understood to function on different levels within the scapegoating mechanism.

Selecting a scapegoat necessitates a denial of accountability and responsibility. Facing violence and taking responsibility for it – acknowledging oneself as a perpetrator – threatens to destroy identities and how these identities are constituted within a specific community. To openly acknowledge that there cannot be one single guilty party that quells violent impulses threatens both the community's historical understanding and future conceptions of themselves (Girard 2013:93).

The role of the victim was unpacked in the previous section and then

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<sup>74</sup> Humbert recognises the literary motifs that Girard identified in order to motivate his theories on violence and mimesis. Doubling is one of these motifs, usually presented in the example of enemy brothers who are not only rivals but also deadly opponents (i.e. the relationship between Cain and Abel from The Bible, which Girard analyses in *The Violence and the Sacred* (2013:4).



connected to scapegoating, but the role of the perpetrator who physically carries out the violent act must be discussed in connection to these notions.

### 3.2.4. The perpetrator of violence as a victim and scapegoat

If one is to implement a contemporary understanding and use of the term scapegoat, then Palaver's (2013:152) description of a scapegoat may be applied not only to a victim, but also to a perpetrator of violence. Palaver defines a scapegoat as a person who is burdened with the "sins of others...", describing the notion of scapegoating as a "partially conscious psychological phenomenon". Girard (2013:168) states, "...there is always a tyrant and always an oppressed, but the roles alternate". Individuals may therefore not be strictly classified as either innocent (the oppressed) or guilty (the tyrant). These social categories are essentially indistinguishable, and even though a victim is not necessarily guilty of inciting the violence acted out upon them, the chance that they are innocent of all ills is also not certain (Girard 2013:167).

An individual's alternation between the roles of victim and perpetrator is inevitable within all relationships, for no person is the sum of something purely positive or negative. No single individual may ever be framed as either a victim or perpetrator (Girard 2013:169). Just as a community chooses a victim (scapegoat) to symbolise their ills, a perpetrator is chosen to carry the role of executioner so that the majority do not become contaminated with violence and bloodshed. The perpetrator then (once again) moves the responsibility of the victim's fate off the community and onto themselves, as the victim's single executioner. The perpetrator of the violent act is therefore just as much a victim and scapegoat as the person they are exercising violence onto.<sup>75</sup> Perpetrators are societies' scapegoats for the ills they do not themselves perform for fear of moral retribution or legal consequence (Girard 2013:183).

Vilém Flusser (2003:16-17) supports Girard's view of the conflation of victim and perpetrator in his book *The Freedom of the Migrant* (2003). He gives a

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<sup>75</sup> The violent crisis may now be contained through a single 'monster'. This perpetrator is now a victim of and for the community (Palaver 2013:152).

brief account of Girard's book *Le Bouc émissaire (The Scapegoat)* (1983), which elaborates on the classification of both perpetrators and victims of violence as scapegoats in their own right. Flusser argues that a need for individual identity drives the scapegoating mechanism (2003:17). As stated earlier, the need to identify oneself as different to and from others is essential, but nevertheless ironic, since our desires are marked by similarities and guided by the model-disciple relationship (Telotte 1983:44-46).<sup>76</sup>

From a Girardian position, it is made clear that once perpetrators are understood as scapegoats, no good will come from making worldly institutions scapegoats; blaming the community or society for social ills, and making 'them' into scapegoats.<sup>77</sup> Blame cannot be assigned to society, religion, or socio-historic ideologies (or anything that would fit Artaud's designation of worldly institutions), for this perpetuates further victimisation and shifts responsibility again from community members onto the perpetrator figure. Liberation from binary distinctions between victims and perpetrators are only possible by thoroughly understanding victimisation, its scapegoat mechanism and how 'guilt' and 'innocence' become interchangeable for all individuals (Girard 1994:286-287).<sup>78</sup>

This study uses the scapegoating mechanism to destabilise the binary divide between a victim and perpetrator of violence. Following Girard's understanding that a perpetrator of violence and a victim of violence may both respectively be scapegoats, I am able to reframe previous ideas around guilt and innocence, which I further discuss in Chapter Four. The view that a victim and perpetrator are doubles of one another through the scapegoating mechanism (see the previous section) may then be contextualised within a

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<sup>76</sup> Palaver (2013:184) fuels the conflation of victim and perpetrator roles by discussing Girard's interpretation of certain medieval texts. In his interpretations, Girard addresses the biased nature of the accounts that are clearly in favour of one party's innocence and another's guilt. Girard highlights that this is clear bias, for there are historical facts that contradict the given perceptions and the positioning of blame.

<sup>77</sup> Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud blamed institutions and systems for failures in people. This blame continues to be perpetuated by contemporary philosophers, but violence and the process of scapegoating cannot hope to be undone by a promise of transgressive thinking and further blame. Each and every individual must accept that they are the participants within these institutions and systems, and until they actively take responsibility for their part, nothing can be done (Girard 1994:286-287).

<sup>78</sup> A collective whole is made up of individual parts. The problem is not so much 'out there' as it is 'in here'.

framework of desire and mimetic rivalry, and the model-disciple relationship.

Out of all desires that cause mimetic rivalry, Girard (2013:36) suggests that sexual desire is possibly the most primal desire that encourages violence between individuals. This view is supported by Palaver (2013:38), who links sexuality's potency to rudimentary human mimetic desire. I now discuss sexual desire and its link to violence, and the shared viewpoints on sexuality by both Antonin Artaud (discussed in Chapter Two) and Girard.

### **3.3. Violence and its link to sexual desire**

As stated in Chapter Two, Artaud disdained sexuality and the practice thereof. He felt that sexual desire was something unholy and irrelevant in the experience of love (Esslin 1976:55). In *The Theatre and its Double* (1997:24-25), Artaud refers to Lucas van Leyden's 1521 painting *Lot and his Daughters*, based on the biblical myth of Lot and his daughters. He points out the overtly sexual nature of the painting, the themes of incest, and the destruction brought forth by sexuality. The myth itself is a lesson on the destructive nature of desire and sexuality as sin (Genesis 19:32).<sup>79</sup> Sexuality is considered as impure because it is associated with violent ends, such as jealous fits and crimes of passion, while violence is often considered impure because it is associated with sexuality (Girard 2013:36). These jealous fits and crimes of passion may relate back to mimetic desire, as displayed in the relationship between the model and disciple (as discussed in section 3.1.2.).

Sexuality is a primal desire that holds a vast amount of control over people and their innate desires. Sexuality is fundamentally driven by mimetic desire and the rivalry it encourages (Girard 1994:343, 2013:36). It is considered as one of the most influential elements of human existence by various religions (Girard 2013:36). Throughout history, sexual liberations and sexual enlightenments were followed by violent epidemics (Girard 2013:130). This pattern is exemplified in the Western sexual revolution of 1960, which

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<sup>79</sup> Notably, Artaud was more interested in the metaphysical and poetic meanings of the painting than its overt sexual nature (Artaud 1977:26-27).

empowered women sexually, and began considering gender as fluid. The revolution faced a moral backlash from religious institutions and more conservative members of society. Systematic oppression and violent physical control were used to subdue and eradicate this ‘potentially dangerous’ advancement of women’s liberties (Cohen 2012:[sp]).

The taboo status of sexuality in various cultures and traditions is fuelled and perpetuated by ‘facts’ that interpolate people into thinking the controlled absence of sexuality will save them from violence. The products of sexual violence, such as sadistic sexual practices, motivate these ‘facts’ as valid and accurate (Girard 2013:39). Religious institutions suppress sexual desires in order to prevent outbreaks of violence and implement systems to protect individuals, such as the institution of marriage, celibacy, and the fear that sexual ‘transgression’ will be followed by moral retribution. However, Girard makes it clear that it is not sexuality itself that is problematic; it is the violence that sexuality encourages that is problematic, as his theory of mimetic desire explains. (Girard 2013:249-250). Girard describes sexuality as “the final veil shielding violence from sight” (2013:130) (he mentions the demystification of sacrifice as a previously lifted veil). Once sexuality and the suppression thereof are understood, he is positive that people may be closer to grappling with violence and its epidemic nature.

Biologically speaking, sex is the supposed origin of specific sicknesses (both real and imagined). Sex would often result in the blood and viscera of childbirths, which often resulted in the deaths of the mothers and/or their child. Female menstrual blood is historically considered to be impure, but any blood spill has long been connected to impurities and threats of violence and destruction. As Girard (2013:36-37) explains, “[b]lood stains everything it touches the colour of violence and death”. This belief in the taint and threat of blood sustains an undercurrent of fear in the presence of blood spill (Girard 2013:36-37).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> This leads the question as to whether or not people have had an underlying motivation to pinpoint the presence of violence on females. Such clear symbolism of blood and where it ‘starts’ can only read as being detrimental to the female sex (Girard 2013:38-39).

According to Girard (2013:38), many contemporary thinkers refuse to acknowledge a link between sexuality and violence. Girard explains this refusal to be an attempt at undoing the suppression religious institutions cause.<sup>81</sup> This refusal becomes dangerous, for it may mislead people into misguided approaches to violence, which may then lead to further suppression of sexual desire. As mentioned earlier, a suppression of any sorts will eventually lead to an overflow of whatever is being suppressed, causing violence where violence was not originally necessary.

In conclusion, the centrality of sexual desire, the conflation of victim and perpetrator, and their connection to violence within Girardian discourse, is used in Chapter Four to offer a vocabulary to reframe the relationship between Beth and Jake in *A lie of the mind*. This reframing aims to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary within the practical component of this study (which is discussed in Chapter Five). Given the intersections between Antonin Artaud and René Girard already emphasised throughout this chapter, I now highlight further similarities and contrasting points between the work of Artaud and Girard in order to constitute a cohesive, inclusive conceptual-framework, that beyond a reading of *A lie of the mind*, can act as a guide for the creative research project.

### **3.4. Artaud and Girard: an integrated framework**

Girard (1994:134) states: “we are undergoing unprecedented change... more radical than humanity has ever been subject to before. This change... is part of the terrifying and wondrous history of our time, which manifests in places other than our writings”. This quote echoes Artaud’s words in 1937, where theatre is seen as the double of life: “[i]n the anguished, catastrophic times we live in, we feel an urgent need for theatre that is not overshadowed by events, but arouses deep chaos within us and predominates over our unsettled period” (Artaud 1977:64). While Girard and Artaud describe their historical contexts in 1994 and 1937 respectively, this present study views their

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<sup>81</sup> Girard does not specify who exactly these contemporary thinkers are.

comments on change (on a social, political and economic level), unsettlement, and chaos, as an appropriate vocabulary to describe current global unrest and volatility (Growing political risk in the year ahead and beyond 2014:1-4).<sup>82</sup>

Artaud concerns himself with the perception of self in relation to the world, while Girard is focused on the perception of violence within the world. Artaud's work fundamentally seeks to answer three questions. He concerns himself with how people perceive things to be, and then with what certainty and clarity these perceptions exist. Finally, Artaud wants to challenge people not only to think differently, but also to understand why it is important to think differently (Scheer 2004:21). Girard's work encourages violence to be re-understood as something that cannot be avoided and must be purged in a controlled manner as part of a functioning social system (Girard wishes to undo the classification of victims and perpetrators and often uses religion as a framework for its protectionist nature. Artaud, however, sees the protectionist nature of religion as stifling).

De Vos (2011:84) draws parallels between Girard's theories on violence and sacrifice, and Artaud's essay *The Theatre and the Plague*. Both Artaud and Girard present a situation of crisis, which according to De Vos, resemble one another and can be brought together in the notion of the plague that serves as both a metaphor and embodied reaction against the disruption of order (De Vos 2011:85). In section 3.2.1 of this chapter, desire is described as endemic, and violence as an epidemic. However, an interesting comparison exists between Artaud and Girard in the overlap of violence, desire, and the metaphor of the plague: violence becomes dissolved into the broader topics of desire and the plague, and the plague becomes the epidemic, while desire remains endemic.

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<sup>82</sup> It must be recognised that both Artaud and Girard functioned and operated within spatial and temporal circumstances that did not allow for thinking of and understanding gender, sexuality, biological sex (and how these affect social relationships) in the same way as contemporary thinking conceives of these constructs. Neither Artaud nor Girard overtly points out gender discrimination within their work, and Artaud's notion of The Absolute does away with gender and biological sex altogether as a worldly institutions (see Chapter Two section 2.2.3). However, it is noted that there are underlying patriarchal viewpoints within both their philosophies and methodologies.

In Girard's work on violence, he discusses sacrifice and how plague-like violence is placated by the sacrifice of an individual so that 'purification' may be achieved. If this is translated into a theatrical language for Artaud, the word purification is replaced with 'catharsis'. For Artaud, theatre should have the same nature as a plague in having a purifying effect and achieving catharsis (De Vos 2011:84).

#### **3.4.1. Violence as an innate impulse**

Both Artaud and Girard see violence as being connected to innate impulses. Girard (2013:2, 4) sees violence itself as an innate impulse that will always manifest and may therefore never be denied. Artaud (1977:26-27, 35, 64) is interested in how violence is able to dissolve facades and normative conventions in any given society so that one has no choice but to surrender to one's innate impulses, while also recognising that violence itself may be an innate impulse that one must eventually surrender to.

#### **3.4.2. Sacrifice as an internal and external process**

For Artaud, sacrifice is an internal process: self-identity and worldly institutions are sacrificed in order to reach The Absolute (Jannarone 2010:192). For Girard, sacrifice is external insofar as it speaks to the collective interiority of guilt for purposes of purification. Girard speaks about violent human sacrifice; that is, how victims are sacrificed through violence in order to prevent vengeance and further violence, and therefore, reject or shift blame and accountability (2013:13-15). Sacrifice is something metaphysical for Artaud, where it is more literal for Girard.

#### **3.4.3. Myth as model and metaphor**

Artaud (1977:55-56) and Girard (2013:61, 74) use myths, tragic literature, and the metaphors they contain, as a way to better understand the world.<sup>83</sup> They

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<sup>83</sup> In contemporary discussion, the term 'myth' is used to describe a story that is seen as untrue. However, in the pre-modern world, myths gave meaning to events through their metaphors and the



use the metaphor of the plague to discuss theatre (for Artaud) and violence (for Girard).<sup>84</sup> The presence of tragedy and incest are two motifs in the myth of Oedipus that intrigued them. They discuss the myth of Oedipus as an accurate metaphor for victimhood and violence (Artaud 1977:55 & Girard 2013:53). De Vos (2011:79) states that for Girard, the myth of Oedipus is a reference to analyse violence as a contagious force. For Artaud, it is the nihilistic undertone of the myth and the visceral bloodshed it contains that inspires him and has a recurring presence within his own Theatre of Cruelty works.

However, their focus on sexuality and its connection to myths is of most value to this study. Artaud denounces sexuality completely and uses myths (such as that of Lot and his Daughters, and the story of Count Cenci) to prove sexual desire's danger and redundancy (Esslin 1976:55). On the other hand, Girard (2013:129-130) views sexuality and sexual desire as a modern myth. According to Girard (2013:129-130), the belief that sexuality and sexual desire is negative and destructive due to its connection with violence is one of the barriers that stand between human understandings of religion and violence.

#### **3.4.4. (Sexual) Desire**

Artaud states that all worldly and sexual desires must be done away with in order to attain The Absolute (De Vos 2011:22), while Girard (2013:164) is interested in analysing desire and its connection to violence. He states that human desire (of any kind) is directly responsible for the manifestation of violence within a society.

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lessons they contained (Armstrong 2005:7). A myth should not be understood as untrue because it is a 'myth', containing no factual information. Quite adversely, it is true because it is effective in its purpose (Armstrong 2005:10).

<sup>84</sup> Palaver (2013:136) discusses Girard's idea of The Mimetic Crisis, in which Palaver likens the process of imitation in mimetic desire to the plague metaphor, describing how the myths Girard uses in his work are often centred around a plague infested community (such as Thebes in *Oedipus Rex*), and how the social collapse encouraged by the plague is reminiscent of the collapse within a community when imitation becomes contagious.



### **3.4.5. The Absolute in relation to Girard's understanding of the apocalypse**

The corresponding and differentiating points above provide a summarised account of key ideas discussed in the current and preceding chapters. Leading into the next chapter, an important touch point between Artaud and Girard is the connection between Girard's notion of the apocalypse and how it speaks to Artaud's notion of The Absolute. Artaud's notion of The Absolute and Girard's understanding of the apocalypse foreground a process of transcendence that provides a way of conceptualising The Absolute that elaborates on Artaud's initial understandings of The Absolute.

Girard (2010:ix) states that the end of Europe and the Western world is prominent in today's times due to the continuous onslaught of human and natural violence.<sup>85</sup> An apocalypse is the most permanent way to be done with worldly institutions, such as the binary distinction between victims and perpetrators. As already discussed, Artaud emphasised the importance of ridding oneself of worldly institutions in order to obtain The Absolute. An apocalypse only leaves remnants behind, but these remnants are imbued with the divine (according to Girard's understanding of the apocalypse as predicted by the Christian bible), which alludes to the transcendental.

Girard (2010:xiii) argues that the apocalypse and its promise of destruction are not exclusively negative. The apocalypse creates hope because it enables one to see global manifestations of violence without dominant powers manipulating one's understanding of it. The apocalypse makes renewal possible, but only if the danger of the apocalyptic event is embraced. If the danger is embraced, individuals may positively change their actions and behaviour to be less violent. Based on the above, Girard sees value and hope in the apocalypse because of the presence of eternal life as a transcendental experience that is referred to in Christian doctrine.

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<sup>85</sup> Girard (2010:ix) frames the apocalypse from a religious perspective, relating it to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Second Coming is a belief that Christ will return to earth in the end times to gather His people and prepare for the destruction of earth. In the book of Revelations, an apocalyptic framework of the Second Coming is presented in which the event is linked to a rise in violence.

For Artaud, by contrast, religion must be done away with in order to obtain The Absolute and to access transcendental experiences; there may be no divine power acting as a moral and behavioural guiding force (De Vos 2011:41). Girard (1994:186) recognises this belief that religion must be completely negated to be popular in alternative philosophies, but states that it is a false consciousness. He argues that individuals further enforce “the competitive world that is stifling them” (Girard 1994:186) when they try to rid themselves of what they understand to be a religious institution.

Artaud blamed worldly institutions, such as religion, for preventing him from obtaining his desires and attaining The Absolute (Esslin 1976:49). According to Girard (1994:186), however, individuals are mistaken if they think anything, including religion, is preventing their desires from being liberated. He acknowledges the protective function religion serves in the suppression of desire, but warns against believing this suppression to be religious doctrine. Girard argues that societies and communities have distorted religion in an attempt to quell violence and protect members of the respective communities. It is therefore not the god of any given religious structure that must be rejected, but rather the collective human understanding that must be re-examined and re-evaluated (1994:295).

Girard (1994:310) acknowledges the emergence of existentialism as an enticing belief system when one is in pursuit of desire without retribution or inhibition. However, existentialism emerges as another institution. Girard (1993:26, 33) states that by rejecting God, one inevitably becomes God to oneself. While this is what Artaud encouraged, Girard points out that by making oneself God, one creates a further institution and thus fails to separate from institutions. By making oneself God, one only succeeds in becoming a victim and scapegoat of failed practice. Girard suggests that if God as the ultimate spiritual figure is rejected, as Artaud suggested, it must be the figure of the commonly perceived God (a God that smites and punishes) that is rejected. By rejecting this perception of God, one is able to free oneself from religious ideology that enforces rigid social codes (Jannarone 2010:192).

I conclude here that by implementing the transcendental principles of Girard's understanding of the apocalypse, it may be possible to gain a different perspective on Artaud's notion of The Absolute and the dissolution of the victim/perpetrator binary I aim for in this study. The understanding of violence here to be purifying by nature allows for the transcendental and metaphysical to be accessed. I will discuss this further in the next chapter, and contextualise it in regards to the reconstruction of Beth and Jake's relationship (discussed again and further in Chapter Five).

### **3.5. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed and unpacked Girard's work on violence, victims, scapegoats, the mimetics of desire, and sexual desire in order to generate a vocabulary that will aid in reading and reconceptualising the relationship between Beth and Jake from *A lie of the mind* (see Chapter Four). This will also aid me in constructing and later analysing my practical reinterpretation of Beth and Jake's relationship wherein the victim/perpetrator binary is destabilised through implementing Artaud's notion of The Absolute (Chapter Five).

This chapter also provided an integrated framework between the work of Antonin Artaud (as discussed in Chapter Two) and René Girard in order to establish a conceptual framework that will become a guide for the praxis of this study. I will now proceed to apply both the Artaudian and Girardian conceptual frameworks to my reading of Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind*, in order to read and reconceptualise the relationship between Beth and Jake, focusing on destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary by using Artaud's notion of The Absolute.

## CHAPTER FOUR: BETH AND JAKE IN *A LIE OF THE MIND*: TOWARDS DESTABILISING THE VICTIM/PERPETRATOR BINARY

In Chapter Two, I discussed Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and the notion of The Absolute in order to frame my directorial approach for this study. In Chapter Three I unpacked René Girard's notions of the mimetics of desire, violence, victimisation and scapegoating in order to generate a conceptual vocabulary with which to analyse the victim/perpetrator binary in the relationship between Beth and Jake from *A Lie of the Mind* (Shepard 1986).

This chapter further discusses Girard's notions of the mimetics of desire, violence, victimisation and scapegoating, and connects it to Artaud's notion of The Absolute in order to directly engage with a conceptual reframing of the relationship between Beth and Jake from *A lie of the mind*. The conceptual reframing of their relationship will specifically entail destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary as per my research question. I will also engage thematically with their relationship in order to construct the practical component of this study, and discuss this in Chapter Five.

The characters I extract and reconstruct from *A lie of the mind* are the two protagonists, Beth and Jake. In order to create the Theatre of Cruelty re-interpretation,  $\pi$  (De Wet 2015), these two characters must be analysed and reconstructed in accordance with The Absolute in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary. The consequent effect of the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary, aiding the characters in moving towards The Absolute as a state, must also be discussed.

Previous studies frame Beth and Jake's relationship as a literary example of gender violence. This positioning of gender violence frames Jake as a male perpetrator, and Beth as his female victim (Bottoms 1998:16; Crum 1993:206; Roudané 2002:5). In McDonough's (1995:76) view, *A lie of the mind* is an explicit study of gender violence, made apparent in the clear mistreatment and physical deterioration of all the female characters. She maintains that Beth is an obvious female victim, and that Jake resists sympathy, as he is too

violent. McDonough therefore maintains the binary separation between victim and perpetrator within *A lie of the mind*.<sup>86</sup>

I argue for a shift in the above dominant perspective through which their relationship is framed and analysed. This shift in perspective reframes the violence within *A lie of the mind* as a symbolic force within The Absolute (discussed in section 4.4), which may allow for the victim/perpetrator binary that exists between Beth and Jake to be destabilised. It is necessary to dissolve this binary in order to move towards Artaud's notion of The Absolute (discussed in Chapter Two) and apply it practically (discussed in Chapter 5).

It must be noted at this point that this study does not condone or encourage gender violence and misogyny, rather it offers an alternative reading of a text that is dominantly associated with gender violence; it problematises readings of the text that maintain a binary. In doing so, this study aims to use an Artaudian and Girardian framework to reconceptualise the existing relationship between Beth and Jake within a Theatre of Cruelty context. The violent nature of this relationship and the characters of Beth and Jake operate alongside the characteristics of Theatre of Cruelty (see Chapter Two), as this chapter aims to make clear.

This chapter also investigates the following sub-questions as provided in Chapter One:

- How can Girard's ideas generate an appropriate vocabulary to analyse the relationship between Beth and Jake in Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind*?
- How can the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary aid in obtaining The Absolute?

I now proceed to critically discuss and apply appropriate notions and concepts

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<sup>86</sup> According to my review of scholarship, McDonough's 1995 research provides the strongest counter argument to the aims of my study, and to the work of Laura Graham that I cite as a supporting argument.

discussed in Chapters Two and Three to Sam Shepard's play text *A lie of the mind* that motivate the reframing of the relationship between Beth and Jake. By conceptually framing the original text in this chapter, I provide a groundwork that motivates directorial choices concerning the praxis that will be discussed in Chapter Five.

#### 4.1. Background and contextualisation

According to my review of available scholarship, *A lie of the mind* is one of Shepard's most under-researched works. Academic and even popular literature available on the text is limited.<sup>87</sup> In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Shepard states that while he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his work *Buried Child*, it should have been given to *A lie of the mind*, which he describes as "...denser, more intricate, better constructed" (Howe, McCulloch & Simpson 1997:[sp]).<sup>88</sup> A review of a 2010 staging of the work in *The New York Times* (directed by American actor Ethan Hawke) describes this play text as "the most poetically coherent" of Shepard's oeuvre (Brantley 2010:[sp]).

Laura Graham (1995:5, 7, 176) links Sam Shepard's style and method to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. The appeal in Shepard's work, like Artaud's, lies in its focus on intuition and the irrational. Graham states that Shepard's work asks of one to feel first and think later. Shepard achieves this by using language in his dialogues to communicate the metaphysical. Shepard's use of language is best described as "imagery in motion," echoing Artaud's need for imagery in every aspect of a Theatre of Cruelty production. Shepard, according to Graham (1995:187), manages to develop Artaud's stipulation that verbal language must become metaphysical:

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<sup>87</sup> The bulk of the information provided in this chapter comes from Laura Graham's 1995 publication *Sam Shepard: Theme, Image and the Director*, and Stephen Bottoms' 1998 publication *The Theatre of Sam Shepard: States of Crisis*. This is due to the lack of literature available on the text beyond reviews of the play, which has been performed on numerous occasions since its first premiere. These performances have predominantly been staged by a combination of professional and amateur theatre houses around Western Europe and Northern America.

<sup>88</sup> *Buried Child* (Shepard 1979) is a morbid family drama. The plot follows a family's unravelling, after years previously, the grandfather buried a new-born baby, which was the result of an incestuous love affair within the family. The baby is eventually unearthed and brought into the house, which symbolically and literally clears the air, and the metaphorical and literal drought.

...[I]f Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty employs the anti-intellectual in theatrical presentation to lead the audience to a consideration of metaphysical crises, Shepard uses anti-intellectual theatricality to bring the audience to an affective realisation and later cognitive consideration of crises in the material and social world – especially the dilemma [humans] face if [they] continue to lose touch with the right hemisphere of [their] brain[s], that lobe which responds to myth and ritual, to symbols and signs, which functions to synthesise rather than to fragment and which uses as its tools the instincts and intuition of the species (Graham 1995:178).

Here, Graham makes it clear that Shepard's work in some ways re-emphasises Artaud's visions for theatre. Shepard's play texts enable feeling and yet simultaneously encourage an understanding of that feeling, in order to better understand and evaluate one's immediate world. Graham acknowledges the importance of theatre for Shepard as intertwined with life, as Artaud aimed for it to be, as mentioned in Chapter Two section 2.1 (Sellin 1968:ix). I now briefly discuss Sam Shepard's biography in order to contextualise his approach to theatre.

#### **4.1.1. Sam Shepard: a brief biography**

Sam Shepard was born in Illinois in the United States of America (USA) on November 5th 1943 as Samuel Shepard Rogers. In 1963 he left home to travel with a theatre group to New York, where he became 'Sam Shepard'. His rural upbringing and difficult relationship with his father influenced many of his texts and characters (Bloom 2003:12-13).

Shepard's debut as a dramatist came in the 1960s, a period during which the cultural and political landscapes of America were characterized by civil violence and unrest. Women's rights gained traction and racial tension was foregrounded as the next social antagonist. With the ideology of the American Dream and middle class values deteriorating due to the Vietnamese War, the American youth rebelled against the American institution, bringing in a stream of consciousness, activism, and a culture of 'Rock 'n Roll' (Ember 2014:[sp]).



Shepard drew from Rock and Roll music and culture, and its spirit of rebellion. He is praised for highlighting myths of Americanism.<sup>89</sup> He often portrays these myths through the deterioration of his masculine characters. Shepard exploits the romanticized notions of the past and highlights the clear deterioration of such a culture in the foreseeable future (Bloom 2003:12).

Although Shepard wrote texts and directed performances in an American context, he warns against reading absolute Americanism into his work. He openly states that it is not his intention to deliver social commentary on 'American' relationship structures alone, and that anyone who wishes to read his intentions as a nation-specific analysis, should do so as a personal interpretation, and not as a truism encouraged by the playwright. Shepard is not interested in addressing nationalism within his plays (Biggsby 2002:9, 20).

According to Stephen Bottoms (1998:2-3), Shepard's plays are comprised of contradictory fragmentations, which come together and create confrontations that pose critical questions. The questions raised centre on states of identity crisis within Shepard's works, driven by unconventional characters who blend fantasy with reality. These characters are continuously torn between who they are and who they must become; time and space; and causes and effects that affect how they understand themselves.

Specifically, Shepard's plays explore the theme of loss by offering perspectives on the deterioration of social and moral codes, as well as the loss of family, community and relationships, which altogether ultimately relate to the loss of identity (Biggsby 2002:11). Additional prominent themes in his works are Shepard's criticisms of societal myths, the binary classification of gender identity, and time as a three-act structure in which the past, present and future are prevented from ever fully connecting to one another (Bloom 2003:12).

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<sup>89</sup> Bradley C. Thompson (2011:[sp]) defines Americanism as a political view that characterises the American way of life and 'culture' to be completely unique and unlike anywhere else in the world. He problematizes the notion, stating its clear contradictions and presents it as an ideal, rather than something that should be believed in with as much faith and purpose as some American citizens do.



The idea of not ‘fully connecting’ is also visible in Shepard’s style of writing, which according to Bottoms (1998:2), is comprised of “random impulses and linguistic excess”. These random impulses and linguistic excess(es) result in play texts that are poetic and linguistically unconventional. The majority of Shepard’s plays implement a non-linear structure; they are visually and verbally juxtaposed, featuring a series of confrontations and contradictions. The rhythmic style of language in *A lie of the mind* highlights melodic tones that both bombard and entice audiences. His plays’ imagery assaults the audiences’ senses, and creates emotional ambiguity (Bottoms 1998:2-3).

Of all Shepard’s plays, *A lie of the mind* (1986) comes closest to approaching ideas around the deterioration of identity (Roudané 2003:4), which motivates my choice in selecting this work of his specifically in connection with *The Absolute*. As mentioned in Chapter One section 1.1, the central themes in *A lie of the mind* that are relevant to this study are violence, binary classifications of victims/perpetrators of violence, love, and deterioration (of language, of the body, and social constructs). I will now provide a brief synopsis of the play text in order to contextualise the plot, and highlight the importance of Beth and Jake’s relationship as the sole component of my practical reinterpretation of *A lie of the mind*, entitled  $\pi$ .

#### **4.1.2. Synopsis of *A lie of the mind***

*A lie of the mind* is comprised of three acts that cover events from the separation of a married couple, up until the deterioration of both their families in different regions of the USA. In addressing these events, *A lie of the mind* speaks to themes of identity, love, loss, the institution of family, internal and external struggle, and psychophysical abuse. Beth is the female protagonist who is married to the male protagonist, Jake. Beth is an actress, but the play omits Jake’s occupation. Jake is prone to violent outbursts and episodes of paranoia. The dramatic conflict is set in motion when Jake telephones his brother (Frankie) to tell him that he physically abused Beth and believes her to be dead.

Jake tells Frankie that his actions were spurred on by his belief that Beth was having a sexual affair with her co-actor, despite no evidence of such an infidelity. Rather, Jake beats Beth because he is driven by jealousy. Jake seems to believe that there is no difference between the character Beth plays, and Beth herself, and thus justifies the alleged affair. According to Jake, Beth encouraged this belief by saying, “This acting shit is more real than the real world” (Shepard 1986:15). It becomes clear that the relationship between Jake and Frankie as brothers is one wherein Jake dominates Frankie, and Frankie must frequently calm Jake down and protect him from himself. The previously mentioned fusion of reality and fantasy for the characters becomes apparent.

As the plot progresses, it is made clear that Beth is alive, but badly brain damaged and physically incapacitated. She speaks in disjointed sounds and cannot use her body with full functionality. Mike (Beth’s brother) rehabilitates her in a hospital, and desires to avenge her. Beth misses Jake and wants to be reunited with him. She does not understand that she is in a hospital, and tells Mike that she is dead; moving between the belief that she is a mummy and that she is buried in a tree. Mike becomes aggressive towards Beth in an attempt to make her forget about Jake.

Meg (their mother) and Baylor (their father) come to see Beth in hospital, but express little concern for her health and well-being. Baylor does not believe that Beth is brain damaged. Mike tries to explain what Jake did. Meg identifies Jake as “the son of those people we don’t talk to anymore” (Shepard 1986:26). Baylor is in a rush to leave the hospital because he has two mules that he needs to deliver somewhere by midnight. He leads Meg out by the elbow. The narrative thus far reveals a level of dysfunction that is both internal and external for all the characters. Relationships present themselves as physically and mentally harmful. Violence becomes a part of their everyday lives, and the characters have illogical memories; they are unable to recall past events (such as Beth’s wedding and the alleged affair) with clarity and reason.

Jake returns home, where Lorraine (his mother), Frankie, and Sally (his sister) try to nurse him. Jake is not in a stable state of mind and refuses to eat; Frankie says that Jake has had “the chills for three days...Talks to himself and shakes.” (Shepard 1986:23). Lorraine cannot remember Beth at all, and eventually concedes that whoever she is, she deserved what she got if she was willing to live with somebody who “...wasn’t fit to live with anybody to begin with!” (Shepard 1986:22). Jake’s state of mind causes him to mistake Sally for Beth. He grips her wrist tightly and tells her, “You never did see me, did ya’, Beth? Just had some big wild notion about some dream life up ahead...I’m gonna’ let go a’ you...once and for all!” (Shepard 1986:24).

Lorraine tries to force-feed Jake cream of broccoli soup by playing the helicopter eating game with him, as one would with an infant. She tells him no woman is worth being this distressed over. He reacts in a fit of aggression, knocking the spoon out of Lorraine’s hand, smashing the bowl, and then “grunt[s] like a buffalo” (Shepard 1986:30).<sup>90</sup> Similar to Baylor’s attitude towards Beth, Lorraine refuses to acknowledge that there is anything wrong with Jake. She tells him he must stop acting, that Frankie has gone to look for Beth, and that Sally has left the house because she is scared of Jake in his condition.

Jake tries to recall his childhood and fails. His mother tells him they lived all across America. He asks for his dad’s box of ashes and Lorraine pulls it out from under the bed along with an American flag. Jake demands to know how his father died. Lorraine explains to him that a truck hit him while he was drunk in the middle of the highway. The truck blew up and he did too, but Jake already knows this because he was there with him when it happened. Jake is confused and angry. Violence manifests itself in this family’s everyday life and disturbs Jake’s psyche. There is a disconnection between Jake and his

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<sup>90</sup> There is a visual and textual through line of animalism within the play text. Human bodies become likened to meat and carcasses. Mike brings a dead carcass into the house and speaks of how he doesn’t care for the flesh; he only wants to keep it as a trophy. Meg refers to Beth and her own mother as having a wild look in their eyes, like a deer that cannot be tamed. Baylor confuses Frankie for a deer and shoots him. Jake’s actions often take on an animal-like nature, and at the end of the text he embodies a broken-in horse (Shepard 1986).

parents, as there is with Beth's. Both their families have little regard for their marriage.

Beth heals at home, amongst her dysfunctional family members. Meg tries to care for her but does a poor attempt. The bandages have been removed from Beth's body and she now has short hair. Beth wants to know what Mike is doing outside with a man that she does not know but whose voice she recognises. When Mike comes inside, Beth is hopeful that it is Jake, but it is Frankie. Baylor shot Frankie in his leg and brought him into the house. He thought Frankie was a deer in the snow. Mike holds Frankie hostage in a psychotic attempt at punishing Jake. Beth confronts her family for continuously lying to her and manipulating one another:

[to Mike] “(*points to her head.*) This didn't happen to you.... You don't know this thought... In me.” [to Meg] “...You a love....You are only that....You don' know...”  
[to Mike] “But he lies to me. Like I'm gone...Lies and tellz me iz for love. Iz not for love! Iz pride!”  
(Shepard 1986:37-38).

In her state of mental deterioration, Frankie's voice triggers an emotional recall for Beth. She recognises the feeling of love, and now attaches it to Frankie. The two develop an unlikely bond, but Frankie remains cautious of her and wants to leave. His leg is not treated and becomes infected. Beth tells him that her family is 'incohesive', and she tells him how Baylor sent his mother-in-law (Beth's grandmother) away. She assures Frankie that her family will not kill him. She announces to her family that she intends to marry Frankie. Baylor will not allow it as she is “already married to one idiot!”, but Meg entertains the idea (Shepard 1986:82).

Jake tries to forget about Beth, specifically her body and the sexual feelings he has towards her.<sup>91</sup> Jake shares with Sally that he feels in moments as if he is outside of himself, and that he cannot connect to his immediate world. Jake

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<sup>91</sup> This rejection of sexual desire, alongside his refusal to eat, is reminiscent of Antonin Artaud's disdain for sexual desire, hunger, and all organs connected to defecation. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Artaud saw sexual desire and hunger as linked to a body that was impure and not in line with an existence that The Absolute encourages (Esslin 1976:55).

speaks of how their family is “shattered,” and how nothing can mend them (Shepard 1986:48). He tells Sally it is best if he stays alienated from the world in their house. Jake has reached an all-new state of paranoia and now believes that Lorraine and Frankie are secretly conspiring against him by trying to make him believe that Beth is still alive because they want to punish him for his violent behaviour.

Jake, in nothing but his underpants and an American flag wrapped around his neck, leaves home to go find Beth. Lorraine is angry when she discovers what Jake has done and then adopts Jake’s initial behaviour when he came home; she refuses to eat and locks herself in the house. Sally tells Lorraine that Jake was complicit in the murder of their father by silent participation. Sally also did nothing to prevent his death, and Lorraine accuses her of the same thing. Sally justifies her actions by telling Lorraine she could do nothing because their father pushed her off of him and Jake had the keys. Current and past violent events colour the narrative and action. Jake’s family cannot acknowledge responsibility or accountability for their actions. In this regard, a sense of reality is severely lacking in these characters’ lives.

Mike finds Jake before Jake finds Beth, and physically beats him into the same state that Beth was in at the beginning of the play. Sally and Lorraine move to Ireland. Lorraine sets fire to all their belongings and Jake appears on the opposite side of the stage embodying a horse, walking on all fours with the flag between his teeth. Mike speaks to him like he is an animal, and Jake obeys. Mike announces to the family that Jake is outside, but Beth does not believe Mike, for she considers Jake to be dead. Mike is obsessed with getting Jake to apologise to Beth and the entire family. He refers to Jake as his prisoner and tells everyone, including Frankie, that he managed to train Jake to do his bidding.

No-one, apart from Mike, appears interested in Jake’s return. Baylor is more concerned with his rifle and flag. Mike forces Beth outside and Jake tells her that he loves her more than this earth. Mike tells Jake that Beth and Frankie have been sleeping together, but they have not. Jake admits that he wronged

Beth that she is the only ‘true’ thing that has ever happened to him. He tells her to stay with Frankie. Beth finally recognises him, referring to the very first time she ever saw him. Jake asks her for a final kiss on the forehead, and departs.

The play resolves with Meg looking across time and space, watching the fire that Lorraine has set to her house and comments on how there is a fire in the snow (it is snowing in the time and space that Meg occupies). The end of the play text accomplishes a strange and surreal note: Mike’s lust for violence and vengeance has driven him to a psychotic state. Jake’s psychophysical deterioration helped him emotionally and mentally understand himself and his actions, and Beth’s sense of reality becomes increasingly warped. Frankie remains stuck in the house, and Baylor kisses Meg for the first time “in 20 years” (Shepard 1986:94).<sup>92</sup> Mike walked away from the family, and everybody’s fates remain unclear. The play text ends with various contradictions and unresolved business.

Stephen Bottoms (1998:3) argues that the contradictions Shepard presents in *A lie of the mind* form “states of crisis”, which he deliberately leaves unresolved. The “states of crisis” Bottoms refers to are directly in line with what Artaud describes as worldly institutions (see Chapter Two section 2.2.3). In his book, *The theatre of Sam Shepard: states of crisis*, Bottoms (1998) refers to institutions that are present in *A lie of the mind* such as language, gender, identity, performance (of the characters), the physical body, sexuality, desire and marriage. He explains how Shepard presents all these institutions to be in a state of crisis, but does not provide resolution. He suggests that the most optimal way to engage with Shepard’s work is to embrace the

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<sup>92</sup> Baylor only kisses Meg because he managed to fold the American flag correctly. Frankie’s last words in the text are, “...Jake, you gotta’ take her with you!!...She belongs to you! I never betrayed you! I was true to you!” (Shepard 1986:94). Yet Jake leaves Frankie with Beth. Beth then “*very softly embraces Frankie and lays her hand on his chest.*” (Shepard 1986:94). Shepard does not specify what Frankie’s reaction to this is. In the provided synopsis of the play text that I use for this study, it is stated that Frankie falls in love with Beth. While I acknowledge this information, my study and analysis of the text does not provide sufficient evidence to support this claim. Bottoms (1998:240) supports my view, stating that Frankie has no desire to marry Beth. He further states that Frankie’s silence to Beth’s reaction is Shepard’s offer to the reader of Beth’s future. By keeping Frankie silent, it is suggested that Shepard offers new possibilities for Beth, where patriarchy does not dictate conversation or action, and it is Beth that gets to decide what will happen to her now (1998:241).

contradictions, for they contain the significance of Shepard's plays (as mentioned in section 4.1.1) (Bottoms 1998:21).

The contradictions within *A lie of the mind* are unpropitious. The characters leave their homes to seek shelter; they are controlled by pasts they cannot remember; they search for company that does not bring solace; they desire love from where they never receive it; and they construct realities out of self-made lies (Mottram 1988:95, 105). Christopher Bigsby (2000:10) describes Shepard's characters as subjects of a world that continuously collapses around them. Devastating violence prevents them from reaching their desires and pursuits. This violence is irrationally mixed with a desire for love and passion, which continually perpetuates a visceral cycle of anguish and despair (Bigsby 2000:12-13).

The irrationality across Shepard's characters' interpersonal domains results in absurd and inescapable tragedies. The ultimate contradiction is that his characters are intricately bound together but destined for separation (Mottram 1988:95). The characters within *A lie of the mind* are plagued by the inability to make meaning of themselves, which is aggravated by their own deluded perceptions of the situations they find themselves in. They can therefore never construct identities. This struggle for meaning-making forces the characters to validate their existence by continuously re-forming identities that depend on the presence, absence, and interplay of both 'falsehoods' and 'truths', thereby enhancing a sense of isolation (Bottoms 1998:13-14).

The struggle for meaning-making and continual identity reformation is perhaps most clearly displayed by Beth, whose career choice as an actress highlights the struggle to make meaning and construct identity for both her and Jake. As mentioned above, Beth feels that acting is "more real to her than the real world." Similarly, Jake tells Frankie that actors become their characters, as "[t]hey start acting that way in real life. Just like the character" (Shepard 1986:15). Beth and Jake both form deluded perceptions and merge make-



believe with reality, which confuses them, and isolates them from one another.<sup>93</sup>

I propose that the notion of The Absolute within Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty provides a lens with which to conceptually-practically interrogate Beth and Jake's struggle for meaning and identity, which entails a reframing of the violence within their relationship as symbolic. This becomes possible when The Absolute is applied in conjunction with Girard's notions on violence, victimisation, and scapegoating. Using the notion of The Absolute offers a different perspective on identity by suggesting the dissolution of the prevalent victim/perpetrator binary that informs Beth and Jake's identities within Shepard's play text.

Before engaging further with the notion of The Absolute and a Girardian vocabulary, the following sections briefly discuss the setting of *A lie of the mind*; the title of the play as a contextual key to understanding the characters; and my decision to use only the play's two protagonists in this study and its praxis,  $\pi$ .

#### 4.1.2.1. Setting: space and time

The majority of the action in the play is located in two spaces: Beth's family home in Montana, and Jake's family home in California. Other minor spaces in the play include a highway, a hospital room, and a motel. These minor spaces are all utilised in the beginning of the play text.<sup>94</sup> Jake opens the play with a call to Frankie using a payphone on the highway, Beth is admitted to a hospital after sustaining the beating from Jake, and Jake confesses his abuse to Frankie in a motel room.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bigsby (2002:25) stresses the importance of Beth's profession in the play text. He highlights how her career as an actress emphasises the crisis of identity within the text for both her and Jake. Bigsby discusses the alternation of social and gender roles for these characters, and how they struggle to identify with roles, due to their inability to connect to their personal histories because of their self-made realities.

<sup>94</sup> In my reading and interpretation of Shepard's text, I accept the centrality of the two different homes to speak to ideas around family, identity, and security, and how Shepard deconstructs these notions that are often clearly tied to family homes as spaces of belonging.

<sup>95</sup> These spaces are best understood as impermanent spaces, or rather non-places, as Marc Augé (1995:78-79) refers to them. They are spaces that are occupied by many different people, at different



The play is set in an unspecified time period, but the popular culture references in the text were relevant from the early 1970s until the late 1980s. I therefore take the position that, considering when the play was published, *A lie of the mind* is set in a then contemporary time, and may be approached in a similar manner if staged now. However, there are no instructions in the play text to stage the play in a specific era. The majority of the action within the play is set in the present while using flashbacks as a temporal motif. This oscillation between present and past manages to heighten what happens in the here and now of the play text, and further enforces the illogical nature of the characters' memories (Bottoms 1998:10).

The play asks to be staged in a proscenium theatre, but stipulates that the set be in front of the arch. Additionally, Shepard mentions the use of conventional furniture. He specifies that there must be no walls, specifically in the first act. Shepard recommends that platforms be used to separate the spaces of the two houses. The platforms create spatial illusions of height and distance (Shepard 1986:8).

The play offers an undefined physical space with the stage directions specifying that the outlines of both family homes on stage be immersed in darkness through lighting techniques. This lighting creates the appearance of both homes being swallowed, or fading into the surrounding space, rather than bordered (Bottoms 1998:222). Beth and Jake appear as captives of their time and space, which are both presented as institutions in the play text; the characters move independently from one another, and their spatial 'captivity', across confined spaces, while a "[desire] for freedom [and]... wild self-release" drives their motives as characters (Bottoms 1998:5).

This undefined physical space that holds Beth and Jake captive represents the characters' mind-sets: they are both struggling to solidify an identity, a history, and a purpose beyond their relationship. The space becomes a site of

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points in time, and in different contexts. Non-places continuously reconstitute themselves. Within *A lie of the mind*, these non-places offer the characters the safety and security from violence that their family homes do not, but conventionally speaking, should.

failed dreams, where the distinction between ‘falsehoods’ and ‘truths’ eventually becomes redundant, for the characters’ lies in their minds have ultimately dictated their realities and behaviours. Thus, however much conflict arises from the characters’ separate realities, the realities have nevertheless become manifested in the space and time they inhabit, which is filled with love and violence (Bigsby 2002:19, 27).

The minimalism of the set and props encouraged in the stage directions incites a space that allows the characters to travel between the real and imagined, and into what Graham (1995:154) refers to as a dream space. This dream space, created by the staging and play world – the space between the real and imagined – may be further explained and unpacked through analysing the title of the text, which is what I will now do.

#### **4.1.2.2. Title of the play text**

*A lie of the mind* portrays the characters as all using their selective memories to shift blame and accountability off of themselves and onto another. This creates a problematic array of subjective past accounts and denials that continue to destabilise the characters throughout the narrative (Bottoms 1998:237). What the characters believe to be real becomes real for them, even though it may be a lie to everyone else. They seduce themselves into believing that their individual worlds are the way that they appear to them, personally, which then ultimately becomes their reality.<sup>96</sup> The characters will things from their fantasies into existence (McDonough 1995:77). Jake convinces himself that Beth must be having an affair, despite no evidence to prove this, and then physically abuses her.

Likewise, Beth and Jake cannot distinguish her acting from real life. A further example of this conflation is Jake’s habit of colouring his past with details that

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<sup>96</sup> They do this not because they prefer an idealised version of themselves, but because, as Bottoms (1998:13-14) points out, they are unable to find a stable identity because they have no capacity for meaning-making.

do not correspond with his family's accounts of the same events.<sup>97</sup> Finally, this is evident in Beth's struggle to understand that she is alive at the beginning of the play, even when all circumstances clearly indicate that she is (Shepard 1986). This infusion of fantasy and reality challenges notions of subjective and objective realities for the characters, which creates tension and fuels conflict in their interpersonal relationships.

Beth and Jake's family members also create their own realities, and are driven by personal obsessions. There is no sense of *communitas*.<sup>98</sup> Family members disagree over different versions of realities and accounts of the past that are individually constructed (Bottoms 1998:225). The characters validate their perceived needs in order to survive and corroborate personal realities by lying to themselves and each other (Mottram 1988:95). In this sense, characters' constructions of their realities are based on strategies of self-deception and the deception of others. *A lie of the mind* as a title becomes an informal foreword by Shepard, guiding his reader to understand the psychotic behaviour of the characters, wherein they construct their own realities justified by lies and delusions throughout the play text.<sup>99</sup> According to Laura Graham (1995:212), it is this web of lies and delusions that fatally tie Beth and Jake to their families.

Beth and Jake's invented realities fuel crises that both characters try escape throughout the play text (Graham 1995:212). *A lie of the mind* is frequently referred to as a family drama, part of a series of plays including *Buried Child* (1978), *Curse of the Starving Class* (1978), *Fool for Love* (1983) and *True West* (1980) (McDonough 1995:66). In the next section, I explain my decision to use only Beth and Jake within my study, as opposed to including all their

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<sup>97</sup> Bottoms (1998:237), in addressing a subjective perception of reality accurately states, "Jake...tends blindly to reinvent the past for his own convenience."

<sup>98</sup> I use the word *communitas* instead of community to address the original Latin definition of the word, which speaks to the collective and shared spirit within a given space (Turner 1969:360), or rather, as is in this instance, the lack thereof.

<sup>99</sup> Bigsby (2002:12) describes the characters as "neurotically hypersensitive". I purposefully choose to use the word psychotic, as the characters' behaviour points towards an instability that indicates they are not of sound mind. Their actions towards one another are sometimes emotionally and physically detrimental, and while they may end the play ready to find resolution and move away from their unbalanced past lives (Bigsby 2002:31), it is only Jake that shows remorse for his actions, where remorse is indicative of a sense of rational self-awareness. The other characters do not exhibit any cognitive understanding of the consequences of their actions.

family members. I acknowledge that the families are inextricably tied to the complexities of the Beth/Jake relationship in the original play; however, reconstructing their relationship apart from their families in a creative work is imperative in destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary in accordance with Artaud's notion of The Absolute. I now discuss the significance of this decision in connection with Girard's notions of mimetic desire and the model-disciple relationship.

#### 4.2. Beth and Jake apart from the family unit

In this study, I deal solely with Beth and Jake in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary within their relationship that was created by violence in the original text, as per my research question. I discuss Beth and Jake in accordance with Girard's model-disciple relationship, and how it is responsible for the violence in the play text, for the model-disciple relationship is dictated by the presence of their parents and other family members. I therefore propose that by removing them from their family units, I discourage further violence in the practical reinterpretation,  $\pi$ .

Furthermore, this creative decision to exclude the family is supported by Graham (1995:193), who, apart from the Girardian discourse I engage with, suggests that Beth and Jake are embodied summaries of all the other characters within the *A lie of the mind*. She states that all the characters may be analysed by following Beth and Jake's individual and relationship trajectory. Bigsby (2002:25) supports Graham's suggestion by stating that Beth and Jake are mirrors for the other characters. Beth and Jake portray the core of the play text, which is the destruction of a romantic relationship. For Bigsby (2002:25), Beth and Jake respectively personify most clearly a "divide of the self", that every character in the text grapples with.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Bigsby states that this destruction is amplified by Shepard's gender portrayal in *A lie of the mind*. Bigsby (2002:25) discusses how Shepard manages to portray the mixture of feminine and masculine traits in both Beth and Jake. Thus, for Bigsby, while there is a clear gendered approach to both Beth and Jake individually, he does not argue for a gendered, heterosexual reading of the relationship and the trials it faces. He argues how the combination of both masculinity and femininity in each of them actually further criticises a heteronormative-gendered reading of the pair.

Following the synopsis of the text in section 4.1.2, it may be deduced that Beth's condition is the metaphoric manifestation of the clear abuse Lorraine, Meg, Sally, and Beth's omnipresent grandmother have sustained from the respective male and female characters that are both present and absent in the play text. Jake's violent and erratic nature are mirrored by his deceased father, Baylor's obsession with hunting, Mike's eventual breakdown, and Frankie's passive acceptance of his detrimental situation.<sup>101</sup> The relationship between Beth and Jake also parallels the relationships between both sets of parents.

My decision to separate Beth and Jake from their family units for the purposes of this study is further explained through Girard's notion of mimetic desire, as unpacked in Chapter Three section 3.1.2. Individuals desire objects because someone else desires them; desire is a result of mimetic patterns. Mimesis is encouraged through learnt behaviour, and is passed down from parent to child through modelling. The parents are the models (rivals), while their children are the disciples (subjects), and what they desire is called the object. The acquisition of the desired object and the conflict between the model and disciple in obtaining the object is more often than not violent (which is why the model is aptly called the rival) (Girard 2013:164).

Beth and Jake in this respect are both disciples, while their parents are models. Beth and Jake desire an identity and existence outside of the crises they face (Bottoms 1998:15), which would require them to reject the mimetic behaviour inherited from their parents. Girard (2010:ix) argues that the process of mimesis and mimetic desire is impossible to undo. However, my research offers a possibility to navigate around mimesis and mimetic desire. I suggest this possibility by separating Beth and Jake from their family units in reconstructing their relationship, without the desires of their parents-models informing their own desires, which is explored in praxis and discussed in Chapter Five. In addition, I suggest that their desire for an identity be

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<sup>101</sup> While I categorise Frankie alongside the other male characters, it must be noted that he is not portrayed as a character with violent tendencies in the text. In fact, it may be argued that Frankie's narrative is more akin to Beth and Sally's, as he serves as an aid to Jake's personal narrative, and becomes defined by his physical wounds within the play text.

reframed through the notion of The Absolute, which provides an alternative approach to identity to that which is constructed through worldly institutions.

*A lie of the mind's* narrative is put in motion by Jake's action of violence; he physically beats Beth to a state of near death (Mottram 1988:96). This spurs on a cycle that plunges the characters into an epidemic of violence. The marriage between Beth and Jake is the only link between the two families. The course of events that the characters around them follow, and the realisations all the characters face internally, actualises through the breakdown of Beth and Jake's marriage (Bottoms 1998:222). Their respective families position themselves either for or against Beth and Jake, evoking previously suppressed emotions around acts of violence each individual faced in the past (Mottram 1988:97). The plague-like quality of violence comes into effect, causing the characters to purge and purify themselves of violence. Therefore, it may be deduced that their families are responsible for the continuation of violence within the play; their families are ecosystems of and for violence.

Beth's family never acts in a nurturing manner in her process through the narrative. Mike is driven by a desire for vengeance for his sister's abuse, and Baylor and Meg are engulfed in their own marital relapses (Shepard 1986). This means that from the beginning of the text, Beth is – to an extent – liberated from the institution of family. Jake, on the other hand, spends most of the text trying to emotionally and logically wrestle with the lies and truths he faces by separating himself from his family unit completely. This separation is made easier by Jake's acknowledgement that his family unit is actually non-existent, describing it as “shattered” (Shepard 1986:48).

The play reveals that Jake was complicit in the murder of his father and as a result, suffered severe psychological trauma. This trauma causes Jake to adopt the violent and erratic behaviour he displays throughout. Sally and Lorraine leave him, burning down their family house, and Frankie becomes estranged from him. Jake's family is no longer present as a unit when the play concludes. Once Jake is freed from the institution of family, and sustains

permanent physical and brain damage from Mike's assault, he is able to comprehend the notion of love and to reflect on the weight of his actions (Shepard 1986).

Although their psychophysical trajectories guide them both to reach a level of emancipation by the end of the play, Beth and Jake are still not mature, functioning characters, because their family units did not offer a context that promoted holistic development (Graham 1995:116).<sup>102</sup> Their parents are not presented as nurturers, or as able to raise children. Shepard's text positions this particular lack as directly related to violent behaviour, both physical and psychological, and as states of identity crisis for all the characters.<sup>103</sup> There is a clear disconnect that affects parents and their children in the play text (McDonough 1995:69).

Graham (1995:307) specifically addresses the disconnection between the main characters and their mothers, between Beth and Meg, and Jake and Lorraine. Graham (1995:307) states that within *A lie of the mind*, "the mother figure is vague and significantly ineffective" at raising children or shielding them from the "assaults of society and nature." (She mentions the abusive father stereotype here as constituting the abovementioned society). Here, it must be considered that because Jake's father is dead, and Beth's father, Baylor, is described as never being around (Shepard 1986:78), they do not need to be physically protected from their fathers; only mentally liberated from the mimetic baggage they have been left with. Graham therefore acknowledges how Beth and Jake ultimately become independent from this model-disciple relationship (the worldly institution of family) in *A lie of the mind*.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> To at this point solely award blame to Beth and Jake's families would be short sighted and make the family unit into a further scapegoat. Beth and Jake are both part of their respective family units. From a Girardian point of view, accountability must be granted to each and every individual in any institution or system, as previously mentioned in Chapter Three section 3.2.4.

<sup>103</sup> This violent behaviour is both overt and covert, located within the same worldly institution. The contextualisation of overt and covert violence is discussed in section 4.4 in this chapter.

<sup>104</sup> Referring back to Chapter Three section 3.2 where I incorporate Žižek's differentiation between subjective and objective violence, I read and frame Beth and Jake's relationship to and with their parents accordingly. Beth and Jake are subjective participants in the system of violence that their parents inherently encourage. To reiterate the first chapter in this section, by removing Beth and Jake from their family units, I remove them from a system of violence that encourages and sustains violence among the individuals who inhabit this system (that perpetuates both subjective and objective violence).



Effectively, the separation of Beth and Jake from their family units is made possible by events and actions presented in the original text: Beth's brain damage severs ties and learnt behaviour within and from her family. She continues to exist in the play in isolation. Jake's father is killed, his mother and sister abandon him to make a new life for themselves in Ireland, and he is emotionally and spatially estranged from his brother (Shepard 1986).<sup>105</sup> Beth and Jake are largely freed from the mimetic influence and desires of their parents by the end of the play text, and to an extent, certain worldly institutions as well.

However, forms of violence and entanglement in one another's lives continually prevent this freedom from being fully realised. By using the notion of The Absolute as a driving force, and by separating Beth and Jake from their families in order to bring them together in this study, they are repositioned within a context that allows for a construction of identity through self-immolation (as discussed in Chapter Two section 2.2.3.). This identity breaks away completely from the previous model-disciple pattern suggested by Girard to dissolve the existing victim/perpetrator binary in order to explore The Absolute.

Having established a rationale for separating Beth and Jake from their families, I now discuss worldly institutions within the play that Shepard began to deconstruct, specifically focusing on the binary separation between victims and perpetrators of violence and its link to The Absolute. I once again integrate appropriate Girardian and Artaudian notions where necessary in order to theoretically frame my creative directorial choices that will be discussed in Chapter Five.

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Additionally, removing worldly institutions in order to attain The Absolute further denounces systematic violence.

<sup>105</sup> Crum (1993:197) views Lorraine's setting fire to her family home as a radicalised move towards separating herself and her offspring from the historical behavioural trajectories of violent male behaviour. The house belonged to Jake's father, who dictated much of their violent pasts.



### 4.3. Interrogating worldly institutions in *A lie of the mind*

As stated in Chapter Two, worldly institutions are primarily defined by language and religion, which then encompass a wide variety of variables, such as race, culture, and gender (De Vos 2011:41).<sup>106</sup> Shepard supports the idea that language shapes one's understanding of the world one inhabits (Bottoms 1998:9), which is discussed in Chapter Two as the primary problem within trying to reconstruct identity to unify the body, mind and soul in moving towards The Absolute. *A lie of the mind* presents a reality that is understood, shaped, and accepted to be 'true' only through the verbal language (the dialogue) the characters use (Bottoms 1998:14).

Shepard's choice of language and the imagery he creates through language serves to highlight the emotional qualities within *A lie of the mind*. The characters' dialogue influences an environment that is emotionally engaged with before it is logically processed (Bottoms 1998:14). Shepard here reiterates Artaud's aim for language to become metaphysical and not intellectually driven (Sellin 1968:21). The Absolute is accessed through the metaphysical and transcendent. Shepard's use of language and the way it constructs identity in *A lie of the mind* may be understood as already having metaphysical qualities. Graham (1995:7) links Shepard's use of language here directly to Artaud's theatre philosophies, where the use of language encourages primarily sensory responses.

According to Bottoms (1998:12), Shepard's use of language and imagery in *A lie of the mind* attempts to create identities that would speak to an identity within The Absolute by problematising binary constructions. Yet the presence of the victim/perpetrator binary in a gendered approach (as previous studies have done) prohibits such an identity: Jake is framed as a violent male perpetrator, and Beth as his vulnerable victim. It becomes impossible for Beth

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<sup>106</sup> *A lie of the mind* presents a godforsaken landscape (Mottram 1988:95). Religion as an institution need not be discussed in detail for purposes of critical interrogation at this point of the chapter. I therefore discuss institutions presented in the play that are affected by language and the realities it creates for the characters in order to interrogate them practically in Chapter Five, so as to move towards The Absolute. The absence of religion is discussed in the final section of this chapter in correlation with Girard's concept of the apocalypse.

and Jake to achieve an identity within the Absolute in the original text, for this binary divide dictates certain readings of their relationship, influenced by the worldly institution of gender, which is dictated by language.

Nonetheless, Shepard manages to present an ambiguous portrayal of gender as an institution within *A lie of the mind* by experimenting with an amalgamation of masculine and feminine traits within Beth and Jake. Beth weaves between masculinity and femininity, and eventually embodies something that is neither overtly masculine nor feminine (Bottoms 1998:234).<sup>107</sup> Beth demonstrates qualities traditionally associated with masculinity (such as assertiveness and agency) after her mental and physical collapse, and is described as having “male in her” by her mother (Shepard 1986:77). Jane Ann Crum (1993:197) argues that *A lie of the mind* succeeds in awarding the female characters in the text with equal agency and ability to their male counterparts, by having them expose the dominant patriarchal framework as oppressive and destructive within the play text.

Equally, while Jake opens the play as a depiction of some violent male stereotype, his character progresses to display qualities that are traditionally associated with being feminine, such as his vulnerability and an open display of non-aggressive emotions at the end of the play text. This change results in him, like Beth, inhabiting a state that is neither clearly masculine nor feminine by the end of the play text (Bottoms 1998:16, 18). Shepard depicts masculinity as being intertwined with anxieties in order to problematise the presence of traditional hegemonic masculinity.<sup>108</sup> Jake experiences a personal “exorcism”, wherein he tries to shed this imposed masculinity

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<sup>107</sup> In a conversation with Frankie, Beth confuses the word “costume” with “custom”, which results in her having a poetically structured conversation in which she implies that gender is a custom that needs costumes in order to function. Beth dons a man’s shirt and then speaks about how she can now pretend to be a man (Shepard 1986:57). What makes this significant is the subjective reality Beth implements; wherein ‘pretend’ is real for her.

<sup>108</sup> Prominent scholar of masculinity, Raewyn Connell (1993), defines hegemonic masculinity in this context to be a gender identity that is centred on superior physical form, qualities of dominance, agency, logic overriding emotion, and superiority over the feminine gender by contrast. It defines itself by what it is not, rather than by what it is. Hegemonic masculinity is often connected to physical superiority and violence. It is conventionally attached to the European Caucasian able-bodied and minded man. If this definition is accepted within this context, then it may be argued that by the end of the play text, Jake may no longer be considered as embodying hegemonic masculinity, for he does not have full function of his body or his mind, and no longer presents himself as domineering or violent.

(Bottoms 1998:16): he moves between moments of violent verbal outbursts and states of complete calmness. His emotional outbursts are fuelled by his desire to rid himself of sexual feelings for Beth, to understand himself better, to make sense of his immediate reality, and to leave his family connection behind (Shepard 1986:46-54). *A lie of the mind* succeeds in showing both masculine and feminine oppression, by highlighting the problematics of binary classification for each gender (Crum 1993:197).

*A lie of the mind* presents a distorted voyage towards the deterioration of gender division through language, costume and stage actions. Nevertheless, Bottoms (1998:18) acknowledges that the play is criticised for portraying women as having agency only while being brain-damaged and irrational. Noted feminist Bonnie Marranca (cited in Crum 1993:196) argues that Shepard's female characters are only empowered in *A lie of the mind's* patriarchal landscape once they sustain mental and physical abuse, and states that this inhibits their participation and agency in a patriarchal world. However, Crum argues that Marranca's view does not consider the play text in its entirety. Crum points out that Beth is "the most extraordinary" of Shepard's characters in his entire oeuvre, and highlights the play text's feminine revolution wherein the female characters all successfully manage to rebel against patriarchal violence in their own right. This acknowledgement forces Bottoms (1998:18) to conclude that the deterioration of gender binaries is left unresolved in *A lie of the mind*.

In a Girardian analysis of Beth being framed specifically as a victim of gender violence, it must be noted that *A lie of the mind* presents an interesting contradiction. As stated in Chapter Three section 3.2.2, victims are chosen from minority groups and are selected based on their weakness (physically and socially) in order to prevent an act of vengeance from occurring (Girard 2013:14; 1994:123). Girard acknowledges that historically, there was a tendency to victimise and scapegoat females due to the belief that they are physically and socially inferior (Palaver 2013:304).

In *A lie of the mind*, however, the violent abuse Beth sustains is avenged by

Mike, which could possibly provide a counter view to her being positioned as being selected for violent sacrifice based on her femaleness. This counter view supports Girard's statement that his notions of violence, victimisation, and scapegoating are not discriminatory against women, and that it does not neglect the historical significance of gender discrimination (Palaver 2013:297).

In my practical reinterpretation  $\pi$ , which I discuss in Chapter Five, I reconstruct Beth and Jake's relationship by dissolving gender binaries completely in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary and move towards an identity within The Absolute. The removal of gender binaries in the reinterpretation is essential in removing the connection to gender violence. To further motivate and frame this creative decision, I engage now with appropriate Girardian discourse and discuss how violence in *A lie of the mind* must be reframed in accordance with this study's outcomes and aims.

#### **4.4. Reframing violence in *A lie of the mind*: re-positioning the mimetic desire**

This study aims to reframe the violence in the play text as an aid in exploring Artaud's notion of The Absolute in Theatre of Cruelty. This section engages with the violence present within the play text and by proxy, the victim/perpetrator binary it encourages in Beth and Jake's relationship. This section also links violence directly to sexual desire in the original play text and motivates why their relationship must be reframed without the presence of sexual desire in the continuation of this study.

In this study, I implement the creative decision to view the acts of violence in the original text as initiations that act as a catalyst for Beth and Jake in pursuing The Absolute and being reconstructed within it. Artaud motivates this view by framing violence as a purifying act (as demonstrated in his metaphor of the plague) (Jannarone 2010:47). By reframing the violence they suffer as something that physically liberates them both, I position it as productive and cleansing, aligning with Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and the notion of The Absolute. Beth and Jake survived the physical violence exerted upon them,

which opens up new possibilities for research into Theatre of Cruelty and The Absolute, and suggests the possibility of an aftermath for the characters.

That Beth and Jake survive the violence inflicted upon them in the original play text provides me with an opportunity in this study to reconstruct their relationship in the aftermath of violence. In Artaud's own demonstrations of Theatre of Cruelty, violence destroyed his characters, causing them to suffer gruesome physical deaths (De Vos 2011:107). It is made clear, however, that in order to explore The Absolute, the characters must physically exist in a newly understood identity (De Vos 2011:109-110). This means that Artaud did not manage to practically explore the possibilities of his notion of The Absolute. In the reconstruction of Beth and Jake's relationship, an identity apart from worldly institutions in The Absolute is explored, by removing the gender binary and in turn, the victim/perpetrator binary.<sup>109</sup>

In Chapter Three, violence is discussed as having a plague-like property as its presence stimulates violence (Girard 2013:53). *A lie of the mind* demonstrates how violence, like a plague, is self-propagating. While the plague is something that initially destroys, it also provides an opportunity of reconstruction for the endemic and epidemic survivors (Artaud 1977:21). Beth and Jake are survivors of the plague-like violence. While Shepard's text left them in the midst of the destruction, this study reconstructs their relationship within  $\pi$  in order to reposition the violence as a liberating and purifying force.

As mentioned earlier, *A lie of the mind's* narrative unpacks itself around the single violent event that takes place between Jake and Beth, when he physically beats her into a state of mental and physical incapacitation. This event sets off further violent actions for all the characters that result in additional direct physical and emotional harm to Beth and Jake. The violent

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<sup>109</sup> While I acknowledge previous analyses of gender violence, I purposefully re-position violence as a necessary aid in severing Beth and Jake from worldly institutions. Furthermore, continuing to view the violence as being gender-based would counteract the dissolution of worldly institutions that is encouraged throughout this study.

actions are both overt and covert in their respective natures.<sup>110</sup>

In Chapter Three section 3.2.1, I address Girard's (2013:18) warning that vengeance is often treated as a primary threat after an initial act of violence occurs. However, it must be noted here that within *A lie of the mind*, there is only one direct single act of vengeance. This direct single act of vengeance occurs even though there has been the sacrifice of Beth as a victim (and scapegoat), and Jake as a victim (and scapegoat), which is further unpacked in the following section. The continuous spread of violence even though a victim has been sacrificed, is a literary example of Girard's (2013:18) observation that the sacrifice of a victim is always an impermanent cure, creating a sacrificial cycle. The other violent acts are a result of violence that has overtly and covertly manifested itself within the everyday lives of the characters:

- Mike attempts to mentally manipulate Beth into accepting his definition of what is good and what is not good for her (1986:18-19).
- Jake and Lorraine reflect on violent moments in their past that are associated with Jake's father and the abuse they all sustained from him. This contextualises Jake's current violent behaviour (1986:21-25).
- Lorraine tries to manipulate and control Jake (1986:29-32).
- Baylor displays behaviour that is both negligent of his family and verbally abusive towards Beth and Meg (1986:25-28; 41-45; 72-84).
- Frankie comes to find Beth in order to protect Jake from any vengeance her family might take. Baylor confuses him for a deer in the snow and shoots Frankie in the leg (1986:41).
- Jake comes to find Beth and is beaten to a state of mental and physical disability (the same as Beth was) by Mike. Jake is then verbally abused by Mike and made to walk on all fours like an animal (1986:88-89).

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<sup>110</sup> While Girard does not directly mention covert violence (objective violence) in the publications I use in this study, I must acknowledge it as part of the text due to its connection to worldly institutions (ideologies) that must be abandoned in order to achieve The Absolute.

- Frankie is held hostage by Beth and her family (1986:94).

The sheer salience of violence throughout the play vividly demonstrates the plague-like quality of violence that Girard (2013:53) speaks of. By the end of the third act, Beth and Jake are the only two characters still present in the text that no longer have a desire to harm anyone around them. Ironically, they are the only two characters involved in the initial action that stimulated successive violent acts. They are also the only two characters that are kept spatially apart, despite their longing for one another (Shepard 1986).

The physical violence exerted on both Beth and Jake results in two outcomes. Firstly, both are unable to use their physical bodies in an optimal and natural (that is to say, 'normalised') manner due to their physical incapacitation. Secondly, a measure of mental deterioration allows both characters to understand observations that other characters cannot comprehend. Even though they continue to construct subjective realities for themselves, their brain trauma paradoxically enables them to emotionally grapple with these realities in a sensitive and mindful manner. The trauma enables them to communicate truths through deteriorated language about all the characters and realities that are not imagined in the play (Graham 1995:212).

Once again, I highlight here how the notion of a deteriorated language speaks to Artaud's wish to use verbal language metaphysically and poetically (Artaud 1977:34).<sup>111</sup> In scene three of the second act, Beth and Frankie engage in potent dialogue that displays her intelligent manner and ability to communicate truths after suffering brain damage:

FRANKIE: They want to kill me  
[Referring to Beth's family]  
BETH: Only Mike. But he won't.  
FRANKIE: What makes you so sure about that?  
BETH: (*Quick*) Because only half of him believes you're  
what he hates. The other half knows it's not true. (*Pause.*  
*Frankie stares at her.*)

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<sup>111</sup> This is an element of the original text that I implement directorially and discuss further in Chapter Five.



FRANKIE: I thought you couldn't uh –

BETH: What?

FRANKIE: (*Lies back down.*) I don't know. I thought you couldn't talk right or something. You sound okay to me.

BETH: I do?

FRANKIE: Yeah. Your Dad said there was – I mean you were having some kind of trouble.

BETH: Oh. There was that time. I don't know. I get them mixed. I get the thought. Mixed. It dangles. Sometimes the thought just hangs with no words there.

(Shepard 1986:55).

In the same scene, Beth tells Frankie how they have cut her brain out (an event that did not actually occur) and compares it to how her family cut her grandmother out of their lives (Shepard 1986:56). This effect of violence on her mind motivates the decision to reframe the violence as something productive in the continuation of this study, and in the practical component, **π**.

The above example addresses a manifestation of physical violence that also alludes to systematic violence, as discussed in Chapter Three section 3.2, and is linked to the work of Slavoj Žižek (2008:9-14). The physical beating that Beth and Jake are subjected to is subjective violence. The crises that Jake faces in terms of his memory, his identity, and how this links back to his father, as well as Beth's future that is trying to be dictated by her family, are objective forms of violence.

The violence that Beth and Jake are subjected to instigates a separation between themselves and worldly institutions. Based on my reading of *A lie of the mind*, I take the position that both Beth and Jake are already in primary stages of transformation that support a move towards The Absolute: their use of language is disrupted (as exemplified above) and the 'normality' of their physical bodies has been violated. However, as mentioned earlier, previous studies of Shepard's play frame Beth as a victim and Jake as a perpetrator of violence, which means that I must first discuss the victim/perpetrator binary in accordance with Girardian discourse before I am able to further substantiate this reframing of violence.

I now discuss the connection between violence and the victim/perpetrator binary present in Beth and Jake's relationship so as to motivate a conceptual destabilisation of the binary. This discussion will form a critical analysis that will provide the baseline for a directorial treatment of *The Absolute* in my next chapter.

#### **4.4.1. Violence and the scapegoating mechanism in *A lie of the mind***

My decision to reframe the violence as a separation mechanism between Beth and Jake and worldly institutions – in order to attain *The Absolute* – means that their position as a victim and perpetrator must also be reanalysed. This reanalysis must take place in accordance with a Girardian vocabulary that aligns itself with *The Absolute*, and not with previous analyses of gender violence (which is not the focus of this current study).

As concluded in Chapter Three section 3.2.4, individuals cannot be categorised exclusively as victims or perpetrators of violence, for these binaries create scapegoating opportunities (Girard 2013:167). Shifting between the roles of victims and perpetrators is inevitable within relationships between individuals because individuals do not exist in pure binaries (Girard 2013:169). It is possible to be liberated from restrictive binary classification by understanding victimisation, its scapegoating mechanism, and how individuals can experience guilt and innocence as interchangeable (Girard 1994:286-287).<sup>112</sup>

In Chapter Three, I presented Girard's (2013:286-287) statement that individual acceptance of agency and accountability is imperative if the self hopes to move away from the violence that mimetic desire in the model-disciple relationship makes manifest, and therefore destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary.<sup>113</sup> As Girard (2013:93, 169) argues and Chapter

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<sup>112</sup> For a detailed discussion of victims, perpetrators, and scapegoating, please refer to sections 3.2.2 to 3.2.4 in Chapter Three.

<sup>113</sup> As Bottoms (1998:22) points out, the play text opens up gaps for further research into the victim/perpetrator binary. Shepard's original play text *A lie of the mind* straddles a line between supporting this binary and doing away with it. This current study does away with the victim/perpetrator binary completely, by using Artaud's notion of *The Absolute* as a directorial impetus.

Three demonstrated, victims and perpetrators of violence are both scapegoats within a specific system that encourages the rejection of responsibility and accountability of violence.

Graham (1995:305) understands Beth to be a dramatic literary scapegoat, serving as the object on which Jake purges himself of his violent desire. Jake, in turn, is framed as the scapegoat for all male aggression within the play, embodying masculine traits such as dominance and aggression until he too becomes a victim of violence at the hands of Mike. By accepting Beth and Jake as scapegoats in distinct ways, there must be a simultaneous acceptance of the interchangeability of guilt and innocence, and of accountability in the relationships between all the characters in the play.

The removal of the scapegoating mechanism is however problematised by Shepard within *A lie of the mind*. According to Bottoms (1998:16), *A lie of the mind* puts to question if its characters will ever be able to achieve the identity they seek when their fates are inescapably shaped by institutions such as government and family that act as “unseen hands”. It is here where the decision to remove Beth and Jake from the play text and from their families becomes essential in the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary. As mentioned in section 4.2 of this chapter, by removing Beth and Jake from their family units and reconstructing their relationship, I remove any opportunities for shifting blame or rejecting accountability. I also prevent the perpetuation of making worldly institutions scapegoats, which Girard (1994:286-287) warns against.<sup>114</sup>

*A lie of the mind* does not provide a conventional portrayal of victimhood, or concern itself with conventional morality. Beth and Jake’s narrative shows that there are no beneficiaries of a system of abuse and binary classification, and highlights the cyclical nature that comes with social and personal intimate deterioration (Roudané 2002:3-5). By providing an unconventional portrayal of

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<sup>114</sup> A family unit, comprised of different members, may constitute as a scapegoat. Girard (1994:286-287) often refers to a scapegoat in collective terms; that is, of a system or an institution. He cautions against how scapegoating deflects individual accountability.

victimhood, *A lie of the mind* offers the idea of redemption through Jake's final actions in the play text, which keep the possibility of a reconnection between him and Beth open (Bigsby 2002:31). The end of the narrative positions all characters as willing to move on from their violent pasts and achieve salvation (Bottoms 1998:241).

Shepard portrays both Beth and Jake with equal empathy (Bottoms 1998:228). Jake spends the majority of the narrative trying to understand the mental, emotional and physical crises he faces. These crises lead to important discoveries within existing theories around the play: as the disciple, Jake's violent behaviour is learnt from his father (the model) and he ends the play with increased self-awareness towards taking responsibility for his violent behaviour (Bottoms 1998:22).<sup>115</sup> Therefore, by continuing to frame Jake as a perpetrator, he would be, as Palaver (2013:152) puts it, "blamed for the mistakes and sins of others", and embody the scapegoat mechanism.

By making himself believe that Beth is guilty of having an affair, Jake is initially able to cleanse himself of his violent purges without taking responsibility for his actions, and to frame Beth as a scapegoat.<sup>116</sup> As stated in Chapter Three, scapegoating is only effective if both the community and the victim sustain the illusion of the victim's guilt (Girard 2013:119; Girard 2010:xiv). Jake breaks the illusion of guilt within the text by acknowledging the scapegoating mechanism by admitting his guilt and agency in a conversation with Sally, telling her that he is going to be punished for what he did (Shepard 1986:49). He also ends the play with acknowledging the weight of his actions, which as mentioned above, allows for redemption (Bigsby 2002:31) and a destabilisation of the perpetrator classification.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Jake expresses his desire to break away from the model-disciple relationship set by his father as early as the second act. He tells Sally, when she accuses him of sounding like their father, "I don't sound anything like him. I never sounded like him. I've made a point not to." (Shepard 1986:50).

<sup>116</sup> It must be noted that Beth's innocence of what she is accused of is never confirmed. Beth and Jake's self-made realities make it difficult to confirm anything that is not directly seen or 'evidenced' (in either action or reaction) within the text.

<sup>117</sup> I do not argue in this study for Jake's innocence, and I am not suggesting that the possibility of redemption for a character cleanses that character of his/her destructive behaviour. As my analysis of Girardian discourse shows, the scapegoating mechanism is not a question of innocence versus guilt; it is an acknowledgement of accountability and agency.

Beth is undeniably subjected to violence, and once injured, she exists in “another realm” (Crum 1993:201). In this other psychosocial realm, she begins to form an identity that is not defined by victimhood within a patriarchal language. She exists apart from patriarchy as an institution. Crum (1993:207) argues that to understand Beth as a character, scholars need to study her in a language that is not defined by patriarchal institutions. For the purposes of this current study, Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and the notion of The Absolute, (in conjunction with a vocabulary provided by Girard’s notions of violence, victimisation and scapegoating), may provide this language.

Furthermore, in connection to the scapegoating mechanism, I must acknowledge the presence of doubling (see Chapter Three section 3.2.3) that manifests in Beth and Jake’s relationship and further supports the conflation of the victim/perpetrator categories. To briefly revisit Chapter Three, doubling is when individuals in a particular relationship, such as the model-disciple structure, begin to resemble one another in violent contexts. This resemblance (the doubling) is due to the overwhelming presence of the scapegoating mechanism caused by the destructive nature of violence, and the lack of reason behind the desire for violence (Humbert 2013:258; Girard 2013:93).

Within *A lie of the mind*, Jake and Beth sustain equally violent traumas to body and mind, and ultimately resemble one another physically, emotionally and mentally. They become one another’s doubles through the violence that connects them. The presence of doubling here further destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary, for Beth and Jake are then made similar through doubling. Insofar as it foregrounds similarities, doubling therefore does away with categorical differences of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’.

As mentioned in Chapter Three section 3.2.3, doubling nullifies the concept of individual identity within a community. Yet, the search for an identity constructed in worldly institutions will consistently evoke both subjective and objective violence as part of the identity construction process. In order to obtain an individual identity in relation to worldly institutions, differences must

be sought out and defined between the self who seeks this identity and another. In this differentiation there is inevitable discrimination, which has the potential to become destructive. The search for identity in worldly institutions is directly connected to a scapegoating mechanism and the belief of innocence versus guilt (Flusser 2003:16-17).

I argue that The Absolute provides an alternative to worldly institutions in which this identity is possible. In The Absolute, all worldly institutions, systems, and the differences they emphasise are done away with, such as the binary divide between victimisation and perpetration of violence. I explore The Absolute in the reconstruction of the relationship between Beth and Jake in *π*, which is discussed in Chapter Five. The practical exploration of this study reconceptualises their relationship with equal accountability and responsibility for all actions within the new text. I now discuss the influence of sexual desire in the relationship between Beth and Jake.

#### **4.4.2. Violence and sexual desire in *A lie of the mind***

As discussed in Chapter Three, sexual desire is driven by mimesis and the rivalry it encourages (Girard 1994:343). Sexual desire is directly linked to physical violence, and has therefore, just like a plague, been quelled into submission by various (religious) institutions (Girard 2013:249-250). As mentioned in Chapter Two and Three, Artaud discouraged sexual desire, as he felt it had nothing in common with the experience of love, and is furthermore an element of the world he wished to be rid of in his pursuit of The Absolute (Esslin 1976:55).

A Girardian reading of Shepard's play offers the following: Jake believes that Beth (object of desire) is having a sexual affair with her co-actor (the rival), which causes a jealous rage in which Jake assaults Beth. It is important here to note that Jake's rage is not caused because he believes her to love the rival, but by the belief that she sexually desires the rival. Jake becomes the subject (the disciple), and the co-actor becomes the rival (the model). Jake wishes to attain Beth (the object), and because he cannot model himself after

the co-actor, he acts out in violence. For Jake, violence is an expression of frustrated desire in the face of another's (perceived) sexual desire for the same object.

In light of the above, I suggest that Beth and Jake are aware of the dangers of sexual desire at the end of Shepard's play because they bear the plague-like marks of mental, emotional, and physical violence. At the end of the play, they are aware of the love they feel for one another manifesting as a transcendental force. In bringing an Artaudian perspective to the play and its character dynamics, sexual desire must be done away with in the reconstruction of Beth and Jake's relationship. The relationship is then reconstructed in  $\pi$  by introducing transcendental love as a driving force of The Absolute, as suggested by De Vos (2011:18).

The victim/perpetrator binary established itself in the event of violence triggered by sexual desire. Transcendental love removes sexual desire and the potential for violence, which in turn, destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary. By using transcendental love as a driving force of The Absolute in  $\pi$ , I present an alternative way of understanding and framing the violence in the original play text.

#### **4.5. The Absolute and transcendental love: reconstructing the relationship between Beth and Jake and destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary**

While De Vos (2011:18) briefly discusses using transcendental love as a literary tool in reading The Absolute in Theatre of Cruelty-inspired works, I extend this line of thought by using transcendental love as a theme and shared desire for Beth and Jake independently in my production and in the reconstruction of their relationship. By using transcendental love, I aim to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary further and therefore continue my conceptual and creative pursuit of The Absolute. The presence of transcendental love in the reconstruction of Beth and Jake's relationship therefore replaces the sexual desire present within the original play text,



where sexual desire was a primary cause of violence between Beth and Jake. As mentioned in Chapter Two section 2.2.3, transcendental love is understood as a state of love that transcends worldly institutions (such as time, space, sex and gender). By using transcendental love as a driving force within the narrative, Beth and Jake are able to surpass worldly institutions and the constructs they (re)present, such as time, space, and the physical body, for these become superfluous in the state of transcendence.

Beth and Jake are the only characters in *A lie of the mind* who eventually understand what transcendental love is. This understanding sets them apart from their families, who ostensibly know love only as a destructive emotion. The notion of transcendental love, as discussed in Chapter Two section 2.2.3, is integral to exploring a viable approach to The Absolute. Mimetic rivalry is no longer present in transcendental love because sexual desire is no longer a focal point.

The love that they express towards one another is then framed beyond something physical. This love speaks to something spiritual and outside of worldly institutions. By eliminating sexual desire, I eliminate violence as it was originally analysed in Shepard's play text, resulting in the removal of victim and scapegoat mechanisms in Beth and Jake's relationship. In the absence of sexual desire, the focus on transcendental love removes emotions such as jealousy and anger that often lead to violence.

In the second act of *A lie of the mind*, Beth mistakes Jake's brother Frankie for Jake, and makes him stay with her. Beth tells Frankie, "This is me now...I... live inside this... I know you.... I know love... I know what love is. I can never forget" (Shepard 1986:45). That she has forgotten Jake's physical form (by confusing Frankie for Jake), and can accept that her own body has changed ("This is me now") but can remember love, alludes to the presence of love already having a transcendental quality within the original text. Beth further motivates this position by saying to Frankie, "You have his same voice. Maybe you could be him. Pretend... Just like him. But soft...Gentle...Like a woman-man... Us. In a love we never knew" (Shepard 1986:58-59). Here, I

interpret “[i]n a love we never knew” to refer to a love that is transcendental (larger than the individual’s purely rational understanding thereof) and not bound by worldly institutions that encourage violence and trauma.

When Jake and Beth are together in act three for the first time throughout the entire text, they share another essential moment that justifies my view that love is already present with transcendental quality in the play text:

JAKE: (*To Beth, very simple.*) These things – in my head – lie to me. Everything lies....But you. You stay. You are true. I know you now.... I love you more than this life. You stay. You stay with him. He’s my brother.

...

BETH: I remember now. The first time I saw you. The very first time I ever saw you. Do you remember that too?

JAKE: (*To Beth.*) Just one kiss. Just one. (*Slowly Jake leans toward Beth and kisses her softly on the forehead. She lets him, then pulls back to Frankie. Jake smiles at her, then turns and exits across R...*)

(Shepard 1986:93-94).

When Jake is no longer mentally and physically ‘whole’ - once he has been separated from the worldly institution of language and the normalised use of his body, which is needed in order to move towards The Absolute - he is able to grasp the transcendental quality of the love he has for Beth and may let her go, unselfishly, to be loved transcendently.

Bottoms (1998:238) addresses the theme of love in *A lie of the mind* and its transformation into something that has transcendent potential. He speaks of a “new found faith in love” that Beth and Jake experience in the play text, and how the experience of love is unpacked and discovered by both characters throughout the narrative’s development. Bottoms (1998:238) notes the selfish love both Beth and Jake give to one another at the beginning of the text, and discusses their trajectory, towards a love presented as a utopian,

transcendental ideal.<sup>118</sup> Selfish love is a love of containment; it is a prison for both participants. Worldly institutions encourage selfish love.

Available scholarship on violence in Shepard's play discusses violence as something that does not disunite the couple emotionally, but prohibits them from ever being together again (Graham 1995:210). The above information derived from the text gives me four important conclusions that drive the pursuit of *The Absolute* and the use of transcendental love in this current study:

- Beth and Jake are essentially 'separated' from their reason and physicality due to acts of violence. Artaud encourages the absence of logic in his *Theatre of Cruelty* (Jannarone 2010:1), and the physical deterioration serves to aid the exploration of *The Absolute* and the deconstruction of their previous identities (2010:192).
- Although Beth and Jake are only present in the same time and space in the final act of the play, the entire narrative is centred on them trying to find their way back to one another (Shepard 1986). The reconstruction, *π* (de Wet 2015), extends on their brief union in the third act by reconstructing their relationship and uniting them spatially.
- This reconstruction will focus on the emergence of transcendental love that I perceive to be present in the original text. The motivation for believing that there is already transcendental love between Beth and Jake comes from existing lines and actions in the text: Beth calling Jake love itself; Jake's final action of selflessly loving Beth; and Beth mistaking Frankie for Jake, demonstrates that physical identity is not a primary factor in transcendental love.
- Both Jake and Beth's incoherent manner of speaking, which nevertheless results in profound actualisations about their lives and

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<sup>118</sup> As early as the first act, Beth begins to identify her family by using the emotion and experience of love that is unselfish; their physical characteristics are no longer identifiable traits that she recognises. She says that her father, Baylor, has given up on love, describing her mother, Meg, as love itself. She concedes that her brother, Mike, prevented her from acquiring love. Once separated from Jake, she pursues Frankie in the hopes that Frankie will provide her with the love Jake could not (Graham 1995:212).

love, supports Artaud's move away from a (psychologically realistic) language driven form of theatre (Artaud 1977:27) that may be further developed in the reinterpretation.

In *A lie of the mind*, Beth and Jake epitomise what Graham (1995:209) describes as “the inescapable bond between...‘demonically attached’ lovers”.<sup>119</sup> This bond, although not completely destroyed, is damaged, and Beth and Jake continue as fragmented individuals, uprooted from one another. This current study and its praxis constitute an imperative meeting point for the two characters, enabling a repair of this bond from where Shepard left off, by using *The Absolute* as a unifying force through the presence of transcendental love. The reinterpretation of their relationship in the practical application of this study acts as a type of continuation of the text that explores the final states of Beth and Jake.

According to Graham (1995:210), Beth and Jake should not only be understood as victims and perpetrators of violence; they are the embodied tragedy of a love that is not transcendental. In the original play text, Beth and Jake epitomize the failures of relationships: people seek refuge with one another in order to stifle the alienation and isolation the modern world creates, but this refuge is temporary and potentially destructive. Sexual relationships become an inevitably destructive force that eliminates its participants: because they cannot connect to anyone, they cannot escape their isolated states (Graham 1995:212, 302).

However, the play's resolution provides an opportunity for an escape from this disconnection and isolation. Jake's final words to Beth, when he professes that he now understands what love is meant to be, and when he tells her that what he previously understood as truths were just lies in his mind, shows a move towards *The Absolute*, away from institutions entrenched in the lies by

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<sup>119</sup> Shepard continuously problematizes heterosexual relationships throughout all of his play texts. By doing so, he asks questions around the perceived duality of male and female. Shepard suggests that if this dual opposition continues to exist, there may be little hope of functioning in unity. Therefore, this idea of lovers being “demonically attached” becomes a dysfunctional, detrimental connection that cannot be escaped, nor resolved (Graham 1995:209).

which the characters live (Shepard 1986:93). Although Beth and Jake are physically and mentally broken, they inhabit an emotional state that allows for a new understanding of love to keep them inextricably and permanently woven together (Bottoms 1998:237).<sup>120</sup> Transcendental love requires a consciousness from the characters; they must be conscious of and active in transcendental love. According to Bottoms (1998:18), *A lie of the mind* ends with numerous possibilities for further continuations and explorations into transcendentalism.

I now discuss Girard's notion of the apocalypse and how it connects to the reinterpretation of the relationship between Beth and Jake, specifically pertaining to ideas of transcendentalism, The Absolute, and the absence of a god figure in *A lie of the mind*.

#### **4.6. The apocalypse, The Absolute, and godlessness in *A lie of the mind***

Both the institutions of language and religion must be undone in order to move towards The Absolute. It is already mentioned in footnote 106 that there is a clear absence of religion and a god figure in *A lie of the mind* (Mottram 1988:95). The existence that The Absolute encourages requires an individual to divorce themselves from a god figure as the centre of their identity. This negation of the god figure as mandated by The Absolute is therefore discussed in order to further contextualise the reconfiguration of Beth and Jake's relationship as it is practically dealt with in Chapter Five, wherein the victim/perpetrator binary is destabilised through using The Absolute.

As stated in Chapter Three, Artaud's notion of The Absolute and Girard's understanding of the apocalypse foregrounds a process of transcendence. This process of transcendence provides a different way of conceptualising The Absolute. An apocalypse is the most permanent way to do away with

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<sup>120</sup> Artaud's notion of The Absolute requires this state of brokenness in order to rebuild and move towards The Absolute. This deterioration is therefore not viewed in this study as something negative, but rather as a productive force that provides a rock bottom in order to reconstruct an identity within The Absolute, apart from worldly institutions that caused Beth and Jake's previous identity collapses and crises.

existing worldly institutions. An apocalypse only leaves remnants of the existing world behind, but these remnants are transcendental by nature.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Girard sees the apocalypse's destructive nature as creating hope for a new beginning (Girard 2010:xiii). Girard's positive view of the apocalypse centres on a Christian understanding thereof, which stands in conflict with Artaud's understanding of The Absolute that denounces a god-like figure (De Vos 2011:41). For Girard, the denouncement of a god-like figure perpetuates worldly institutions. He states that it is through divine presence and an understanding that God is not acting as an oppressive or restrictive force (as institutions have structured God to be) that spiritual liberation and freedom from institutions will be achieved (Girard 1994:186, 295).

I propose a conceptual and theoretical intersecting of Girard and Artaud so as not to create further scapegoating mechanisms (mainly in and of institutions). This intersection aims to find a positive force related to the divine that does not control or constrict, and is not abandoned completely so as to give rise to nihilism or existential angst as discussed in Chapter Three. By separating Beth and Jake from worldly institutions, they access the transcendental, where they are able to make themselves divine in The Absolute, separating themselves from violence that is understood as destructive.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

Shepard succeeds in freeing Beth and Jake from certain worldly institutions such as religion, gender constructs and language (Graham 1995:114-116). Bottoms (1998:242) points out that both Beth and Jake were partially, if not completely, liberated from physically bound understandings of love (Graham 1995:310). In *A lie of the mind* (Shepard 1986), Beth and Jake are already without conventional use of their physical bodies due to physical violence; family ties; conventional language (due to the brain damage); fixed identities; logical use of time and space, and a stable god centre. In reconstructing the characters of Beth and Jake, my starting point becomes the crises of

existence, as highlighted by Bottoms (1998:15), and its connection to the absence of a religious centre.

Both Graham (1995:313) and Bottoms (1998:18) acknowledge that the relationship between Beth and Jake has metaphysical and transcendental potential, but their ties to worldly institutions inhibit them from achieving an identity that is free from violence and the binary separation of victim/perpetrator, fostered by violence. Therefore, while this chapter motivated the destabilisation of this binary divide and reconceptualised the violence present in the original text, it is only in the reconstruction of the relationship that this binary separation will be finally destabilised, by using The Absolute as a method of identity making, and using transcendental love as its driving force.

I may now reconstruct the relationship between Beth and Jake without the presence of violence, using The Absolute and its connection with transcendental love to reconstruct their identities. These characters signify the potential to deconstruct victim/perpetrator binaries as approached through the complementary lenses of Antonin Artaud and René Girard.



## CHAPTER FIVE: DIRECTING THE ABSOLUTE: CREATING AND STAGING $\pi$

This chapter discusses the creative decisions I implemented within my original Theatre of Cruelty production,  $\pi$  (De Wet 2015). In this chapter I discuss my directorial framework that practically explored the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary between Beth and Jake from Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind* (1986) by using Antonin Artaud's notion of The Absolute as a directorial focus with a Theatre of Cruelty framework. This directorial framework develops conclusions from Chapter Four, and uses Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty manifesto guidelines as provided in Chapter Two. Furthermore, I integrate the Girardian vocabulary I structured in Chapters Three and Four in order to contextualise my directorial choices in light of my research aim, which is to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary, by using The Absolute.<sup>121</sup>

This chapter also explores the following sub-questions provided in Chapter One:

- How can I integrate the Artaudian notion of The Absolute alongside a Girardian vocabulary, into an appropriate directorial approach that will enable me to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary set up in the relationship between Beth and Jake in a theatrical production?
- How can The Absolute act as a directorial tool to re-imagine the relationship between Beth and Jake?

I now provide a brief summary of the applicable concepts discussed in the previous four chapters to give context to my directorial choices that will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

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<sup>121</sup> It must be acknowledged that my directorial process is invariably influenced by specific techniques that I have been trained in throughout my four years of study as both a performer and scholar.

## 5.1. Background and summation of frameworks used within this study

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Artaudian notion of The Absolute is a state of existence devoid of an identity constructed via the socio-ideological paradigms that Artaud labelled as worldly institutions. In this state of existence, individuals' bodies, minds, and souls exist in unity. In order to exist within The Absolute, one must divorce from the governance of worldly institutions, as dictated by language and religion (De Vos 2011:41). As mentioned in Chapter Two, practical explorations of The Absolute previously hindered scholars and practitioners of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Many theatre endeavors into the Theatre of Cruelty and the notion of The Absolute maintained that The Absolute was only possible through the physical death of characters (see Chapter Two sections 2.1.1 and 2.2.3).

As previously mentioned, scholarly investigations suggest that The Absolute as a notion can be applied through the theme of transcendental love in readings and analyses of character relationships (De Vos 2011:18). As concluded in Chapter Four, I use the notion of transcendental love as central theme in the practical reconstruction of the relationship between Beth and Jake in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary and reframe their existence within The Absolute. As also mentioned in Chapter Four, this approach to The Absolute in my directorial focus is possible due to the presence of transcendental love already evident within Beth and Jake's original relationship in *A lie of the mind*, as motivated by Graham (1995:313) and Bottoms (1998:18).<sup>122</sup>

Transcendental love in its entire philosophical undertaking provides vast possibilities for exploration. I therefore use the conceptual framework provided by Girard and Artaud, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, in order to focus my exploration. This conceptual framework focuses on destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary that exists between Beth and Jake by positioning Beth and Jake's existence within The Absolute. I replace the sexual desire in

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<sup>122</sup> For a full recapitulation of The Absolute and the presence of transcendental love within Beth and Jake's relationship, please revisit Chapter Two section 2.2.3, and Chapter Four sections 4.5 and 4.7.

Beth and Jake's relationship with a desire for transcendental love in the reconstruction of their relationship.

As motivated by Girard and discussed in Chapter Three section 3.3, sexual desire is directly linked to violence. Therefore, by removing sexual desire and replacing it with a desire for transcendental love in Beth and Jake's reconstructed relationship, I am able to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary by removing the threat of violence within their relationship. This shift from sexual to transcendental desire provides both characters with an identity outside of worldly institutions, apart from the victim/perpetrator binary and within *The Absolute*.

By making this shift, I break away from the mimetic process of desire, as defined by Girard and discussed in Chapter Three in section 3.1.2, and Chapter Four in sections 4.2 and 4.3. As stated in Chapter Four section 4.1, Beth and Jake struggle towards an identity that does not crystallise its basis in worldly institutions in *A lie of the mind* (Bottoms 1998:5). My research proposes that by destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary through positioning Beth and Jake within *The Absolute*, there is a possibility to achieve the identity they desire. Additionally, the victim/perpetrator binary is destabilised in the reconstruction of their relationship by consciously engaging with the Girardian notion of scapegoating within the reconstruction.

To briefly revisit Chapters Three and Four; the roles of victims and perpetrators of violence become interchangeable due to the fact that both are scapegoats of systems that award blame and reject accountability (Girard 2013:93, 169). As I argued in Chapter Four section 4.4.1, Shepard does not portray Beth and Jake as conventional victims and perpetrators of violence, and instead exposes the cyclical nature of such roles within *A lie of the mind*. As explained in Chapter Four section 4.4.1, the binary divide between victim/perpetrator in Beth and Jake's relationship is destabilised in theory through understanding the scapegoating mechanism. The victim/perpetrator binary may therefore at this point of my study be practically destabilised by using *The Absolute* as a directorial focus in *π*.

As concluded in Chapter Four section 4.4, I choose to frame the violence that Beth and Jake were subjected to as a tool that separates them from certain worldly institutions, such as language and the biological body (to revisit an earlier statement: this study frames and accepts the victim/perpetrator binary to be a worldly institution). Therefore, I do not structure my theatrical interpretation with any violence present.<sup>123</sup>

The destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary allows the characters to exist within the notion of The Absolute, which is a primary aim in the Theatre of Cruelty. Thus, the notion of The Absolute is used to destabilise the binary, and once the binary is destabilised, Beth and Jake are able to exist within The Absolute. As Chapter Four demonstrates, there are specific components within the relationship between Beth and Jake in Shepard's *A lie of the mind* that already substantiate a move towards The Absolute.

These components are the deterioration of gender binaries, the dissolution of sexual desire at the end of the play text, the absence of religion and a god-like figure, the depreciation of the physical form, and the disconnect from verbal language for both of the characters.<sup>124</sup> This chapter unpacks conceptual choices made within the praxis of this study that furthers the exploration of The Absolute in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary between Beth and Jake and allow the characters to exist within The Absolute as a state, due to the victim/perpetrator binary being destabilised.

$\pi$  acts as a radicalised 'sequel' to the original text in a Theatre of Cruelty paradigm. I use the final scene of Shepard's text, where Beth and Jake interact with one another directly for the first time in the entire play text, as an impetus to reconstruct their identities and relationship (as discussed in Chapter Four section 4.5). I then implement Artaud's notion of The Absolute

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<sup>123</sup> This choice further sets my Theatre of Cruelty endeavour apart from Artaud's. As mentioned in Chapter Two, his Theatre of Cruelty productions focused on violence, which ultimately destroyed his characters and prevented them from existing within The Absolute. As mentioned in Chapter Three, to continue to use violence within such a destructive framework would once again be perpetuating the false conceptions of violence that Girard warns against.

<sup>124</sup> Please revisit Chapter Four for a thorough analysis on Beth and Jake's move towards The Absolute in Shepard's original play text.

as a directorial focus within the reconstruction of their relationship to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary that remained between them at the end of Shepard's original play text.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, creative choices within a Theatre of Cruelty endeavour are encouraged by Artaud to be undertaken by a Creator. However, I have up until this point referred to 'directorial' choices and focuses. I therefore now identify my role within this Theatre of Cruelty process and study by discussing the concept of a Creator versus the idea of a director.

### **5.1.1. The role of the Creator versus the role of a director**

According to Artaud, and as mentioned in Chapter Two section 2.3, a single body of a Creator exists, merging all aspects of a Theatre of Cruelty production into one – dealing with both the “play and action” in the hopes of doing away with the separation of roles within a theatre production (Artaud 1977:72). This has the possibility of sounding contradictory, for my research continuously brings to light the sole credit Artaud bestows unto himself as a Creator, but here, it could either be understood that an entire production team is a Creator, or the 'director' is the Creator. Artaud does not clarify what he means.

The Creator critically engages with a Theatre of Cruelty work; scrutinising their understanding of the world on and off stage. A Creator must re-evaluate what they understand as 'real', and understand that their Theatre of Cruelty endeavour is akin to life, and not a representation of it (Artaud 1977:71).<sup>125</sup> A Creator is therefore someone who has an involvement with his or her production beyond its technical aspects. They become philosophically and metaphysically absorbed into its world.

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<sup>125</sup> This is applied in my practice, as I accept and explore the stage world as a reality in itself, and therefore not a portrayal or representation/presentation within The Absolute and Theatre of Cruelty framework.

The term 'director' and functions or roles associated with the term has shape-shifted through history and in accordance with context (Barnett 2010:[sp]).<sup>126</sup> For the purposes of this brief discussion, I include Francis Hodge and Michael McLain's explanation of what a director is, as a contrary role to that of a creator. I additionally discuss David Barnett's explanation of a director, which aligns with the concept of a creator, and provides a counter definition to Hodge and McLain's.

According to Francis Hodge and Michael McLain (2010:2), a director is responsible for only four elements within a theatrical production: a vision of the play that encompasses all aspects of the production; a thorough technical knowledge of the dynamics of plays (the climaxes and denouements, the tempo, rhythm, mood, tone); an ability to communicate in a manner that helps their actors and designers to give their utmost to the project, and an urge to entertain audiences by stimulating their minds, hearts and spirits.<sup>127</sup>

David Barnett (2010:[sp]) states that a director must function like a conductor; tying together all the creative parts of the theatre production. Sam Shepard supports Barnett's approach to directing, even though he did not structure his work according to Post-dramatic principles, which Barnett does in this context. However, unlike Artaud's strict instruction in *Theatre of Cruelty* that does not allow for the performers to take initiative, Shepard urged his performers to find their own impulses in order to make sense of the stage (Bottoms 1998:218). I accept and understand Barnett's description of a director to both compare and contrast Hodge and McLain's description of a director. According to my understanding, Barnett's description is more in line with Artaud's understanding of a Creator.

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<sup>126</sup> An interrogation into the above falls outside of the scope of this dissertation. For a detailed, historical explanation of directors and directing, see Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova's 2013 publication of *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*.

<sup>127</sup> I use the word tone throughout this chapter in order to address emotional states created within my production. According to Hodge and McLain (2010:48), tone is a key component within any theatre experience and production. They describe tone as the maximal state of feeling within a production, and state that if the director does not set a specific tone, their production will ultimately collapse. Within tone, there will always be the element of moods, which are created through the audience's sensory experiences and influence the way a production is understood in correlation with its tone. Moods cannot always be logically explained, and are difficult to define (Hodge & McLain 200:47-49).

Within this work, I functioned as both a researcher and what Artaud deems a Creator. I interpret Artaud's vision of a Creator to acknowledge the help and presence of other theatrical role players, such as designers of sound, lights and costume. It must be stated that within this production and study, I was solely responsible for all elements of my production, barring technical assistance while filming and moving into the theatre, and the actual making of the costumes. The performers were not given freedom to dictate any content within the production, or freedom to design and construct their own versions of Beth and Jake. As Artaud stipulates, the performers served to carry the message that I as the Creator, created.<sup>128</sup>

It was essential that I had sole agency and creative discretion. This was amplified by the fact that this is a research project, and I am uncovering, discovering, and exploring a way to implement The Absolute within Theatre of Cruelty in order to destabilise a victim/perpetrator binary between Beth and Jake. If I had allowed other parties to implement their creative decisions, I would not be able to take full responsibility for all aspects of this research and production. Technical assistance was directed by the decisions I had already made in my creative capacity; I only needed to instruct people to help execute the technicalities of my play. In light of the above, it would not be accurate to label myself as a director; however, I will continue to speak of 'directorial' choices that I implemented as a Creator.

Now that I have positioned myself as a Creator in this study who makes and implements directorial choices, I proceed to discuss my creative process involved in executing the Theatre of Cruelty work.

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<sup>128</sup> While it remains essential for performers to personally interpret content, and to consider the aspect of personal uniqueness, I did not solicit their interpretations as a creative force in order to specifically inform the outcomes of this study.



## 5.2. Theatre of Cruelty and The Absolute: application in $\pi$ in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary

I now discuss my understanding of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty guidelines as unpacked in Chapter Two section 2.3 in connection with my production,  $\pi$ . I motivate my choice of title, and the form and structure of the production in order to discuss how The Absolute is implemented through my directorial choices, and how this implementation destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary (as defined by Girard) in Beth and Jake's relationship.

### 5.2.1. Motivating the title: $\pi$ and Theatre of Cruelty

$\pi$  is a Greek word symbol that is pronounced the same as an English "p" and means perimeter.<sup>129</sup> A perimeter is the distance around an area or the distance of a two dimensional shape.  $\pi$  is the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. The circle is a shape that indicates infinity, showing no beginning or end (About Pi 2015:[sp]).  $\pi$  is an infinite decimal number, which in mathematics is deemed as an irrational or transcendental number. This means it is a number that cannot be expressed as a fraction or exact decimal; therefore it is a non-algebraic number (Buchan 2009:50, 129).<sup>130</sup>

I chose the title based on Artaud's commitment to moving away from words and to focus on symbols or word symbols instead (Sellin 1968:21; Artaud 1977:34). For Artaud, symbols and word symbols access the metaphysical and transcendental. Verbal language represents the literal, and the literal must be discarded in Theatre of Cruelty (Sellin 1968:18). I pose that the symbol  $\pi$  is significant within the notion of The Absolute as it is a word symbol of an infinite, irrational, transcendental number. The Absolute looks at an existence beyond worldly institutions, and the conventional understanding of time as a linear structure of past, present, and future. Time as an entity in this study is understood to be a worldly institution.

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<sup>129</sup> Colloquially, the symbol is pronounced as 'pie'.

<sup>130</sup> While relating to the study of circles in mathematics, this number is also important in quantum physics and cosmology, which do not use circles as a point of study (Buchan 2009:129).

By making something infinite, there is no marking of time; therefore, there is no beginning or end. By embracing the numbers' irrationality, I also symbolically address the indeterminate and unlimited nature of The Absolute, which was important for me to acknowledge in the title of the show.

Furthermore, this specific word symbol's affiliation with infinity highlights an important aspect within the theme and use of transcendental love. Within transcendental love, sexual desire is not present; which means that there will never be procreation.<sup>131</sup> In making life, there is also death (Bersani 2004:100). By engaging in sexual intercourse and creating a child, a pair gives life to death. Beth and Jake never make life; therefore they do not create death. By framing the presence of infinity within the production in this light, I suggest that Beth and Jake do not continue time. They exist in a perpetual on-going time that cannot be described as past, present, or future. As such, both Beth and Jake do not suffer from the conditions of time.

The title addresses the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary within this study through metaphor and symbolism.  $\pi$  is connected to The Absolute through its meaning and symbolism. In The Absolute, the victim/perpetrator binary cannot be present, as I accept and frame it as a worldly institution within this study, and to exist within The Absolute is to exist apart from worldly institutions. The presence of the infinite within the title becomes symbolic in the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary as touched upon in the previous paragraph, connoting to the end of a cycle, and the infinitely present existence of two individuals who exist apart from time as a three-act structure.

The presence of the infinite within this production is also incorporated into the use of space and time of the staging and play world, which I discuss in the

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<sup>131</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Four section 4.5, transcendental love surpasses worldly institutions such as the physical body, and therefore the biological needs of the body (such as sexual desire and hunger, as Artaud saw to be superfluous in The Absolute). I accept and position transcendental love within this study as a force and entity that exists in time and space apart from the feelings and inner desires of human beings. This means that it becomes a shared experience between two individuals, but can exist as an experience apart from these individuals. Thus, if the two people who sharing this experience would cease to exist, the experience of transcendental love would not die with them, for it in itself transcends the boundaries of time and space.

section after next. I now unpack the structure of the production, in order to give context to the use of space and time that follows.

### **5.2.2. The ‘narrativeless’ structure of $\pi$**

$\pi$  consisted of four sections that occurred in a different order in every run. Therefore, there was no fixed plot. These four sections each focused on different elements and states of Beth and Jake’s relationship, and of The Absolute. Each of these sections worked towards and through The Absolute as it destabilised the victim/perpetrator binary. The decision to use four sections came from a four-stage process that I envisioned would take place if one were to access The Absolute. It then made creative sense to me that since The Absolute does not recognise worldly institutions (such as chronological and linear time), the order in which the sections occurred did not have to take place in a chronological or linear order, and no unity of space, time, and action, or cause-and-effect sequencing would be necessary.

A Theatre of Cruelty production is intended to be an organic process that runs for one evening only, for repetitive runs will create a language, and will give signs and symbols meanings that may be made into a language (De Vos 2011:45). As my research unfolded, I saw that this instruction would not be plausible. The closest I could come to Artaud’s instruction was implementing modern dance choreographer Merc Cunningham’s “dance by chance” method, or as it is otherwise known, “choreography by chance” (Weinstein 2011:[sp]).

Dance by chance, or choreography by chance, focuses on creating a number of steps/movements in separate sequences. Cunningham would roll a dice or flip a coin to decide in what order these steps or movements would be performed. He structured this method on the basis that dance could be performed without a structured narrative and still creating meaning and intent through physical imagery (Weinstein 2011:[sp]).

These four sections are unpacked in more detail as the discussion in this chapter unfolds. I list them and each of their aims below in order to provide structure to my discussion. In alphabetical order:

	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Artaudian influence</b>	<b>Girardian influence</b>
<b>Corollary</b>	A natural consequence or effect; a result.	This state is created after and with the end scene of the original text in mind. It is the unifying moment for Beth and Jake, and explores the aftermath of their traumas. It further explores how to rebuild their identity outside of worldly institutions in order to exist within The Absolute. It is the acceptance of the death of their previous identities, and with it, the victim/perpetrator binary.	The plague: the separation from all existing worldly institutions in order for Beth and Jake to reconstruct themselves within The Absolute.	The after-effects of violence and its plague-like effect that leave Beth and Jake in a state of mental and physical trauma.
<b>Philia</b>	Love or affection.	This state is moulded in response to a sensory interpretation of existing within The Absolute. The experience is likened to being caught in a severe wind (that is created by fans on stage). This is a sensory expression of the experience that	Existing in The Absolute without sexual desire or physical bodies, as their bodies were understood in a worldly institution driven identity.	Being freed of the mimetic process of desire and the violence it encourages. Beth and Jake no longer exist in the model-disciple relationship as previously dictated by their parents, which encouraged

		takes place when there is unity between body, mind, and soul that The Absolute requires of Beth and Jake.		and enforced systematic violence.
<b>Pyre</b>	Combustible material or a pile put together that is used for burning dead bodies.	The purification process – the move into The Absolute; the moment of rebirth. Beth and Jake must be cleansed of their previous identities and relationship.	The self-immolation (through burning) required in order to reach The Absolute.	The act of violence as a purifying process.
<b>Snāw</b>	Snow.	This state is a response to intimacy and love existing within The Absolute without sexual desire as a driving force and its mimetic nature that encourages violence. Beth and Jake are now driven by transcendental love and explore this new desire, as opposed to sexual desire, which previously framed their relationship.	The characters have been metaphysically burnt and did not die. They now exist with the shared experience of transcendental love, and in infinite time and space.	Girard's understanding of the apocalypse. All worldly institutions have been dissolved, and only the transcendent remains.

The production was not dependent on a narrative, but rather an experience that was constructed via the mood and tone of each section, and how they worked together in different sequences. Each night, an hour before the show began, my two performers drew crumpled pieces of paper from a bowl that each had individual sections written on them. This was inspired by Cunningham's use of dice. This adapted dance by chance method allowed me to stage a 'different' production each night. By having four set sections

and performing them in a different order, I did not produce “an entirely organic process that plays for one night only” (De Vos 2011:45), but I created an opportunity for different meanings and outcomes to be explored by rearranging the sequence of events. I therefore created different experiences on each performance evening.

In order to sustain the entire experience of the production, the audience would have needed to watch all three performances. However, by watching the production each evening, and by employing repetition, I ran the risk of inviting the audience to make meaning of what they saw, which Artaud advises against, because he does not want an audience to employ a rationalised language through which to understand the production (De Vos 2011:45).

Stephen Di Benedetto (2012:102) argues that it is impossible to prohibit an audience from making meaning and thereby attaching a language to the production. He states that individuals are conditioned to make sensory connections through the images they are presented with and automatically attach meaning to these images. Bearing this in mind, I used Cunningham’s method in order to ensure that the production would be a different experience each night, and thus give rise to different possible meanings, according to the sequence of events I presented. As my research unfolded, it also became clear that to discourage the use and creation of meaning would not be conducive to the directorial focus of *The Absolute* and the outcomes of my research.

I now discuss the use of time and space within the play world, and how I implemented *The Absolute* within my directorial choices in the use of time and space in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary.

### **5.2.3. Space and time in *The Absolute*: staging and the play world**

As stated in Chapter Two section 2.3, Artaud (1977:74) wants the stage space in a Theatre of Cruelty production constructed so that both the performers and audience are spatially ‘absorbed’ into the show. While Artaud

saw an audience as structurally and spatially indispensable to Theatre of Cruelty (Artaud 1977:62), the audience was not my focus within this study and its praxis. However, I do acknowledge certain spatial stipulations Artaud encouraged concerning the audience within a Theatre of Cruelty guideline.

I positioned chairs around the stage and auditorium, forming a theatre-in-the-round effect. There were also little clusters of chairs that were thrust into the performance space. The action then took place on both the stage and on the auditorium raked seating space that was left open on the right side. I chose to make the performance space deliberately separate from the audience space in order to create a 'private' space (observed by an audience) for Beth and Jake to explore themselves in, and to exist within *The Absolute*, which is apart from worldly institutions, and therefore, apart from an audience, who do not exist within *The Absolute*, and may therefore still perpetuate a victim/perpetrator binary that is destabilised in the reconstruction of their relationship.

Artaud encourages unconventional spaces for theatrical productions (Jannarone 2010:89) and specifies that the selected space must be utilised in its entirety (Artaud 1977:82-83). In *π*, I used a traditional black box theatre and rearranged the audience seating so that audience members sat both around the stage and in sections of the auditorium.

While Artaud discourages such spaces, I returned to one for this study, to create a work that speaks to my contemporary time and echoes Artaud's wish for theatre to comment on the "...catastrophic times 'we live in'..." (Artaud 1977:64).<sup>132</sup> My intention in using a conventional black box theatre space (The Lier theatre at the University of Pretoria) was motivated by personal experiences of contemporary theatre. As a regular theatregoer, I have not seen something that stirred me the way Artaud hoped to stir people in his time. I therefore set out to make something within a theatre space that created this

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<sup>132</sup> While this statement coming from *The Theatre and its Double* that was originally released in the mid 1930s may seem archaic, it echoes theatre's ability to inspire change, regardless of the era it is performed and set in (Fortier 2012:20).



experience for me. By returning to a conventional theatrical space, and by acknowledging the space to be a conventional theatre, I also remove any and all pretence of illusion and of alluding to any other space within the actual space through metaphor and symbolism, as Artaud discouraged in his *Theatre of Cruelty*.

I used the entrance space in the foyer of the theatre for the audience's exit point, and used the loading door that leads directly onto the stage as the entry point for the audience. By making the audience enter through the stage, I aimed to immerse the audience into the performance that began before the doors opened, and ended only when the last person exited. I encouraged the audience to walk around during the performance, and had sections of the work performed in the auditorium space, right up to the sound and lighting box.<sup>133</sup>

In this way, I also made visible the mechanics of my theatrical production, which again relates to Artaud's idea in *Theatre of Cruelty* that nothing must be constructed as a representation or illusion (Esslin 1976:95). Therefore, in terms of the world I create on stage; it would not be justified as being located "nowhere" or "nor here nor there", or otherwise, "everywhere". Instead, the space in this study is fully acknowledged as a theatre space, and all action that takes place within this world is accepted accordingly.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Bottoms (1998:5) motivates that Beth and Jake are captives of the institutions of time and space in the original text and desire freedom. I provide Beth and Jake with this freedom they desire by spatially separating them from their families, who perpetuated mimetic desire and the model-disciple relationship. Additionally, the world I created did not accept or perpetuate the worldly institutions that stifled them (such as their previous times and spaces).

In order to give further context and meaning to the space, I must discuss my use of time within the play world and staging. In the original text, Beth and

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<sup>133</sup> Different runs of the production yielded different results on this score. In the first performance, not one audience member moved. However, in the final two performances a few audience members did.

Jake's narrative takes place in the present with integrated flashbacks that create a temporal motif (Bottoms 1998:10) (as mentioned in Chapter Four section 4.1.1). This use of time in the original play text as well as the original use of space constructs the borders of their captivity. In my production, I used infinite time in order to encourage a process of discovery for the characters that is not bound and constricted by the limitations of time.

It remained important for me that I followed Artaud's instruction to not set the play in a specified time or era. Not only because I wanted to keep as close to the Theatre of Cruelty guidelines as possible, but also because I implemented infinite timing. Thus, to be bound to a specified time or era would have been counterproductive. Within  $\pi$ , I created different and unspecified time states in a period of 50-62 minutes (the length changed in each run).

1. Corollary section: images of daylight sky with clouds were projected. A lighting state of both cold and warm light was used throughout the section.
2. Philia section: no weather state was projected, but the use of cold blue and warm amber lighting was used in different parts of the section.
3. Pyre section: projecting a video of a bulbous fire against the theatre walls created an atmospheric state. Additional stage lights were used in order to make the actors visible in 'dead' spots on the stage.
4. Snāw section: a video of snow falling was projected and only cold blue lighting was used. This was the only section that gave a specific reference to weather and season, but when experienced in conjunction with the other states, it did not overpower the production so as to be considered a dominant state of weather and season.

That I created different environmental states and seasons over the course of the performances remained essential in approaching the infinite. Within the infinite, I accept that everything can happen simultaneously: past, present and future do not need to act linearly or chronologically. As mentioned earlier, each performance presented the four sections of the production in a different order. Thus, when the fourth section of the evening concluded, the performers

would revert back to the section they opened with, which on all three nights cued the audience that the production had ended for them for the evening.

On all four evenings, some audience members would stay to watch the moments of the first section they did not witness due to it happening while they were still outside. I instructed the performers that they must continue until the last audience member left the auditorium. This instruction could have resulted in a show running indefinitely for an unspecified period of time. The performers drew the four sections at random out of a bowl each evening, which then indicated the order that the evening's show would run in (as already discussed as being inspired by the dance by chance method). It was by chance that the order of the evenings began to follow a pattern when read as 3 parts (evenings) of one whole experience:

3 September: Pyre, Corollary, Philia, Snāw, Pyre.

4 September: Corollary, Philia, Snāw, Pyre, Corollary.

5 September: Philia, Pyre, Snāw, Corollary, Philia.

In light of the actual running time of a performance, Artaud left no specifications. As mentioned in Chapter Two section 2.1.4, his own Theatre of Cruelty productions are simply recorded as being 'lengthy' (Sellin 1968:112).  $\pi$  had a running time of 50 to 62 minutes, depending on the night of performance and the running order of the sections (the order would create a different mood and tone and therefore affect the timing of the production). I made the conscious decision while structuring the four segments of the production to never time the content or set a definite pace.

I worked purely on a personal instinct of timing, which influenced each section's duration differently. I encouraged each section to begin and end at an organic pace during the performance, taking into consideration the overall objective of wanting to create a sense of infinite time and disregarding time as a linear structure. The result of this was that three out of the four stages moved on most evenings at a steady and constant pace (The Pyre section was the only section that incorporated movements that necessitated a quick

paced response in every run from the characters). The constant pace I used stands in stark contrast to timing that builds and drops according to the creation and execution of dramatic conflict. By using time in this way, I nullified the use of rising action, climaxes, and resolutions, as Artaud hoped to do.

While I acknowledge that a constant pace within the production albeit different in each section risked monotony, it was necessary for executing my interpretation of *The Absolute* within this study. I accept that by applying *The Absolute* that is driven by transcendental love, there cannot be conflict, rises, and denouements that affect rhythm and pace, which in turn affects timing and dramatic tension. I understand and interpret transcendental love to be an unbiased acceptance of another; an unconditional love; and within this unconditional love there cannot be selfish impetus that drives personal desires and in turn sparks conflict.

Consequently, there was only a constant and steady exchange of attention, dialogue, and action that was accepted and reacted on accordingly by each of the characters. Furthermore, I was interested in creatively exploring infinite time as something that incorporated both a quick, and an equally slower rhythm and pace. The result was as previously mentioned, that the *Pyre* section specifically explored a faster rhythm with energetic movement and exchange, the *Corollary* section incorporated both speed and slowness in equal measure, and the *Philia* and *Snāw* sections worked with steady and slower pacing than the other two sections.

The timing and pace I used in the production, within my understanding of *The Absolute*, destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary between Beth and Jake. A victim/perpetrator binary needs conflict that results from climaxes and tension, which is created by linear action in linear time and space. This conflict positions characters in structures of stability and vulnerability (which character holds control in the conflict and has agency versus which character is without control and agency).

In my reconstruction of Beth and Jake's relationship, this sense of control is re-established in time and space. By creating a steady flow and equal agency within the production, there was no persistently dominant character. Each character was awarded equal agency, and thus, the victim/perpetrator binary was destabilised by reconceptualising the use of time and space within  $\pi$ . Time and space are not used in this production as logical, progressive structures that implement cause and effects and box the characters in as they did in Shepard's original text. Instead, time and space are implemented as borderless entities that have endless possibilities for the character's to explore and inhabit.<sup>134</sup>

Now that the use of space and time as guided by The Absolute has been discussed, and how time and space was implemented to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary, I proceed to examine the use of décor within my production. I unpack how the choices of décor aligned with Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty manifestoes and The Absolute, and how the specific décor I used destabilised the victim/perpetrator binary.

#### **5.2.4. Filling the space and time: the décor and blocking used in $\pi$**

As mentioned in Chapter Two, characters, alongside the props and instruments (if used) should constitute the décor (Artaud 1977:76). Accordingly, I used a large wooden structure, white cloth, projected images, lighting states, and my two characters to sculpt the décor within  $\pi$ .<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> I use the term 'endless possibilities' with full Artaudian gusto. While any performance space is confined by the spatial structure of the building, I accept that within a play world and the employment of Artaudian metaphysics, the way space is perceived, and the possibilities within that space changes, and may become endless in its capacity to be interpreted.

<sup>135</sup> It was my original intention to have two circumferences continually rotating on the stage. Made of steel, a large circumference would rotate clockwise on the base of the stage while another would hover above it, between the base and the ceiling, rotating in an anti-clockwise direction. The hovering circumference would be about half the size of the circumference on the base of the stage. I wanted the production to take place between these two circles in motion. This for me would spatially emphasise my circular blocking, which again alludes to infinite time and space. It would also have provided me with height, which was a very important element of space that I worked with (as per Artaud's instruction of utilising a space in its entirety). I wanted the circumferences to be steel, as steel is one of the strongest elements. Steel has a mirror-like quality to it, which would have served as a practical reflective surface that could also have added to the spatial dynamic of the space. Due to financial constraints and available resources, this became impossible. I therefore used the equal alternative as discussed in this section.

I positioned the white wooden structure diagonally on the stage, and used circular blocking around and on this diagonally placed box-like structure. When circular motion was not possible due to spatial constrictions, I had Beth and Jake walk parallel to one another (either together, or apart, up or down) and then break the line with a circular motion. Traditional blocking is done in a triangular shape, which encourages relationships of power that are explored and alluded to on stage (Monta & Stanley 2008:115). The decision to use circular movements aimed to negate a dominant figure, which addressed the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary in how I directed the characters engagements within the space.



Figure 1: set structure  
Screen shot by author

The white sheet that is pinned to the structure in this figure was part of the props I used in the production. Artaud (1977:75-76) suggests using props of “strange proportions, and objects that highlight the physical language”. This white cloth highlighted the physical language and imagery in the Snāw section specifically. The white cloth was positioned so that only Beth and Jake’s heads and feet stuck out, and as they moved, only their feet, hands, and heads would be visible in different moments. The cloth aided in creating a disembodied physical image as they moved intimately within the structure, as

depicted above. As Beth and Jake moved around in the enclosed structure, the lights placed inside the structure reflected against the cloth and their bodies, throwing shadows against the cloth.

These shadows illustrated Beth and Jake's new bodies in *The Absolute*. As previously mentioned, Artaud wanted the physical body to be re-made and reconceptualised in *The Absolute*, but this always resulted in the physical deaths of his characters. Within the context of this study and production, I view and accept shadows to be projections of new physical bodies that use *The Absolute* to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary, and in turn, may exist within *The Absolute* once the victim/perpetrator binary is destabilised.

There was an additional white cloth positioned on the auditorium steps that spilled onto the stage. This white cloth became an altar. The altar was initially an ode to Artaud within the production, specifically commenting on his fascination with the Orient and their use of textiles (Sellin 1968:18). However, the cloth (altar) became an important tool in recreating an image from the original text that served the notion of *The Absolute*: a mummification tool. In Shepard's original play text, Beth's head is wrapped in bandages and she calls herself a mummy (Shepard 1986:11). The process of mummification was and is sometimes still done in Egyptian culture in order to 'preserve' the body for its journey to the afterlife (An Egyptian Mummification [sa]:[sp]).

Beth's bandages are a result of the physical violence she sustained in *A lie of the mind*, and the victim/perpetrator binary present in the original text. In this production, Beth wraps Jake in the cloth to mummify him. Mummification was traditionally done to preserve bodies, but the body inevitably decays. To reach *The Absolute* the physical body must decay in order to undergo a process of change that is necessary to access *The Absolute*. By having Beth wrap Jake in a clockwise direction, and having Jake unwrap himself in a counter-clockwise direction, I explored the possibility of this change through mummification, and the imagistic language of the mummification process.



I accept in this interpretation that Beth was already mummified in the original text, and therefore it became necessary that Jake underwent a similar process in  $\pi$ , for in the original text, he sustained the same violent physical trauma, but the original text ended before he could seek rehabilitation. In  $\pi$ , Beth provides him with the mummification process, so that he too may undergo the physical change and access The Absolute. Beth's action, when framed in the context of transcendental love, becomes a selfless act towards Jake, ensuring that they may access The Absolute together.

The idea of life after death (as discussed above in light of the Egyptian mummification process) alludes to infinite time. The cloth created a symbol through its bandage-inspired nature that destabilised the victim/perpetrator binary by reconstructing the body through symbolic decay. Without their original physical bodies, the connection to Beth and Jake's violent pasts and the physical damage they sustained is removed. Therefore, the victim/perpetrator binary is destabilised by removing the physical markings of violence and in turn, the marking of Beth as a victim and Jake as a perpetrator.

In addition to the cloths, I used three fans on top of the wooden structure in order to create wind within the Philia section. The wind created a sensory experience for the characters, which is directly in line with Artaud's aims in Theatre of Cruelty. It was important not to hide the fans from sight, as hiding them would create an illusion, which goes against Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty guidelines. Similarly to my approach with the props I used in this production, I designed the lighting to also not be hidden from sight, but instead, to become part of the décor by means of visibility.

#### **5.2.5. The use of lighting in $\pi$**

As Artaud stipulated in his manifestoes, unique and unconventional ways of lighting that create and inspire emotional tones must be implemented in Theatre of Cruelty works (Artaud 1977:74). In my production, I used four isolated lights on the floor, one on the highest step of the auditorium, and one

ceiling light in each corner of the theatre's roof. I specifically wanted to move away from conventional overhead lighting that I have often experienced in theatrical productions. The result was that I had lighting states that did not always light the characters clearly. Sometimes only certain parts of their bodies could be seen. This use of lighting also amplified the presence of shadows within the performance space.

It was my intention to use unique lighting that inspired emotional and tactile tones, as Artaud stipulated. These emotional and tactile tones I created echoed isolation and disjointedness, which is understood as a positive experience within the context of this study, and not a jarring one. I was also influenced by Shepard's original lighting design for *A lie of the mind* where it appeared as though the set was being swallowed at points, giving it no definite beginning or end to the performance space.<sup>136</sup>

I used amber and steel blue gels, as well as stark white light with no gels. The Absolute and the separation it requires from worldly institutions inspired my specific choice of colour and design, insofar as the lights visually separated and isolated the characters in pools of light. I was also careful to not set a binary distinction between the characters using lighting and specific colour states in the production. The lighting states destabilised the victim/perpetrator binary by not using lighting to create prominence or insignificance in connection with what the lighting highlighted and what it 'hid' from view. In addition to the props and lighting, I also made particular musical and melodic choices with The Absolute and the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary in mind.

#### **5.2.6. The soundscape in $\pi$**

Artaud encouraged all instruments to be original in design and played live (Artaud 1977:73-74). Considering his own *Les Cenci* (1935) and its use of stereophonic sound alongside live soundscapes, I decided against having live

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<sup>136</sup> This is based on a photo of the set that is included in the publication of the play I use within this study. Please refer to Appendix A to view this image.

music, but did choose sounds and music based on his guidelines. I made use of three audio tracks within  $\pi$  and used a silent soundscape for the Pyre section.

In the Corollary section, which deals with Beth and Jake's states of trauma, I used a track of high-pitch noise. The pitch gradually grew louder and higher until it stopped halfway through the section. When listened to in relation to the stage language and the projected images, it created a contradictory harmony. Harmony, even in contradiction, is imperative to Artaud (1977:62) (as stated in Chapter Two section 2.3). This sharp, building sound was reflective of Beth and Jake's move towards *The Absolute*; the high-pitched noise was the auditory embodiment of their trauma, which must be sensorially engaged with in order to work through it, and therefore destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary.

The track I used in the *Philia* section became an auditory guide in the feeling of relinquishing over to *The Absolute*. The track is named *Negative Capability* and was composed by Mark Bradshaw in response to John Keats' life and poetry (Films De Lover 2010:[sp]).<sup>137</sup> Music in itself may be described as poetry, and here, music was made from poetry. This echoes Artaud's wish for language to become poetic and symbolic (Artaud 1977:34). Bradshaw used a harpsichord and meditation bowls to create the sounds heard in the track (Films De Lover 2010:[sp]).

The title, *Negative Capability*, is a term that was used by Keats to describe an individual's willingness to live in a state that is not governed by rational logic and reason (Popova 2012:[sp]). The meaning of this title and the tone of the melody echoed *The Absolute's* move away from worldly institutions. To exist within *The Absolute* is to exist in an identity that rejects the victim/perpetrator binary, and therefore destabilises its existence through rejection.

The track I used in the *Snāw* section was recorded poetic dialogue that took

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<sup>137</sup> This track comes from the *Bright Star* (Campion 2009) film soundtrack. The film is about the love relationship between John Keats and Fanny Brawne before his early death.

place between Beth and Jake. They discuss a dream Jake had in which Beth appeared. The characters discuss a transcendental state of existence and the transcendental love that now exists between them. The dialogue had a whispery effect to it, which created a spoken rhythm that the characters used as an impetus to respond to onstage. As mentioned in section 5.2.2, the Snāw section is the section of the work wherein Beth and Jake exist within The Absolute. Therefore, the victim/perpetrator binary has already been destabilised by this point. By referring to transcendental love within this dialogue, they only highlight the destabilisation of the binary, or rather, its absence.

My deliberate choice to not use a soundtrack in the Pyre section was influenced by the emphasised sounds of Beth and Jake touching each other while moving around the stage, their breathing and their exhales when they approached a moment of fright or excitement. This sensory experience of present engagement became a musical score for engagement within The Absolute and a re-understanding of touch within their relationship that is non-violent and not sexual, and therefore outside of the victim/perpetrator binary.

In the beginning of this section I mentioned that props, objects, lighting design, as well as the characters within a Theatre of Cruelty production constitute the décor. I now discuss characterisation and my choice of casting as an essential part of this Theatre of Cruelty endeavour, and in working towards my research aim of destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary through the directorial approach of The Absolute.

### **5.2.7. The actor, technique, and characterisation in $\pi$**

As mentioned in section 5.1.1, as the Creator, I was solely responsible for producing the content that was performed and the performers were only the vehicles for this content. Since Artaud was not interested in representation or imitation, I discuss the characterisation and little of the actors themselves.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>This is barring casting choices, which are only discussed in this section to highlight and serve characterisation in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary.

Additionally, this study implements a directorial focus that does not include the process of the actors per se. While Artaud does not speak about characterisation in any of his manifestoes, I include it here as I am dealing with characters (Beth and Jake) in a theatrical space. By approaching an Artaudian way of thinking in Theatre of Cruelty, as I understand it, I accept and frame Beth and Jake as existing entities within this theatrical territory.

In reconceptualising their relationship by using *The Absolute* so as to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary, it was important for me as the Creator that Beth and Jake were emotionally, mentally and physically similar. I achieved physical similarity by ensuring physical androgyny. Neither performer was overtly masculine or feminine in their physical appearance, which aided the visual reception of Beth and Jake. Both performers also had equal physical and technical strength, which meant that I could employ equal physical agency in the physical construction of both Beth and Jake, which is imperative when dealing with the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary within their relationship. If one character had more physical prowess than another, and if a dominant physical masculine/feminine binary was depicted, the characters ran the risk of falling back into the binary separation of victim/perpetrator that hindered them in Shepard's original text.

This physical similarity was overtly apparent in the *Pyre* and *Corollary* sequence, where Beth and Jake engaged with one another using a highly physicalised language that gave rise to emotional and mental similarities, as stated in the beginning of the previous paragraph. I took great care to make Jake more pensive and have less bravado as a character than he had within the original text. It was important for me in the reconceptualisation of their relationship that Jake acknowledges his trauma and damage, and does not fight against it, which in previous studies, linked him to crises of masculinity (Bottoms 1998:16). It was important to reconstruct Beth with more physical agency and a firmer grasp on what it means for love to be transcendental.<sup>139</sup> I

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<sup>139</sup> Agency is the ability to make choices and execute actions for oneself and community. To have agency is to be understood as a fully functional, rational individual who is allowed to function in a socio-cultural paradigm (Emirbayer & Mische 1998:964-965).

aimed to structure Beth as a character that had identity beyond the state her abuse handed her (as discussed in Chapter Four section 4.4.1) in order to frame her within *The Absolute*, and therefore destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary.

The state of being I implemented within their characterisation was motivated by Girard's understanding of the scapegoating mechanism. In order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary within their relationship, Beth and Jake must acknowledge their own accountability and previous traumas, so as not to place further blame on each other or anyone and anything in their life world.<sup>140</sup> By making both characters physically and emotionally present within the text, and by bringing them proximally together, I deviated from Shepard's text that only united the couple in the last few pages of the final act and scene of the play text. The original play text's narrative foregrounded their separation in time and space, and the disconnection between their bodies, minds, and emotions. This disconnect, as previously mentioned in Chapter Four, fuelled traumas that caused the characters to inhabit the victim/perpetrator state they did within their relationship and as individuals.

Shepard presents Beth and Jake's traumas as catalysts for violent rage and disconnection. I presented their traumas as something that must be emotionally and mentally dealt with in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary. My outcome enabled Beth and Jake to exist within *The Absolute* because the victim/perpetrator binary is destabilised. I ensured that the characters, in the reinterpretation, did not blame one another or any other institution and person for their traumas, so as not to fall into the trap of further enforcing the victim/perpetrator binary I am destabilising in this research.

By forcing them to confront their trauma, I further disengage the cyclical nature of violence and vengeance that Girard (2013:18) warns against. Therefore, within this reinterpretation of their relationship, there is no further

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<sup>140</sup> By limiting the theatrical world to exist with only Beth and Jake, there is no one and nothing else to place blame onto, as discussed in Chapter Four section 4.2 and in this chapter, section 5.1.

threat of violence for both Beth and Jake, whereas Shepard's text leaves open an entry point into further violence, by not concluding either Beth or Jake's personal narratives. This creative decision links to Artaud's notion of cruelty, which demands constant, conscious engagement and re-interrogation of one's immediate world as shown on stage (see Chapter Two section 2.2.2).

Additionally, I made no covert or conscious directorial decisions based on the sex and gender of each character. I awarded equal agency and passivity to both Beth and Jake in light of their perceived sex and possible gender, and ensured that the stage language did not fall into a clearly identifiable gender pattern. A clearly identifiable gender pattern would give rise to masculine dominance and feminine submissiveness, and further perpetuate the victim/perpetrator binary. The directorial decision to reinterpret the characters without focusing on a fixed sex or gender approach destabilised the victim/perpetrator binary, for in the original text, Beth and Jake's characters are framed as victims and perpetrators of violence that is connected to sex and gender (Jake as the male, dominating Beth as the female, in form and ideology) (Bottoms 1998:16; Crum 1993:206; Roudané 2002:5).

My reinterpretation of their relationship constructed power dynamics as a scale that carried equal weight and was sometimes tipped out of provocation from one or the other character, but never due to gender politics. The only clear distinction they faced as characters was a verbal (Beth) and physical (Jake) disability. I treated each disability with equal weight and foregrounded these disabilities in the Corollary section, which, as aforementioned, focused on the aftermath of the traumas they both sustained. If in *The Absolute* there is a unity between body, mind and soul, then a physical disability is as severe as a mental one.

By structuring their relationship as such in the Corollary section, I forced the characters to aid one another through their individual psychophysical traumas: Jake could not walk unless Beth helped him, eventually learning to walk by himself. Beth struggled through her speech while Jake listened and encouraged her through his silence, until she eventually broke through her



staccato pattern. By the end of the Corollary section, both Beth and Jake overcame their disabilities. In Shepard's original text, both characters suffered from and lived out verbal and physical disabilities as a result of the physical violence exerted against them. My reinterpretation of Beth and Jake's relationship in  $\pi$  removed these disabilities by having the characters aid one another. This is significant, as in the original text, Jake is responsible for Beth's psychophysical traumas, and Beth's brother Mike is responsible for Jake's.

In light of the physical and visual reinterpretation of Beth and Jake as characters within my production, I now discuss my use of costume and how it reflected the rejection of a specific sex and gender in my approach to character construction, which inhibited them in the original text.

#### **5.2.8. Character and costume in $\pi$**

Artaud specifies that costumes in a Theatre of Cruelty production must be specific to the message and content of that specific Theatre of Cruelty production. Costumes must also appear to be timeless and stateless (Artaud 1977:74). The costumes I used for both Beth and Jake were deep blue loose fitting t-shirts and shorts. I chose the deep blue colour for its connection to the ocean, and the calming effect of water. While this may not be the conventional association of the colour blue, I was encouraged by Artaud's need to find new meanings and to work towards the metaphysical.

The cut of the costumes alluded to an androgynous and child-like state for me. The cut and shape did not cling to the shape of either character's body. It created a box shape that would not allow form to be associated with a specific sex or gender, where sexual and sexualised body parts are made apparent. Additionally, I used a white formal shirt only in the Philia section, which was worn by both Beth and Jake. This white formal shirt became part of the stage language.

The white formal shirt was inspired by the original text, where Beth dons her father's shirt and then assumes another gender in her performance. She plays on the words "costume" and "custom". The white formal shirt is taken as a symbol for the worldly institution of gender. It was a men's white formal shirt that Beth wears and then eventually she and Jake wear it simultaneously, moving together, becoming entwined in the shirt. The acknowledgement of the formal shirt as a symbol in my production shows that there can be a fluidity of states of being within *The Absolute* in relation to gender performance.

The costume (clothes that are given power through association) is exposed and framed as only a custom. This custom (patriarchy as a dominant ideology that loomed over the characters, and is now symbolised by the white formal shirt) does not hold power over Beth and Jake's identity. It can be put on and taken off at will. The symbolic nature and use of the shirt also highlighted an important aspect for me in light of gender performance. To force both into a purely androgynous state would be counter-productive. By nullifying the possibility of switching between states of gender would further enforce a binary construct that I was trying to destabilise, just as enforcing masculine and feminine traits and characteristics on them would be.

This once again speaks back to the power dynamic in the victim/perpetrator binary that is destabilised in *The Absolute*. The costumes in totality, as with the characterisation, do not create or allude to physical prowess or dominance of one character over the other. Both characters were visually twinned, and could therefore not further perpetuate or uphold the victim/perpetrator binary, because I exposed them as visual doubles of one another (as pertaining to Girard's notion of doubling discussed in Chapter Three sections 3.1.2 and 3.2.4).

The sections above have highlighted and unpacked directorial choices that directly constituted the décor and interior make-up of my Theatre of Cruelty production, explaining the presence of *The Absolute* and its connection to destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary. I now proceed to discuss the

architecture of the production, such as the stage language and the production's inner meanings, and how using The Absolute as a directorial focus in these components destabilised the victim/perpetrator binary.

### **5.2.9. Subjects and inner meaning: transcendental love in $\pi$ , the metaphysical, and the symbolic**

Since the notion of The Absolute requires an existence with a unity between body, mind and soul (and the construction of an identity apart from worldly institutions ultimately influenced by religion and language), I created and encouraged the stage language and production's inner meanings to be metaphysical and poetic, as Artaud hoped language would be. This was explored by using emotional stimuli to create a certain mood and tone within each of the four sections.

The emotional stimuli I used within  $\pi$  in order to create my desired tones and moods, and in order to explore the metaphysical language encouraged by Artaud were constructed via metaphysical and symbolic interpretation. In the Corollary section, I experimented with the idea of trauma and how this experience could manifest sensorially, which for me was a manifestation of contradictions that resulted in fluctuations of the characters' emotional states.

In the Philia section, I aimed to create a tone that promoted an overwhelming experience of contentment within my interpretation of transcendental love, which manifested physically as the sensation of being caught in a warm windstorm. For the Pyre section, I created a tone and feeling of danger that aroused excitement. This is how I artistically and intuitively expressed the process of leaving one's previous identity and the worldly institution of the victim/perpetrator binary, in order to attain The Absolute.

Within the Snāw section, it was my aim to explore a tone that encouraged a feeling of isolation, but within that isolation, the certainty of transcendental love. The combination of these four different tones and moods aided the objective of this research, which is to use the notion of The Absolute

directorially to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary in the relationship between Beth and Jake. I motivate that I managed to do this by creating a metaphysical language through the use of tone and mood that moved away from the violence and negative perceptions of their relationship that existed in the previous text.

Aligning with a metaphysical language, Artaud is clear that the subjects and inner meanings of a Theatre of Cruelty endeavour must be transcendental in nature, and that they must be in line with contemporary socio-political issues, while remaining innovative and unique. As discussed in Chapter Two, Artaud specifies that Theatre of Cruelty productions may be adaptations, original works, or historical accounts, but the themes must never be specific to a certain culture (Artaud 1977:71-72, 76, 81-82).

The instruction not to make themes culturally specific was implemented by focusing on the theme of transcendental love; wherein the notion of transcendentalism automatically surpasses worldly institutions, such as culture. Moreover, love as an emotion is not culturally specific; the experience of love has the potential to touch everyone, albeit in different ways. The reaction each individual has to love may differ according to their own personal backgrounds and histories, and the type of love they have felt and/or been exposed to (Aron & Aron 2006:365).<sup>141</sup>

As previously mentioned, the presence of transcendental love within *The Absolute* destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary in Beth and Jake's relationship because it replaces sexual desire, which is directly linked to violence. Thus, by removing the threat of violence from their relationship, I destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary that existed between them.

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<sup>141</sup> Through the use of this theme, I was still able to structure my four separate sections as one cohesive whole, even without the presence of a linear narrative. This is due to the fact that themes carry meanings, which implies that they have the potential to drive meaning, even in the absence of a logical or linear narrative (Mitchell 2009:47).

I will now proceed to discuss how I constructed the stage language in relation to *The Absolute* and *Theatre of Cruelty*, and how the stage language aided in the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary in the reinterpreted relationship.

#### **5.2.10. Stage language in $\pi$**

As concluded in Chapter Four and reiterated in this chapter, I chose to reframe the violence Beth and Jake were subjected to in Shepard's original text as something that guides and aids their existence within *The Absolute*, and not as a destructive force. I destabilised the victim/perpetrator binary by directorially immersing Beth and Jake in a stage language in each section that moves away from violence, and instead focuses on the process of moving toward *The Absolute* through using transcendental love. I now unpack the stage language used in each section, according to the *Theatre of Cruelty* guidelines.

In Chapter Two, I stated that Artaud specifies that the stage language (the onstage action) within a *Theatre of Cruelty* endeavour is not a representation, but accepted as real and approached accordingly (Artaud 1977:62, 72). Artaud accepts 'real' here to be in line with life, and not with realism, which is still accepted by Artaud to be a representation on stage. As aforementioned, *Theatre of Cruelty* encourages a metaphysical language in creation and content, hence verbal language must be reconsidered (Artaud 1977:72). Verbal language was only explored in the Corollary and Snāw section of the work, where I wanted to emphasise the mind in the unity between body, soul, and mind in *The Absolute*.

In the original text, Beth and Jake found it difficult to discuss their trauma. In  $\pi$ , I presented them verbalising their trauma in a lucid yet calm manner (within the Corollary section) in order to move towards *The Absolute*, and therefore

destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary.<sup>142</sup> The sound, meaning, and pronunciation of words were experimented with. The text I created was largely inspired by the original text and its subtext, with *The Absolute* in mind. The dialogue was not structured to follow a logical narrative and was open ended. In the beginning of the Corollary section, Beth continually repeated the words “we”, “blue” and “house”, with the aim of teaching herself how to speak fluently and overcome her mental disability. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Beth is without the conventional use of language in *A lie of the mind* due to her sustaining brain damage from Jake’s physical abuse. In this section, I creatively explored what a construction of metaphysical language may sound like in *The Absolute*, where the victim/perpetrator binary is destabilised.

The repetition and disjointed pronunciation eventually made it sound as though she was saying *we blew hows*, or *weblewhows*, until she gets to the end of the repetition of the sentence, when she eventually is able to say the entire sentence. It comes from the sentence I structured which is actually spoken as, “we lived in the blue house”. This sentence became a mantra for Beth within this section, and a poetic expression of the worldly institution of shelter, safety, and security that is absent within *The Absolute*.

As the Corollary section unfolds, both Beth and Jake engage in a conversation about their anger and frustration towards the state of trauma they face (Beth struggling to speak and not wanting to, Jake struggling to walk and not wanting to, and now having to accept the inevitable presence of *The Absolute*). They discuss the presence and absence of memory, wherein I emphasised the presence of transcendental love, and the absence of an identity based on physical characteristics.

Jake: I don’t want to walk  
Beth: I’ll walk and you can talk, how does that sound?  
Beth: I’m scared you’ll forget me.  
Jake: You don’t forget love.

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<sup>142</sup> I accept in my praxis that a unity between the body, mind, and soul will include verbal expression in the form of language (to address the mind), however, as mentioned previously in this chapter, this language is approached metaphysically and poetically, and not literally or in its conventional/literal use.

What if you forget me?  
Beth: Then I'll just follow the sound of your voice.  
(De Wet 2015).

Within this section of dialogue, I incorporated the idea of a sensory unity that Artaud encouraged (Artaud 1977:72). I played on the idea of walking and talking being perceived as a “sound”, despite the use of the words in a colloquial sense, and the idea that the sound of Jake’s voice could trigger emotional recalls that logic alone could forget.

The Corollary section made use of lines from the original text and adapted their meaning and intent. In the original text, Beth tells Frankie (Jake’s brother): “Your whole life can turn around. Upside down. In a flash. Sudden. Don’t worry. Everything you know can go. This whole world can disappear. You won’t even recognize your own hands.” (Shepard 1986:61-62). In *π*, Beth says these exact words to Jake when he fears discarding his previous identity connected to worldly institutions in order to exist within The Absolute.

The dialogue in the Snāw section drew from the theme of objective and subjective realities in the original text (as discussed in Chapter Four section 4.3). Beth and Jake discuss a dream he had. Beth helps him decipher it, and it unfolds that Beth was in his dream, but in the form of “warmth” and what she calls “rapture”. Jake tells Beth that he “was more frightened to wake than die as [he] remained”. Beth tells him that she would “rather [he] not die,” for she “plans to spend the next lifetime nestled in the hollow of [his] neck”. By having Beth materialise within a dream I play on the disintegration of time and space in dialogue, and reference The Absolute and its existence without constrictions that worldly institutions set for individuals.

This section of the dialogue was inspired by Gilles Deleuze’s use of The Absolute in his notion of Body without Organs (as discussed in Chapter Two section 2.2.3). The spoken text allowed a reality wherein the characters were able to become fluid bodies that can move into dreams and become emotions and experiences. If the world is only understood and experienced through the language that we think and speak in, then the language used here may be



argued to become a reality for the characters. The verbal language in both these sections explores literal poetic form and what Artaud sought to be metaphysical.

While verbal language was explored as something poetic and metaphysical (dialogue that does not make use of literal conventional norms, see Chapter Two section 2.1.3.), it was the physical vocabulary that I used to primarily relay and create meaning from, as is stipulated by Artaud. The physical movements derived from images that were sourced from the original text and specific senses I wanted to highlight during the performances.

For the Corollary component I translated the emotional reaction of trauma to manifest in physical disarray for the characters. The result was that their bodies moved in a staccato fashion, and overall, they were marked by reluctance to move. This resulted in Beth continuously changing her spatial position throughout the section. She started from the highest point of the structure, visited the different parts created in the space, and finally rested on the stage floor. Jake on the other hand, presented the staccato fashion in his excursion of learning to walk again. His feet stopped him from moving, which gave rise to an agitation he expressed with the physical space. All physical actions in this section incorporated a heavy weight, which allowed me to experiment with the sense of hearing; the physical actions of the characters were heard, as well as seen.

For the Pyre section, I focused on emotions connected to transition and change: such as excitement, hesitation, fear and determination. For this section I focused on stimulating these emotions through the sense of touch. Physical movement of a child-like game ensued, where power shifted between Beth and Jake, providing equal moments of stability and vulnerability (which as aforementioned in this chapter, are connected to the victim/perpetrator binary in terms of power structures and dynamics).

The characters engaged through touch which transitioned from moment to moment, turning from playful into serious, into dangerous, into exhilarated,

into comforting and back into serious. It was important for me to look at physical impulse and reaction between the two characters, which meant that Beth and Jake continuously negotiated the way they approached and dealt with one another's bodies, adjusting their responses according to the other person. By continuously shifting the physical power dynamics, I experimented with destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary specifically by addressing physical agency in both characters, and the equal physical strength of Beth and Jake.

In the Snāw section, a feeling of intimacy stimulated the stage language. I focused on the sense of sight. I worked with closer proxemics and repetitive movements. Beth and Jake were positioned inside a structure on the stage, which was enclosed by the white cloth (as mentioned in section 5.2.4). They moved together rhythmically, creating shadows, never losing contact. When they eventually came out of the structure, Beth wrapped Jake up in a white cloth that then acted as a mummification tool, walking in a clockwise direction to bind him. Jake then pulled away from the binding in a counter clockwise manner.

In the Philia section, Beth and Jake moved in circular fashions, with Beth on the stage floor and Jake at the highest point of the structure. Beth eventually joined him at the topmost point and they moved together, entwining and untangling themselves from the white formal shirt Beth put on at the beginning of the section (discussed in section 5.2.8). The two characters continued to move without ever physically losing contact, until the shirt eventually transferred off of Beth's body and came onto Jake's. At this point he left his position to take Beth's at the start of this section, and Beth remained to take Jake's.

I juxtaposed the physical language with audio and video in all four sections. By mixing sensory expectations in what was seen and heard, I aimed to experiment with a disarray of the senses of sight and sound and to have this influence the tone and mood of the production (contrast is an effective tool in theatre, because contrasted elements demand focus) (Monta & Stanley

2008:114). In Theatre of Cruelty, where a focus must be placed on cruelty, and cruelty's need for conscious engagement (see Chapter Two section 2.2.2.), I used contrast in order to heighten focus, aiming to engage the level of consciousness cruelty demands.

The stage language I created further referenced significant imagery from the original text, as well as new imagery that I interpreted as connected to The Absolute and the Theatre of Cruelty. I now discuss these images that appeared within the production.

#### **5.2.10.1 The imagery inspired by The Absolute within $\pi$**

As per Artaud's instruction of using imagery within Theatre of Cruelty that arouses intrinsic, emotional responses (Artaud 1977:82-83), I sourced imagery from the original text that addressed the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary and implemented new imagery that in addition to this, stimulated emotional responses from me.

The images used in Shepard's text, and how they were translated into this performance, aimed to blur the borders that separate reality from fantasy. Shepard's text's most significant imagery, such as the moon and the fire in the snow, highlights the emotional separation and disunity between the characters in space and time, but their infinite and inseparable emotional bonds (Bottoms 1998:226). These meanings once again refer back to the victim/perpetrator binary and the separation this poses between Beth and Jake, as mentioned above.

The projections became an important visual experience within the performances. The images I used were projected against the two sidewalls of the stage and the cyclorama. The images I projected provided me with a wider landscape of possibility in exploring The Absolute than a conventional and traditional theatre production without the use of filmed imagery would have done. Within film, time and space may be manipulated in order to show

The Absolute (merging what was past into present, showing it as present, alluding to the infinite).

**Fire and Snow:** In the original play, Lorrain and Sally set their home on fire and move to Ireland. At the end of the play, Meg looks out her window into the snow and sees the fire (Shepard 1986:95). This should technically not be possible as the house was set alight much earlier in the play, and in a completely different space. This means that Meg has seen across time and space and linked these two opposing elements together. This image presents a duality of opposing elements: fire and ice. It is symbolic of conflict, incompatibility, and the possibility of being joined by a new time (Graham 1995:211).

Within  $\pi$ , fire and snow are not shown together but instead used as main images in the respective segments, Pyre and Snāw. I recorded fire and distorted the image so that it appeared to be bulbous and flickered across the stage as Beth and Jake moved within it, creating the effect of a furnace. This was also the section wherein I constructed Beth and Jake to specifically go through the transitional phase of coming to exist in The Absolute in my production. This section had a crucible effect to it; Beth and Jake must be burnt and cleansed of worldly institutions in order to be remade in/through The Absolute, and without the presence of the victim/perpetrator binary.

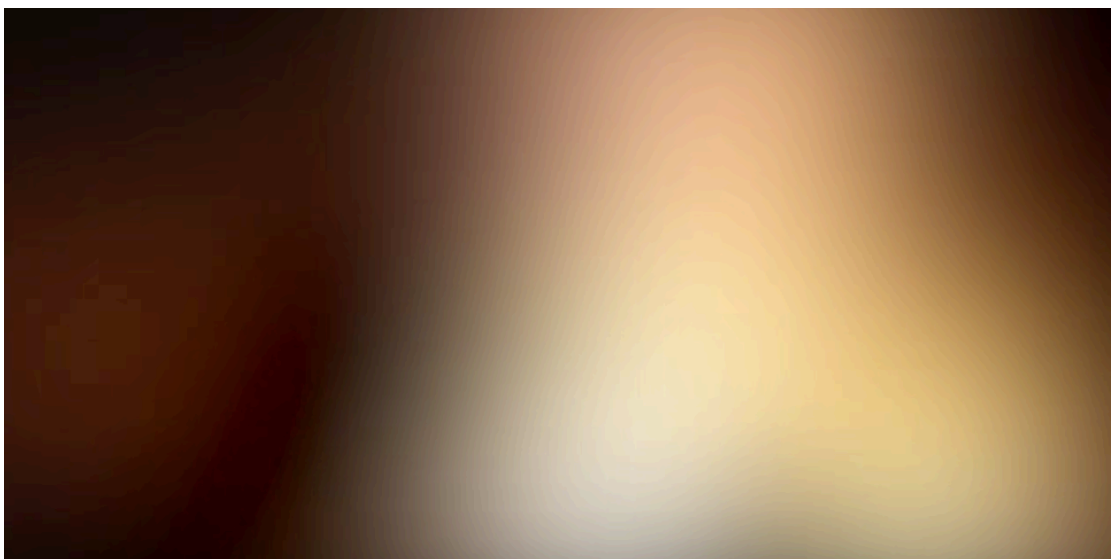


Figure 2: bulbous fire in the Pyre section  
Screen shot by author

In Snāw, the projections opened with a tight close-up of Beth's face. There were shadows around Beth's cheekbones that gave her face a skull-like appearance. The projection then snapped quickly into stock footage of snow that fell for several minutes, and then snapped to a close-up of Jake's face that appeared in warm light. The opening of the skull-like image framed the snow to appear as falling ash, which became reminiscent of the decay I discussed earlier (through mummification) within this section. The significance of indicating physical decay (symbolic death) within this section further links to the Pyre section. Once Beth and Jake moved through the cleansing fire within the Pyre section, their old identities passed on. They could now exist in The Absolute with no connections to the world as they previously understood it, and with that, the victim/perpetrator binary they were previously positioned in.



Figure 3: Beth's skull in the Snāw section  
Screen shot by author



Figure 4: snowing ash in the Snāw section  
Screen shot by author



Figure 5: Jake's face in the Snāw section  
Screen shot by author

**Clouds:** The significance of the soothing effects I associate with watching clouds was juxtaposed by using them in the Corollary section, which focuses on Beth and Jake's traumas. This juxtaposition addresses the necessary engagement the characters need with their violent pasts in order to embrace the calm and certainty that comes from an existence within The Absolute. This



is an existence that does not allow for a victim/perpetrator binary to exist, and therefore undoes the cyclical nature of violence, and the continuation of the scapegoating mechanism. I looped stock footage of clouds to go forwards and backwards, echoing the staccato nature of the physical vocabulary that took place on stage.



Figure 6: clouds in the Corollary section  
Screen shot by author

**Shadows:** I used shadows as a significant image in  $\pi$  to express Beth and Jake's physical bodies existing within The Absolute. Androgynous and sexless shadows opened the Corollary section, before the clouds appeared on loop. These shadows had the same bulbous nature as the distorted flames in the Pyre section. The final image in the Philia section was of a single sexless and androgynous body walking towards the camera. By manipulating lighting while filming, I was able to film a character walking towards the camera but have their body appear as a shadow. The light behind the character as they walked created an ethereal glow around them. As they neared the camera, the entire image dissolved into blinding whiteness. A victim/perpetrator binary cannot be attached to shadows, for once again, I position them as visual doubles of one another, as per Girard's doubling process (see Chapter Three section 3.1.2).





Figure 7: bulbous shadows in the Corollary section  
Screen shot by author

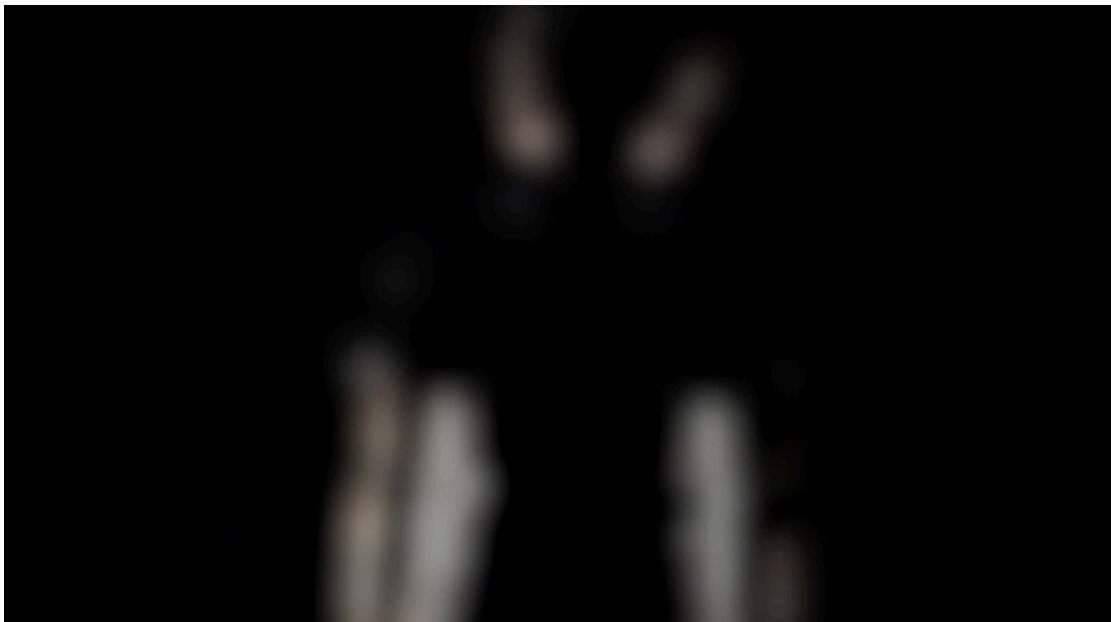


Figure 8: bulbous shadow figure in the Philia section  
Screen shot by author

**The embrace:** The significance of the embrace comes from the moment Beth and Jake are finally spatially but temporarily united in the original text. In the original text, Jake leaves Beth to be loved better by his brother. He kisses her

on the forehead and Beth has only a vague recognition of him (Shepard 1986:93). The image of the embrace was placed in the beginning of the Philia section. The Philia section's filmed segment used only the image of the embrace and the singular bulbous shadow walking towards the camera (as discussed above).

The Philia section is the final stage of the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary, where Beth and Jake are finally able to exist in The Absolute. The Absolute was previously only explored through the filmed projections in the production. Thus, this section juxtaposes the structure of the others: The Absolute taking place live onstage, and the filmed projections showing the process towards it. In the other sections the filmed projections explored The Absolute and the stage action showed the process towards it (or in it, as is the case in the Snāw section). It was important that the characters were present within The Absolute on stage to show the difference between this production and previous Theatre of Cruelty endeavours, where the characters died and therefore could not exist in The Absolute. By implementing Deleuze's notion of a Body without Organs, I was able to conceptually restructure this obstacle within my production.

The projection of the embrace captured the idea of mortality and the sombre realisation thereof. Whereas the embrace in the original text was Jake's final act before separating from Beth, in this production they embrace in order to depart together from their identities that are structured around worldly institutions, in order to now embrace The Absolute and the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary. In the original text, there was a kiss on the forehead. In this reinterpretation, there was physical touch suggesting a kiss, but never materialising, for a kiss would no longer serve their love that is now transcendental and not sexually driven.

While the image played, Jake stood still on the highest point of the structure, moving slowly in a circular motion to watch the embrace on all three walls while being caught in the wind. Beth circled the structure on the stage floor, also watching their past selves. Once the image ended, Beth joined him at the

highest point of the structure, to join him in their new existence and give in to its thrill and excitement. Here, the stage language and imagery highlighted the absence of sexual desire. It highlighted the new presence of transcendental love, thus destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary by immersing the characters in *The Absolute*, which rejects all worldly institutions such as the victim/perpetrator binary.



Figure 9: the embrace in the Philia section  
Screen shot by author

The stage language and the images that amplified it were directorially driven by *The Absolute*, which was implemented in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary within Beth and Jake's relationship. The victim/perpetrator binary is destabilised in each section of *π*, by reinterpreting the relationship between Beth and Jake to centre on the experience of transcendental love and by positioning the previous violence they sustained as a constructive force within the context of this study. The stage language and imagery, created in specification with *The Absolute*, therefore assists in destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary.

I now conclude this chapter in order to move on to Chapter Six, which will reflect on this praxis, as well as the previous four chapters.

### 5.3. Conclusion

This chapter discussed and unpacked my directorial choices in applying Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and the notion of The Absolute in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary that previously existed between Beth and Jake in their original relationship, as set up by Shepard in *A lie of the mind*. It drew theoretically from Chapters One, Two, Three and Four, which assisted me in practically implementing theory in order to achieve what I did with the production, and the vocabulary provided by Girard helped focus decisions I made directorially directly regarding the character constructions of Beth and Jake, so as to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary. I will now proceed to reflect and analyse choices made in the production so as to conclude this study in Chapter Six, which is also the concluding chapter in this study.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

### 6.1. Chapter Introduction

This study interrogated Antonin Artaud's concept of The Absolute in a reinterpretation of Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind* (1986). I explored the violent relationship between the protagonists Beth and Jake, in context of the victim/perpetrator binary set up in the original play text. I used a vocabulary informed by René Girard's work on violence, victimisation, and scapegoating, and then applied this to Artaud's notion of The Absolute, in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary in Beth and Jake's relationship. Within this study, I argued that a directorial treatment of The Absolute may assist in destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary present in Beth and Jake's relationship, as it stands in *A lie of the mind*. I then reconstructed Beth and Jake's relationship in the production  $\pi$  (De Wet 2015) to exist within The Absolute, without the victim/perpetrator binary present.

Chapter One of this study provided an introduction to the research, unpacking my research methodology and my research question. Chapter Two focused on Antonin Artaud's theatre philosophies, the Theatre of Cruelty, and the notion of The Absolute. In Chapter Three, I discussed the work of René Girard, and delved into his notions of the mimetics of desire, violence, victimisation, and scapegoating. I also provided a link between Artaud and Girard, which led me into Chapter Four. Chapter Four of this study unpacked Shepard's original text, *A lie of the mind*, and then analysed Beth and Jake's existing relationship in accordance with the vocabulary provided by Girard, and Artaud's notion of The Absolute. In Chapter Five, I discussed and analysed my praxis – unpacking directorial decisions and creative choices implemented in  $\pi$  – that link back to the previous four chapters.

Now, in Chapter Six, I conclude my study and reflect back to Chapter One, revisiting my research question; sub questions; my research methodology, and my problem statement.

## 6.2. Addressing the problem statement

As stated in Chapter One, my review of scholarship before and during this study pointed out the following:

- The Absolute as a primary aim in Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is under-researched in contemporary Theatre of Cruelty applications, and Theatre of Cruelty, as a mode of theatre, has long been misinterpreted.
- There are no significant studies of theatre performance in an Artaudian tradition that utilise a complementary Girardian framework to read and develop character relationships in theatre performance.
- There is a paucity of research on Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind* compared to his other play texts, and no analysis of the existing relationship between Beth and Jake that explores the relationship as anything other than one dictated by gender violence.

Therefore, this research aimed to contribute to the above-mentioned gaps in research. In Chapter Two, I addressed the first bullet, by unpacking and discussing the perimeters and possibilities of The Absolute as an Artaudian notion, which is the unity between body, mind and soul, and an identity apart from worldly institutions. I further discussed the Theatre of Cruelty and the misconceptions around the term cruelty; explaining that cruelty is not to be understood literally, and that Theatre of Cruelty is a theatre that explores brutal consciousness when engaging with the world; not violence and bloodshed, as is often assumed.

Towards the end of Chapter Three, and in Chapter Four and Five, I addressed the second bullet. I merged Artaud's notion of The Absolute and Girard's understanding of the apocalypse, connecting the two with a through line of transcendentalism. I was also able to connect their respective understandings of violence and sacrifice. As previously mentioned, Girard and Artaud both accept violence to have a purifying element to it, which allows for a physiological change. This links to their use of the metaphor of the plague to

demonstrate the effect of violence, and of theatre; that theatre should function as the plague does, affecting and infecting all it comes into contact with (as violence does). The connection between Girard and Artaud allowed me to construct an intricate theoretical thread that wove together The Absolute and concepts around victimisation and scapegoating that made it possible for me to answer my research question.

In attending to the final bullet above, I discussed Shepard's *A lie of the mind* in Chapter Four of this study, dissecting elements of the play in accordance with the outcomes of this research, and motivated a reframing of the violence present in Beth and Jake's relationship. This reframing offers an alternative reading to the traditional reading that emphasises gender violence. The Artaudian and Girardian frameworks discussed in this study allow me to reframe the violence within Beth and Jake's relationship as an aid in achieving The Absolute within a broad Artaudian and specifically, Theatre of Cruelty context.

By reflecting on the information provided in Chapters' Two up until Four, I ascertain that this research managed to address the problem statement(s) provided in Chapter One of this study. This leads me to discuss Chapter Five, which essentially sought to answer my research question through using practice-as-research (which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter).

### **6.3. Answering the research question and sub-questions**

This study set out to answer the following question:

How can a directorial treatment of Artaud's 'The Absolute' destabilise the victim-perpetrator binary in *A Lie of the Mind* (Shepard 1986)?

By drawing conclusions from Chapters' Two, Three, Four, and Five, I can confirm that a directorial treatment of Artaud's notion of The Absolute can destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary in Shepard's *A lie of the mind*, by



providing a method of reconceptualisation and reconstruction of the relationship between the two protagonists, Beth and Jake. These two protagonists, as stated in Chapter Four, embody the central narrative within their relationship, and exemplify most clearly the victim/perpetrator binary.

By using *The Absolute* as a directorial focus I was able to reconstruct an identity for both characters, and for their relationship, apart from worldly institutions, which as stated in Chapter Two are dictated by language and religion (De Vos 2011:41). An identity within *The Absolute* is one that in this case study, removed sexual desire and replaced it with transcendental love in the reconstruction of Beth and Jake's relationship. Sexual desire, as discussed in Chapter Three and Four, is considered in an Artaudian framework to be a worldly institution. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the characters were already separated from other worldly institutions in Shepard's original text, such as the full physical use of their bodies, the presence of a dictator-god-figure, and the use of rational and conventional language.

Therefore, by using *The Absolute* as a directorial focus, I was able to remove other worldly institutions from their relationship, and refocus the violence within their relationship to be re-understood as a mechanism in aiding the state of *The Absolute* (for the purposes of this study). *The Absolute*, as a directorial focus, destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary because it does not acknowledge the presence or existence of a binary system of classification and segregation. To exist within *The Absolute*, there must be a unity between the body, mind, and soul, and this unity can only happen once an individual is freed from worldly institutions.

However, as this study demonstrated, the presence alone of *The Absolute* does not necessarily destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary. These two different concepts work alongside one another. By initially understanding what *The Absolute* entails, I was able to approach Girard's notions of victimisation, perpetration, and scapegoating from a specific angle. This angle entailed implementing a metaphysical and transcendental approach to Girard's notions, as enforced through an Artaudian framework. Once I adopted this

perspective, it was possible to re-read the violence present in Beth and Jake's relationship, and then destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary conceptually. This re-reading made it then possible to reconstruct the characters' relationship, with a desire to attain The Absolute as a state of existence, which was then a possibility, because the victim/perpetrator binary had been destabilised.

In addressing the above research question, I also had the following sub-questions, which were answered in their respective chapters. I provide here a brief summation of each question's answer, according to my study's findings.

- What is Theatre of Cruelty?

Theatre of Cruelty is an Artaudian mode of theatre that seeks to employ a sensorial, metaphysical experience for its audience. A Theatre of Cruelty production deals with contemporary social content (Jannarone 2010:192; Artaud 1977:71-72). Controlled by a Creator, a Theatre of Cruelty endeavour sets out to revive the suppressed and repressed subconscious of every individual that comes to experience it. This mode of theatre is not 'theatrical' and presentational, or representational; it is life, shared with an audience in a chosen time frame (Artaud 1977:70-71).

- What is The Absolute?

The Absolute is a state of being that encompasses a connection between an individual's body, mind, and soul. This connection is fuelled by an identity that is founded outside of worldly institutions, which are dictated by language and religion (De Vos 2011:41). To exist within The Absolute requires a death of one's previous identity and construction of self, and a rebirth in this new state through a process of symbolic self-immolation (Jannarone 2010:192).

- How does René Girard frame violence?

For Girard (2013:28, 31, 53), violence is like a plague in that it cannot be cured; it can only consciously be engaged with. Girard accepts that the presence of violence encourages more violence, creating an on-going epidemic. He understands violence to be an innate impulse that all individuals possess. Girard (2013:18) argues that the threat of vengeance in outbreaks of violence is what must be controlled and contained in order to prevent a further spread of violence. Girard (1994:343; 2013:36) frames sexual desire as a primary cause of violence throughout history and notes the intricate relationship between sexual desire and violence, as well as the misconceptions around each of these individual concepts that further propagates violence.

- How can the binary positioning of victims and perpetrators of violence be destabilised in order to attain The Absolute?

The binary positioning of victims and perpetrators can be destabilised by understanding and applying Girard's notion of the scapegoating mechanism. By accepting that all individuals are scapegoats within a specific framework and system, one must accept that individuals cannot be framed as respective perpetrators and victims of violence (Girard 2013:169). By implementing an understanding of the scapegoating mechanism, I was able to reconstruct Beth and Jake's relationship to exist without the victim/perpetrator binary present. The destabilisation of this binary, and the removal of it within the reconstructed relationship, is how The Absolute was then attained as a state of being within the context of this study.

- How can Girard's ideas be used to generate an appropriate vocabulary to analyse the violence in Beth and Jake's relationship in Sam Shepard's *A lie of the mind*?

As stated above, by unpacking and understanding Girard's notion of scapegoating, the way in which violence and victimisation is grappled with changes. Therefore, Girard's ideas provided a complementary vocabulary to Artaud's philosophies that I dealt with in this study. The combination of Girard's ideas and Artaud's philosophies enabled me to frame violence as a purifying act, which allowed Beth and Jake to attain The Absolute and to move away from the idea of violence in *A lie of the mind* (in their relationship specifically).

- How can I integrate the Artaudian notion of The Absolute in Theatre of Cruelty, and Girard's vocabulary around violence, victimisation, scapegoating and perpetrators of violence, into an appropriate directorial approach that will enable me to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary set up in the relationship between Beth and Jake in a theatrical production?

This sub-question's answer links to the previous sub-question. By linking Girard's above-mentioned notions to Artaud's notion of The Absolute, I was able to construct a focused and guided directorial framework that provided a method of applying The Absolute in a Theatre of Cruelty production, which previous endeavours in Theatre of Cruelty lacked, and which caused the failure of The Absolute in practical implementation (such as Artaud's own attempts, where his characters died, and therefore could not exist within The Absolute). The directorial framework I constructed was informed by an understanding of the scapegoating mechanism, and how this destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary – which then allowed me to implement The Absolute. Moreover, the implementation of The Absolute allowed a further destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary, for The Absolute does not allow an existence connected to worldly institutions. A victim/perpetrator binary is positioned as a worldly institution within this study.

- How can The Absolute act as a conceptual tool to re-imagine the relationship between Beth and Jake?

Insofar as *The Absolute* allows an existence apart from worldly institutions, it makes a unity between the body, mind, and soul possible. *The Absolute* allows Beth and Jake an identity separate from the identities they embody in Shepard's original text, which keep them in a perpetual state of turmoil and disarray. *The Absolute* provides a method of identity making for Beth and Jake's relationship that moves away from destructive violence and the victim/perpetrator binary.

Now that I have addressed my research questions and connected sub-questions, I will discuss my research approach, and answer how this research implemented Carter's (2010:21) three guidelines in constructing a practice-as-research study, as provided in Chapter One section 1.3.

#### **6.4. My research approach and discoveries**

As stated in Chapter One, I use the practice-as-research methodology in qualitative research, which is a combination of different methodologies and research philosophies (Generic Qualitative Research Chapter 6 2014:2). The praxis of this study, *π*, became the practice-as-research and the basis for my Chapter Five. This praxis implemented findings and research unpacked in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. The body-mind connection of theoretical frameworks within practice-as-research (Feiner 2012:125-126) was then established and explored in the process and performance of creating and staging *π*. I was able to directorially explore *The Absolute* and the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary.

As previously stated in Chapter One: practice-as-research allows the researcher to discover new findings and research in the actual process of creating art out of existing literature; in this respect, the creative practice facilitates/is research (Carter 2010:18). In Chapters Two and Three, I discussed and unpacked the applicable notions and concepts I used for the purposes of this study: *The Absolute*, Theatre of Cruelty, violence, victimisation, and scapegoating. I then practically explored these concepts

and notions in my production, which created new and further understandings, as well as further pros and cons.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, The Absolute had only previously been applied and explored as a tool in reading and analysing character relationships (De Vos 2011:18). This study applied the notion of The Absolute practically. In light of practically structuring Beth and Jake's relationship within The Absolute, the theme of transcendental love allowed me to explore a relationship that used both digital and live performance in order to demonstrate this state. However, in light of some of the stipulations of The Absolute (for example, existing without one's physical organs), I still could only provide an artistic expression of this – and apply Gilles Deleuze's (Scheer 2004:6) understanding of organs as ideologies. To literally implement the stipulation of a performer's body without sexual and digestive organs, as Artaud originally wanted, would be physically impossible.

However, the practical implementation of The Absolute allowed me to nonetheless explore and provide various creative ways of implementing The Absolute. I chose, as suggested by De Vos (2011:18), to focus the implementation of The Absolute through the theme of transcendental love, which caused this research and its praxis to have a very specific outcome: Beth and Jake's relationship became centred on what I interpreted to be a poetic and metaphysical expression of transcendental love as I understand it. Different interpretations will yield different outcomes and results, so there is a possibility that further research into this topic with a different approach would yield a different interpretation and outcome.

Furthermore, as I began practically exploring the notions and concepts prevalent in this research, I found that my approach needed the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary and The Absolute to work in a mutual relationship with one another. I could not implement The Absolute as a state without destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary, and I could not destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary without applying The Absolute into Beth and Jake's relationship. I also discovered that the level of consciousness

(cruelty) which Artaud demands in the Theatre of Cruelty, translated far more directly into my directorial process and the way in which I engaged with the research and performance material. As a Creator, I became acutely aware of choices and decisions that I would have overlooked or described as superfluous in any other directing approach.

In trying to connect the body, mind, and soul, and portray this through a directorial approach, I often found myself tending towards moments of silence and using physical expression in the production instead of dialogue. I increasingly came to agree with Artaud's lamentation that language had failed him, and understood why he urged for a physical language to be adopted in a Theatre of Cruelty undertaking. This was both frustrating and equally challenging. In Chapter Two I argued that Artaud did not possess a language in his time that allowed for adequate verbal expression, and that the emergence of post-structuralist thinking has made such possibilities open to contemporary researchers. While I still agree that post-structuralist thinking has opened such possibilities, I do now understand that an attempt to express transcendental and metaphysical states predominantly in imagery and action within this framework is profoundly frustrating.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, practice-as-research supports creativity as a problem-solving mechanism. A practice-as-research study is a process of discovery, trial, rediscovery, and reflection; it therefore cannot benefit from a classification of success versus failure. It allows a flexible study (Carter 2010:18, 21). I understand and accept that my frustrations and challenges do not dictate or point to failures within my research. Instead, they provide opportunities for reflection and open dialogue surrounding my directorial framework, as discussed in Chapter Five. These challenges also encourage further research opportunities into Theatre of Cruelty.

I now revisit Carter's (2010:21) three guidelines that structured this practice-as-research study as a research methodology under the umbrella of qualitative research:



4. “It has to describe a forming situation” (Carter 2010:21):

The Absolute was previously argued to be only accomplishable in literary analyses, and not in practical application. I therefore used the case study of Beth and Jake’s relationship from *A lie of the mind* in order to explore the directorial possibilities of The Absolute. Alongside this, I provided a Girardian vocabulary, which focused the approach I took in order to explore The Absolute in the reconstruction of Beth and Jake’s relationship. The forming situation then became how The Absolute destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary in Beth and Jake’s relationship.

5. “It has to articulate the discursive and plastic intelligence of materials” (Carter 2010:21):

The materials I articulated into praxis were Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and the connected notion of The Absolute, alongside Girard’s notions of violence, victimisation, and scapegoating. This provided my practice-as-research study with a refined and focused articulation that allowed for outcomes only alongside the parameters of my research findings.

6. “It has to establish the necessity of design” (Carter 2010:21):

The Theatre of Cruelty manifestos provided by Artaud in *The Theatre and its Double* (1977) provided me with a clear guideline in the process of designing the praxis and outcomes of the research. These manifestoes and their guidelines also meant that in exploring The Absolute, I had a clear process to follow. Additionally, by implementing De Vos’s suggestion of using transcendental love as a theme in approaching The Absolute, I had a further guideline for designing  $\pi$ .

Throughout this chapter, I briefly discuss appropriate analyses of my process and research. I now provide an analysis and reflection of my production,

taking into consideration the parameters I set for myself, and my research question.

### **6.5. Analysis of and reflection of $\pi$**

When considering my research question and the clear parameters established and discussed above, I conclude that the praxis,  $\pi$ , answered my research question. I was able to, through the creation of the production, discover how implementing *The Absolute* as a directorial approach may assist in destabilising the victim/perpetrator binary in Beth and Jake's relationship.

Through the process and performance of the production, I discovered that *The Absolute* and *Theatre of Cruelty* requires, as Artaud stipulates, a different way of engaging with and understanding theatrical content. It required of me as the researcher and Creator to understand that I had to approach this theatrical endeavour as a small piece of life, and not as a staged production. I also discovered that I had to merge a philosophical and open mind-set with strict theoretical frameworks, which sometimes proved to be a conflicting experience. As a scholar and researcher, I initially struggled to consider that philosophical concepts such as metaphysics and the experience of transcendental love could be considered viable in an academic study. However, as I progressed and as my research grew, I began to understand the importance and academic necessity of these concepts within the work, and within academia. This understanding was further encouraged by engaging with René Girard's concepts as used in this study, which gave structure to metaphysical and transcendental concepts.

This study further asserted for me the relevance of Artaud's theatre philosophies and approaches in contemporary applications of theatre, and of approaching theatre in a contemporary academic context. Artaud's "phenomenology of suffering" (Sontag 1976:xx), in the context of this study, became more than a blueprint. It became a relevant action plan in approaching theatre that goes beyond entertainment value, and provides an experience that provides an opportunity for theatre practitioners to reconnect

with their work in an intuitive, hyper-conscious manner.

My decision use the theme of transcendental love in  $\pi$  was discussed in Chapter Five in light of following Artaud's instruction to not make the subjects and inner meanings culturally specific. I now address in addition to this previous discussion, Artaud's specification within a Theatre of Cruelty production to focus the subjects and inner meanings on the "unrest of the time" (Artaud 1977:81). I, like Girard, find myself observing and engaging in a world that is becoming increasingly violent and divided. This divide is evident for me in global cultural, religious, and nationalist disruptions.<sup>143</sup> It is apparent for me that in reflecting on this research and Theatre of Cruelty production in a contemporary context, I provide an alternative discourse on violence, and how violence is engaged with and analysed.<sup>144</sup>

If I was to revisit my production and my directorial decisions, taking into consideration my parameters and research questions, I would have made use of more nature elements within the production. I would have used water and actual fire in the theatre space. I would also have liked a structure that was closer to the original set design I intended to use (see Chapter Five footnote 135), which was based on circular designs. I also would have had a fourth projector, thus projecting on every wall of the theatre, or perhaps design the projections so that they look as though they move from one wall to the next, suggesting yet another circular structure. In light of my stage language, I would have incorporated more elements of physical risk within the physical language.

In a reflective summary, I deduce that the production as it stands did answer my research question, and explored a specific possibility of approaching The

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<sup>143</sup> In my observation, these violent disruptions are often caused by religious, sexual, racial, social, political, and economic differences. I addressed the notion of universality in Chapter Two footnote 49, and acknowledge its problematic nature. While I do not advocate here for a singular truth or collective whole, I do suggest in my research (as Girard did previously) that by acknowledging similarities between people, an alternative route to violent resolve may be engaged with, and the binaries and worldly institutions that cause individuals to violently destroy may be, as this research suggests, destabilised.

<sup>144</sup> This study does not interrogate or apply any specific South African socio-political contexts. While I am a South African scholar, and this study took place at a South African university, it would have been counter-productive to limit/focus this research and its specific outcomes to specific cultural, political, and local socio-political discourse. Such an interrogation is encouraged for further research on this topic.

Absolute directorially in order to destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary. I now proceed to conclude this chapter, and the study at large.

## 6.6. Conclusion

This Chapter provided a reflection of my study, and surmised my previous five chapters, linking together and concluding important discoveries that formed part of answering my research question: how can a directorial treatment of Artaud's 'The Absolute' destabilise the victim/perpetrator binary in *A Lie of the Mind* (Shepard 1986)?

I may conclude that a directorial treatment of Artaud's *The Absolute* destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary in *A lie of the mind* because it provides an alternative approach to constructing identity; one that positions itself apart from worldly institutions, and therefore the victim/perpetrator binary. Furthermore, it requires an existence in this identity. Thus, *The Absolute* becomes a state of existence; outside and apart from worldly institutions, and thus, destabilises the victim/perpetrator binary.

Within the focus of this study, the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary in Beth and Jake's relationship was achieved by directorially engaging with the notion of *The Absolute*, and within *The Absolute*, replacing sexual desire in Beth and Jake's relationship with transcendental love. Furthermore, by reframing the violence Beth and Jake were subjected to in Shepard's original text as a purifying act that readied both characters for *The Absolute*, and not as a product of gender violence, I was able to engage with Girard's scapegoating mechanism and *The Absolute* in a manner that aided the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary within their relationship. A directorial engagement with *The Absolute* allowed me to reconstruct Beth and Jake's identities apart from their families and the model-disciple relationship encouraged by family ties, gender constructs, limitations of language, constructs of time and space, and the victim/perpetrator binary, which are all accepted in this study to be worldly institutions.

To conclude, I provide the following translated extract from Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty radio drama, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (To have done with the judgement of God) (1947), which encapsulates my exploration with The Absolute and the destabilisation of the victim/perpetrator binary within Beth and Jake's relationship: "When you will have made [them] a body without organs, then you will have delivered [them] from all automatic reactions and restored [them] to true freedom."

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**Appendix A: Original set design for Sam Shepard's production of *A Lie of the mind* (1986)**

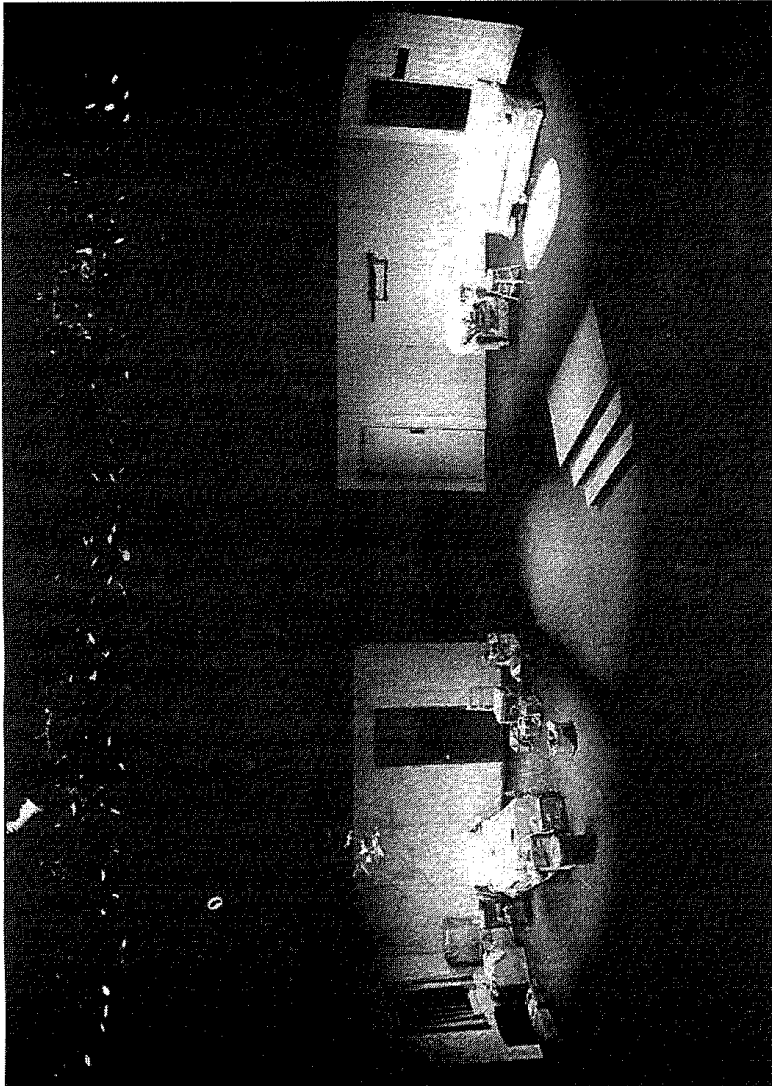
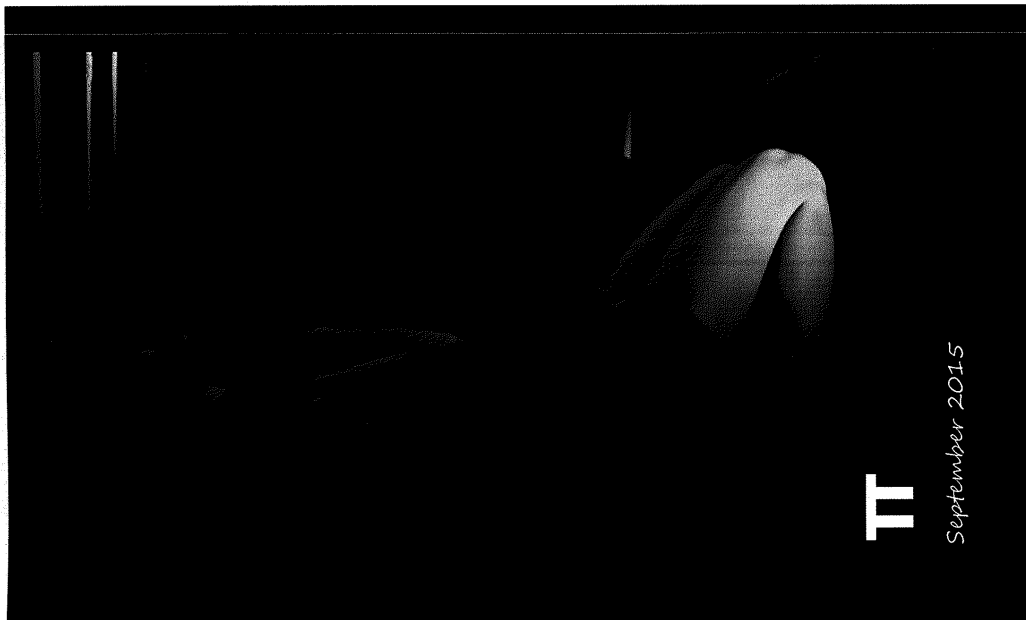


PHOTO © 1986 BY MARTHA SWOPE  
Setting for the New York production of "A Lie of the Mind." Designed by Andy Stacklin.



## Appendix B: The programme for $\pi$



*In love there is the idea of service, and one does not indefinitely serve the same being, there is nothing more exhaustible than the idea of devotion, besides, it seems to me a fundamental indiscretion that one can ask me this question... love is that unattainable thing of which one only speaks with a sealed mouth... there is no secret dream, there is no dark register that offers an account of what it is, this parish of satisfied realities, nothing, love is a forgotten feeling, and that's all.*

- antoinette strand

**3 till 5 September 19.00**

For the full experience, please join us every evening

## director's note

if we're lucky enough, we'll come across a piece of theatre in our lifetime that changes us, alters us, disturbs us, moves us, it will settle itself in our hearts and brains and forever remain undone. the possibility of being present to such an event is what makes me come time and time again into theatrical spaces – the anticipation of such presence fuels me.

years ago, i had the privilege of reading sam shepard's *a lie of the mind*, and what you bear witness to this evening is (all things considered) a re-interpretation of the relationship between the two lovers and protagonists, both and jake.

my dear audience, i will not strangle you with words of motivations in this program, nor will i attempt to try and prepare you for what you are about to take part in. i simply at this point want to write that the thoughts and feelings these two individuals have graced me with, have left me undone in the most incredible way.

i hope that by bringing them together in this event, i am able to give them something in return but then, i must also acknowledge that it is not for me to position myself as some god-like figure, granting life to a pair that is so ~~text~~ intricately woven together. for such fates, i would like to believe, will always find their way across space and time and back to one another.

oh, also, please do not feel bound by your seat. it is not a repressive anchor that aids in constraining your experience. i would be most glad for you to position yourself according to your viewing needs throughout the production. i just ask that you will be mindful of the experience of others and that of the performers.

i am humbled and honoured to share this with you.

mica

## special thanks

first and foremost, i give thanks to:

up arts for the space, for the printing of posters, for the set, and painting, and in this i must include all technical set up done by johnny heinemann and shilo nkaana. maritelle labuschagne, your help is always indispensable. you have been such a wonderful spirit in this process. spiro schoeman – thank you for always managing to interpret my arm movements and poor measuring skills into something tangible and now so structurally wonderful. secondly, i must acknowledge my vast technical team:

bonda makhele and fina rehmam, thank you for your help during the rehearsal process; your presence(s) in what sometimes seems like absurd tasks has made the world of difference to my time and sanity. maritje enamus, tshite du bulson & marelize wolmarans, i don't even know how or what – you have all been incredible. no thanks will be enough.

finally, to my supervisors:

prof marie-heleen coetzee, for your time and passion in this study and process. mr-almost-de chris broodryk, for frequently helping me find words to express what my heart wants to convey.

