

## Scene One/Warning Signs: Puritanism and the Early American Theatres of Cruelty

Anthony Kubiak

Television came over on the Mayflower. —Don DeLillo

1.

While it has become commonplace, following the work of Perry Miller and especially Sacvan Bercovitch, to see the Puritan "project" in terms of a progressive iconization of self as saint—the self as constructed hero emerging from the Puritan propensity "for epitome," to quote Bercovitch—this casting of self as principle player in a theological-political drama has never been discussed specifically in terms of theatre or theatrical ontology. The reasons might seem obvious—the Puritans vilified theatre, often for reasons that were oddly prescient; the theatre, like the Hollywood film of today, tended to demean women, and to focus undue attention on sex and violence. Theatre, moreover, in its reliance on the false and the illusory tended to coarsen sensibility, empathy and even perception itself.<sup>1</sup> In this the Puritan attack on theatre anticipated not only conservative Christian ideology of today, but also certain strains of feminism and cultural studies, as well.

I would like to suggest a reassessment of some of these early American Puritan texts—most particularly the diaries—through the ontological lens of *mise en scene* not only because these texts enact an uncanny grasp of theatrical consciousness, but because that consciousness represents the very re-emergence of the theatre that Puritanism had seemingly repressed, a theatre that in following ages saw an increasing, and increasingly unacknowledged, theatricalization of American culture.

This "newly discovered" theatricalization of America—which some have seen emerging in a modern American society, a society of the image and the sound bite, the society of television—was a theatricalization that had its roots in the very inception, the very idea of America. From the Puritan concerns with self/surveillance, through the Franklinesque focus on the mere appearance of

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propriety and prosperity, from the culture of the con-man, the spectacles of religious revival at Cane Ridge, Tennessee, and the Barnumesque spectacles of nineteenth and twentieth-century America, right up to the inevitable discovery of television and the appearance of the American president-as-actor, American culture has been unknowingly immersed in and formulated through theatre, through the ontologies and strategies of seeing and being seen, revelation and concealment.

It is the unknowingness of that immersion that fascinates me—for all of the professed hatred of sham and theatricality in American culture, we are perhaps more than any other a society of the spectacle. And yet in our demand for the authentic, the true, beneath the masks of sham and mere appearance, we demonstrate what is, I think, a unique blindness to the nature of theatricality—*blindsight*<sup>2</sup> that I believe finds its nascent expression in Puritan writing.

These texts describe the surveillance phenomenology of theatre in very different ways: watching and being watched in the Puritan style of John Winthrop and Michael Wigglesworth, of course, but also the awareness of watching oneself watch—seeing oneself through the watcher's eye, the making of a seeming self through the insubstantiality of the (once) seen—in the writings of Thomas Shepard. This was, in Puritan society, a long series of theatrical meditations that had no theatre at its conclusion, not unlike the long and tortured meditations of another genius whose ruminations realized no theatre, Antonin Artaud. In fact, the writings of Artaud, also obsessed with self-surveillance, represent an almost absolute inversion of Puritan ontology.

2.

Artaud's *Second Manifesto for the Theatre of Cruelty* is an anti-colonial text that presents a scenario, *The Conquest of Mexico*, which purports to enact, from the viewpoint of his theatre of cruelty, the defeat of Mexico (in the person of Montezuma) by Spain (in the person of Cortez), and the decimation of Mexico's inhabitants. This scenario was chosen, Artaud explains, in order to "pose the question of colonization"—most probably the French colonization of Algeria, and the attempted colonization of Indochina—and through the issues of colonization to foreground the moral and ideological scandal of racism.

Although he does not raise the issue directly, the scenario as it exists seems to suggest, in its violence and its excess, the concomitant issue of what has been called endocolonization, a term used by theorists to indicate—in a somewhat simplistic rendering—the processes by which not only cultures, but the structures of thought that give shape to cultures are themselves colonized by dominant ideologies; when dominant cultures take over and marginalize indigenous peoples,

for example, they not only restructure culture itself, they restructure the very ways that indigenous peoples think. Furthermore, dominant culture perpetuates itself by endocolonizing itself, determining not merely what its own subjects think and believe, but how they think and how they believe. Thus dominant culture controls not only what is acceptable to think, it also controls the possibilities of what can be thought. Although, as Gramsci points out, the structuring of hegemonic forces is quite a bit messier than I have presented it here—allowing, for example, new counter-forces to emerge from within hegemony—the "through-line" of endocolonization theory is that the endocolonized mind, because its thought strategies have been changed, remains blind to its own colonization.

Endocolonization determines the edges of consciousness, in other words, and determines those edges through a theatrical reciprocity—a theatre of mind which projects itself as culture, and a theatricalized culture that in turn infects the processes of perception. Thought, mind, and culture are thus as much the product of theatre as theatre is a "manifestation" of culture. Artaud is thus able to theatricalize Cortez's conquest not only because conquest is intrinsically theatrical, but also because the endocolonized mind thinks through the display and representation of power and dominance. Artaud's scenario, then, shows us theatre recuperating colonization, but it also shows us thought colonized by/as theatre.

The kind of power deployment Artaud suggests in this scenario works only in the absence of critical (Brechtian) distance—what we would term a theory of performance, but a theory that incorporates at its center the ontologic and epistemological problem of the theatrical as the condition of consciousness, a condition which, in the absence of such a theory, remains concealed to itself. The push toward thought—*critical* thought—that somehow moves through the coarser structures of the concealing mind and duplicitous consciousness and toward something both terrifying and sublime in Artaud's work, suggests his strong desire to identify that which is divine in consciousness and thought itself. Note that the issue is to identify, not identify with—Artaud's desire is to be the divine, not merely to lay himself subservient to it. There is, nonetheless, a pursuit of moral purity in Artaud, emanating from his Gnostic belief in the fallenness of flesh, that has strong Puritanical echoes. For while Calvinism rejected Manichaeism, the rejection was often not convincing.

Thus while the intersection between Artaud's manifesto and the theatricalization of America, or even more problematically, the Puritan mind, may seem odd at first glance, the correlations are, I think, productive. The Puritans were, of course, both colonizers and colonized. I am suggesting that the colonization of America, like Cortez and Artaud's colonization of Mexico, appears first as theatre. But while Artaud theatricalizes colonization within a

performative cruelty that ironically resists theatricalization in its search for life, in America colonization occurs through the efficacy of a life that is both increasingly theatricalized and resistant to any attempts to distance or theorize it. This stage was set in the most unlikely of places, in the Puritan world of New England where theatre itself was anathema—where in fact theatre was repressed, was repression itself—and the Puritan diary (among other surveillance techniques) took its place.<sup>3</sup>

Now, in order for theatre to be "repressed" there must, obviously, be some sort of theatre already in place. If, as was the case for the Puritans, there was no *established* theatre, if theatre existed only as a condition or possibility of mind, then theatre becomes its own origin and end—the conscious mind, in other words, does not find its contours in an externalized structure, in (a) play, but only in yet another expression or representation of mind-play. This was certainly the case with Artaud, who created virtually no theatre in his life, a situation that Michel Foucault cites as the root cause of his madness—a closed theatricalized consciousness which finds no escape through *mise en scene* to the "real" stage. In the case of the Puritans, theatre, though absent as an institution, nonetheless acts interiorly as a kind of performance feed-back loop which forms the very basis of morality—one is constantly assessing and reassessing *how one acts* to order to ascertain if one has *acted well*. In fact, even one's intentions are objectified as exhibition or *show* through the interior watching, and are moved out of the realm of the merely intentional into the realm of the performative (how I present myself to myself), and into performance itself: I act, and I act well, but finally I realize that acting well reveals nothing about the condition or even the existence of my true self. Acting well might in fact be the best cover-up for a self that has denied God and his ways. My performance, in other words, finally refers to nothing but itself—it, as Augustine charges, turns its back on life. The issue, ultimately, in the Puritan mind becomes the ability to construct one's own *character*, to construct oneself as a character, to construct character itself. Here is where the issue of the performative gives way, it seems to me, to theatre. For performativity, as used, for example, by Judith Butler, denotes the conditions under which one becomes or "does" one's body/identity. The process, unlike the becoming or doing of theatre, is largely unconscious and concealed, but influenced by any number of cultural norms and biases. Theatre, on the other hand, seemingly brings into view the processes of enacting itself, and in doing so largely ignores or forgets what is already in place—gender identity, for example. Theatre becomes a kind of second-rate performativity, a fake performativity, while performativity itself becomes the more inclusive term because it exists *a priori* to theatre. But this ignores, among other issues, the problem of *precession*: the theoretical notion of the performative, like the performative itself, is grounded

in and emerges from the idea of theatre: it is theatre that in essence "gives birth" to the category of the performative, both historically and, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out, epistemologically as well.

Yet this theoretical quibble is no simple invocation to cultural constructivist views of theatricalization—that it is theatre and not the performative that best describes the coming to being of identity. Butler herself seems to challenge such simple notions of constructivism, and indeed, the issue of cultural constructivism is itself challenged through the example of the Puritan diary. In New Canaan the cultural voices were loud and clear. It was obvious to the Puritans what they must be, what they must become, and why. They set about *consciously* to construct that self, and yet lived in constant awareness of their failures. If the cultural definitions were so powerful, what are we to make of the fact that, try as they might, these diarists could *not* construct or reconstruct desire and will? It is, of course, unknowable if these men were as sinful as they say they were, or if they seemed or even acted so. To suggest that they "really" didn't want to be good and were just acting merely underscores my point—at one level at least the Puritan experience seems to suggest that one cannot change the lineaments of will or desire to conform to ideology (indeed, at some level this is one of the central issues in the history of Western drama). The failure, finally, to construct that life through an unrealized theatrical ontology links Artaud and Puritanism—both I would argue, although in very different ways, suffer the derangement of theatre activated but unrealized. Both are left bereft by a theatre operating only as consciousness. There is a strange affinity in the means to the presumed end—the purification of life and thought, "a meticulous and unremitting pulverization of every insufficiently fine, insufficiently matured form," a need to restrain the spirit from taking its leap "until it has passed through all the filters and foundations of existing matter" then redoubling its labor "at the incandescent edges of the future."<sup>4</sup> The words are, of course, Artaud's, but they seem imbued with the spirit of Puritanical desire—the desire for a salvation which was intense in its focus and purity, but never known for certain. Indeed, Artaud's whole notion of a theatre of cruelty stands in strange and even harrowing relation to the Puritan ethos—the strict moral "athleticism," the activation of a theatricality that seeks "not theatre but life itself," the powerful emphasis on a life delivered from delusion. "This cruelty," says Artaud, referring to theatre itself, "can thus be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid."<sup>5</sup> Words that might have sprung, albeit with a certain moral subterfuge, from the pen of the pious Puritan Michael Wigglesworth himself.

The Puritan "theatre of morals" also moves outside the more strictly theoretical ideas of Artaud. The self-observation and self-correction of the

Puritans is employed by means of recollected memory and desire and is similar, in some respects, to Stanislavskian technique, and through him, to American Method acting. A kind of theatricalized narrative is constructed on the basis of this recollection which allows the director/moralist to ascertain the status of his intentions—were they pure (do not enter the theatre with mud on your feet)? Was behavior seemly? Was righteousness observed? Yet at the moment that this theatricality emerges, it is repressed *as theatre* and seemingly reemerges as "life," as the correction of false motive, false consciousness, or sinful desire. Theatre thus becomes in Puritanism the repressed origin of life, the means by which one is saved or becomes righteous—becomes, in other words, an authentic human being—"a child of God." "Theatre is born in its own disappearance," writes Derrida, "and the offspring of this movement has a name: man."<sup>6</sup> While the Puritans sought "man"—their own personal identity and salvation in Christ—Artaud sought to erase man entirely, to create a theatre that "sweeps away human individuality, and in which man is only a reflection."<sup>7</sup> Thus in both Artaud and Puritanism, "man," self, identity, is created through the very absence of "real" theatre—in Artaud because he cannot realize his theatre of cruelty, and in Puritanism because it remains blind and resistant to theatre. Yet in both Artaud and Puritanism, it is also the failure to activate this theatre that is the problem, whereas later on in American drama it is the failure to activate theatrical theory that is the problem. In either case, one is consigned to blindness unless one sees the inevitable interplay between a consciousness that is formulated *as if*, and its expression as theatre—a theatre that is inevitably representational, perhaps even at some moments irresolutely real as *as-if*.

## 3.

In the chapter called "The Castaway" in Melville's *Moby-Dick*,<sup>8</sup> Pip, the cabin boy, falls overboard in the heat of the whale hunt. He manages to stay afloat, but as the ship disappears over the horizon, and he finds himself bobbing in the undifferentiated sea, he goes mad, sees "the multitudinous God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs," sees "God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it." He expresses that ineffable revelation, however, in a most distressing way:

"This way comes Pip—poor boy! would he had died, or I; he's half horrible to me. He too has been *watching all these interpreters*—myself included—and look now, he comes to read, with that unearthly idiot face. Stand away again and hear him. Hark!"

"I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look."

"Upon my soul, he's been studying Murray's grammar."<sup>9</sup>

So also the earliest moments of the American experience as parable: the approach of the first band of Puritans led by John Winthrop writing his proclamation, he tells us, while they are still out on the Atlantic Ocean, the idea of civilization-as-theatre formulating itself before civilization even takes root, emerging instead, like Pip's madness, on the undifferentiated sea, and finding its expression in the invocation to the seeing and being seen, to the interpreting and the seeing of interpretation; the proclamation ordains the new land "a city on a hill," an object of wonder, a dramatic melding of set and character, actors strutting against the backdrop of the New Canaan before the assembled gaze of the world, "I look, you look, he looks." The proclamation, in fact, bespeaks a man and a community already laboring under the watchful gaze of man and God. It is a community founded on watching—God watching them, they watching each other, each watching herself, and watching herself watch:

So the ground of love is an apprehension of some resemblance in the things loved to that which affects it, this is the cause why the Lord loved the Creature, so far as it hath any of his Image in it, he loves his elect because they are like himself, he beholds them in his beloved son; so a mother loves her child, because she thoroughly conceives a resemblance of herself in it. Thus it is between the members of Christ, each discerns by the work of the spirit his own image and resemblance in another.<sup>10</sup>

In the mirroring projection of self-identity in otherness, one sees oneself in the other, in one's gaze upon the other, and sees in the other's gaze the projection of one's own guilt or glory—in the eyes of the other, the eyes I give to the other, I perceive my possibility and my failure:

The eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our god in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world, we shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of god.<sup>11</sup>

Succeeding or failing in the charge that god has given them, in other words, will turn their endeavor into a story, a story enacted even now before the eyes of the world. Thus the failure or success of the noble experiment is already being sealed in a kind of grand play produced in the theatre of humanity. The mechanism of the experiment—and the means by which we gauge its success or failure—lay in the eye of Puritan watchfulness, playing upon the actions of men. This was "a complex mimetic logic," in the words of Frederick Dolan,

a circular chain in which Winthrop's community mimes God's law (as revealed in the Bible), and the world, through miming the Puritan community, is brought to God; an endless chain of similitude, resemblance, and identification governs the colony's theologicopolitical strategy.<sup>12</sup>

The similitude and search for resemblances, the captivation by mimesis that so distressed Artaud, means also, of course, that one is always alive to difference, to otherness as the sign and symptom of one's failure.

The intense, self-absorbed and ironically ego-enhancing activity of self observation is, as has often been observed, part and parcel of the Puritan mindset in general. Indeed, in the earliest Puritan America watchfulness of all kinds was the key to salvation and even survival, from the "panoptical" Puritan concept of the village—central placement of the church, the village surrounding common pasture land, the very compactness of the village itself making all who lived within it visible to all—to the self-examination and preaching activities of ministers, to the public display of sinners, to the use of the diary as a means of objectifying a self that could then be measured against Puritan standards of behavior. Everett Emerson writes:<sup>13</sup>

[The] personal documents reveal much about the nature of Puritanism. Self examination by means of a diary had obvious virtues. The self that examines and the self examined could be distinguished as the diarist objectified his experiences, his feelings, his reasonings. What he learned about himself he recorded and by externalizing it felt a greater sense of control.<sup>14</sup>

The diary, then, helps the author narrativize his life and observations. He creates a true fiction, what Jean Genet calls a "false spectacle borne of a true illusion," through the form of the diary and uses it to *translate* his perceptions into "facts" that could be scrutinized over and over again. He utilizes, more than anything else, his memory of the day's events, and his memory turns those events into



something like the fact of memory-identity—the diary thus represents the contents of memory, as well as what that memory could not contain. The Puritan diary, moreover, takes on historical interest for us—it provides a "glimpse into the Puritan mind." And yet the memory that the diary represents also resists historicization just as any personal memories resist historicization unless they are ratified by others who can verify what memory gives over. Memory demands witness, in other words, to move into the domain of the historical. And it is the private and personal nature of the diaries that generates this resistance—how do we know that what they represent was in any way typical of the "Puritan mind," or even that such a thing as a Puritan mind existed?

And yet the form of the personal diary also resists the status of "mere" memory. In the diaries after all, the observation of other selves (the Puritan village *cum* institution) was shifted to the observation of self by self *through the eye of the other*, thus activating a consciousness that was grounded in *mise en scene*. The form and content of the diary, in other words, is generated through the very public (historical) eye of Puritan watchfulness—the spiritual and behavioral concerns, the Calvinist doctrine, the ethos of the diary itself, were all shared communal experiences, as were, presumably, the experiences being recorded. But this decidedly Brechtian-like distancing fails the Puritan imagination precisely because—though it is profoundly theatrical—it lacks an actual theatre through which the personal vision of one's struggle can be assimilated into, or judged against, a communal consciousness. The repressive aspects of theatre-as-social-control are here ameliorated when we see theatre's lack in the neurotic consciousness of Puritan writing. Even though theatre in some sense formulates (rather than "celebrates") communal attitudes and biases, it also provides an essential outlet through which those biases can be critiqued (leading, of course, to yet another round of formulated biases and attitudes). The earliest impulse toward theatrical consciousness in America, and American's deep distrust of that very theatricality, find their sources in the earliest days of the American experience, where such a formulated community might "rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our Commission and Community."<sup>15</sup>

#### 4.

For a people who formulated themselves so completely through the promiscuity of the other/self's voyeuristic eye, it is perhaps no surprise that through the past 400 hundred years this group of colonizers has itself undergone so many recolonizations. True to the theatrical ontology of absence which haunted them, the Puritans, through rehearsals, revisions and rewrites, have seemingly dissolved into an endless precession of dramatic images. For many

years the butt of jokes and caricatures both in America and Europe, the Puritans early on were often portrayed as stiff, pious busybodies, concerned not only with their own salvation, but with the salvation of all those with whom they lived, fearing sin in others as much as in themselves because sin in any part of the community could bring down God's wrath on the whole of that community—guilt and responsibility moving in the realm of the Imaginary. The image of sinners set out for public display in stocks, with their sins "writ full large" in signs about their necks quickly became stereotypical of the Puritanical rage for guilt and punishment through, in part, the representations of sin and guilt. The caricatures of Puritanism, in fact, did much to help the literary careers of nineteenth-century artists. Most noteworthy perhaps, but not alone in his condemnation of Puritanism, was Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Later, in the middle and latter part of our own century, thanks in large part to the work of Perry Miller, the Puritans were recuperated as a more human, less fanatical religious group. They drank, they liked sex and good food, they laughed and danced and read poetry, all with relative abandon, all seemingly without guilt or remorse. They were a people who valued progress and prosperity, and linked the prosperity of the individual and community with righteousness and proper piety. This, along with their penchant for observation and exactitude moved quite easily into the strictures of commerce and the empirical sciences. These Puritans were a focused and deliberate people, to be sure, but full of vigor and life, appreciative of what life offered them in the pleasures with which they surrounded themselves.

Then, seemingly swimming against this revisionism, there was Michael Wigglesworth,<sup>16</sup> a dyspeptic, nosy moralizer obsessed with guilt, "a poor, sinful worm" undeserving even of God's wrath. Whatever recuperation the Puritans might have undergone is undone the minute Wigglesworth's diaries are opened. Even his name seems a caricature of Puritanical ridiculousness and absurdity that is quickly confirmed as one reads him, and reads about him.

Wigglesworth was a man without humor, "chief among sinners," with seemingly no appreciation for pleasure or any of the forms pleasure might take. At one point, early in his diary, he admonishes one of his students who had left Harvard College for a few days of fun in Ipswich, explicitly disobeying Wigglesworth's orders that he not go:

I told him also of the dangers of pleasure and how they had like to have been my ruin. Knowing the danger of them therefore I dissuade both myself and others. And so I bade him farewell. But that very evening he was again at play I think among the students and when he saw me coming he slinked home and left

his game whereby I gather he is more afraid of me a poor, sinful worm than of God.<sup>17</sup>

Although we might appreciate the severity of an absence without leave, Wigglesworth's outrage at finding his charge playing a game with fellow students later that day is unintentionally funny, although, as the editor of his diaries points out, Wigglesworth seems not to appreciate the ridiculousness of his own tirades, or his over-zealous response.

In typical Puritan diaretic style, Wigglesworth does not limit his observations to the students in his charge, he also inveighs against others in his community, "Lord in mercy heal, or I know not what will become of New England." At one point Wigglesworth launches into an extraordinarily obsessive meditation on his neighbor's door, which swings back and forth at night in the wind:

I cannot tell whether it were it my duty to give them some hint that owe them. When I think 'tis a common thing, and that 'tis impossible but that the owners should have seen them in that case, and heard them blow to and fro, and that it is but a trivial matter, and that I have given a hint to one that dwells in the house, and he maketh light of it; and that it would rather be a seeming to check others mindlessness of their own affairs . . . and I am troubled.<sup>18</sup>

He saves the great bulk of his observations, however, for himself, his vileness, his poor health, and most prominently, his sexuality. Indeed, Wigglesworth seems to be his own favorite subject. While he confesses again and again to the sins of pride and vanity, and reminds himself (and his readers?) endlessly of his worthlessness, such castigations only serve to underscore and heighten the suspicion that Wigglesworth was in fact extraordinarily self-centered, even, perhaps, vain and egomaniacal. His blindness to the double-bind is remarkable: he castigates himself for pride, but never suspects that his own self-obsessed self-observation might be vain or prideful. Moreover, the hide and seek style of the diary, especially when describing his sexual proclivities (which seem decidedly homoerotic) and guilts, takes on a kind of voyeuristic theatricality beyond the conventional narcissism of the diary-as-self-observed.

ah Lord I am vile, I desire to abhor my self (o that I could) before the for these things. [*sic*]. I find such unresistable torments of carnal lust or provocation unto the ejection of seed

that I find myself unable to read any thing to inform me about my distemper because of the prevailing or rising of my lusts.<sup>19</sup>

The adolescent narcissism of the text is remarkable—it seems that Wigglesworth is unable to read and learn about his sexual problems because the words turn him on—and leads one to wonder in reading Wigglesworth's diary if there was in his mind an unseen audience, an other reader. This is an unknowable proposition, of course, but one that complicates the ontological cross-reflections. There are moments, for example, when the diarist seems so self-absorbed in his own physical and moral concerns, that he is oblivious even to his own conceit: when he asks his doctor if marriage is advisable for him, it is not because he is afraid of infecting his wife with the gonorrhoea from which he suffers, but rather because he is afraid marriage might injure his health further. When the doctor advises him that marriage might offer physical comfort, the matter is more or less settled in Wigglesworth's mind. The idea that someone might someday read his words and be rightly appalled at such an egomaniacal afterthought seems far from his mind. Yet, at another point, when he discusses his disease more intimately, he becomes evasive—he describes the details of his affliction in Latin, "the excretio (*which happened in the presence of such a friend*) seminis."<sup>20</sup> The tantalizing, even seductive timbre of the phrasing raises more questions than it answers: who might this friend be who witnesses the "excretio seminis," and under what circumstances might (he? she?) witness such an intimate occurrence. This is the reason, one might at first suppose, for the use of Latin, but while such phrasing might elude the prying eyes of his fiancé or other uneducated women or men, it would certainly not fool his audience of colleagues or students, who were required to converse in Latin while at Harvard College. Finally, when he gets to the point of actually naming the disease, he becomes almost coy, and calls it *Gon.*, suggesting in the word itself, gone/Gon, a kind of Freudian fort/da, a double desire for both concealment and revelation.

What is interesting, in fact, about these evasions and sidesteps is that they seem not to be intentionally tactical; that is, the Latin and the abbreviations are easily deciphered, and seem designed to protect Wigglesworth from his own self-revelations. This contrasts with other places in the diary, where Wigglesworth actually writes in code, a kind of short-hand developed by Thomas Shelton and quite elaborate already, but complicated further by Wigglesworth, who added many of his own characters and abbreviations, rendering portions of the diary indecipherable.<sup>21</sup> While it is true that such shorthand might simply be shorthand, i.e., a more efficient way of writing, one is impressed in the diary by the fact that most all of the shorthand sections deal with sexual matters, Wigglesworth's "filthy, carnal lusts."

One might also object that while Wigglesworth never intended his writings to be read, he feared they might. His refusal to write all of the seamy details in anything but the more elusive code indicates this. But then why use a accessible code like Shelton's that could be deciphered by an unknown reader? Why not use a private code that might more effectively prevent the private portions of his diary from being exposed? Perhaps because the issue was not merely to conceal the content of the writing. Indeed, even though portions remain occluded, the very idea of coded revelations suggest something else as well: that the desire might not be merely to conceal, nor merely to reveal—it might rather represent the desire to be seen concealing, to be seen concealed. The desire emerging out of this Sartrean voyeurism is the desire to be caught in the cross-reflected strategies of theatre, revealing that one conceals, concealing the revelation, making sure the ruse is discovered, then covering up again, seducing the watcher in the shadows with the desire to be caught watching. It doesn't matter that Wigglesworth may not ever have imagined his diaries would one day be read by others, much less published; the ontologic desire of presentation and performance, finally of theatre, animates his writing. There is a suggestion in the diary, I believe, that facts and observations are being concealed from potentially prying eyes. But there is a further sense or sensibility in the writing that Wigglesworth himself is the watcher in the shadows. He is the one from whom certain desire and lusts must be hidden. The very theatrical ontology that is developed is repressed—the unconscious as *mise en scene*.

But who, finally, in the cells of the repressed, might the watcher's object of desire have been? On the first page of his diary, in the first sentence, in fact, Wigglesworth first names the "unnatural, filthy lust," which arises in him as a result of a conversation with his pupils, all of whom are male, of course, and all of whom are "unloving . . . yet go so to my heart." His "fond affection," in fact, is often returned as ridicule and insult. He seems especially focused on one John Haines, the young man whom he castigates for being AWOL, and to whom he refers on several different occasions. Just what his feelings for this young man were, we may never know, but he appears upon the stage of Wigglesworth's meditations often, is privy to his intimate advice, and is even seemingly brought to tears by his abjurations.

The full effect of Wigglesworth's writing is, as I have suggested, very nearly a recapitulation of the Puritan stereotype. He is both lust-driven, and yet seems quite openly to detest the flesh, and hovers dangerously close to Manicheaism in his suspicion that the physical world is evil. His rejection of sexuality, and his fervent desire to have God relieve him of the temptations of the flesh, his constant physical pains and sickly constitution, his attraction, finally, to a kind of Calvinized Gnosticism, in which the stern, vengeful God of Sinai

seems to threaten the obliteration of all flesh—suggest a man who, like Artaud, was possessed of a dramatic vision that was finally incapable of play. What is also noteworthy in Wigglesworth's diaries is his straight-ahead desire for constructedness, to be made as God would seemingly want him to be made, but finally to be rid of ego and desire along oddly egotistical, narcissistic lines, in which constructedness is perhaps the ego's way past the prototypical narcissistic stoppage.

It is, in fact, a kind of narcissistic masochism which probably best describes Wigglesworth's diaries. Indeed, it is often noted within the psychoanalytic community that the diary is the expression *par excellence* of the narcissistic personality—recording all of the observed nuances and occurrences of the day in order to keep the self that is constantly in danger of fading into the image of the self-as-other, stable and self-possessed.

Consequently, in a kind of extension of something like the Lacanian mirror-stage, Wigglesworth is so preoccupied with his own self-image that he becomes entirely captivated by it. In his captivation, moreover, he projects that image onto the world around him, seeing in others the same masochistic abjection that fuels his ego. Ultimately he projects that image onto a potential love object, John Haines, so that he may suffer the inevitable humiliation of ridicule, "meeting with some very disrespectful carriage," thus activating both a Freudian moral masochism as well as an erotogenic masochism that seems, as I have already suggested, plainly homoerotic. In either case, Wigglesworth's captivation by his own image within the frame of a nearly infinite extension of the mirror-stage suggests also his captivation by a theatre that he never sees, but that sees him. We see in Wigglesworth the same Artaudian drive toward the divine, a divine that seems at every turn to reject and elude him—a drive that seems in its pursuit of perfection, doomed to failure at the outset. There is in either case a desire to find the self as saved and purified, a desire that is aborted at each turn when the watcher watching the self watching finds only a sham identity, falsified papers.

5.

In the introduction to Thomas Shepard's collection of writings, *God's Plot*, the editor explains why he has used the phrase from Shepard's autobiography as the title of his work:

Shepard and his people envisioned a divine scenario governing the living of their lives and the saving of their souls. They became actors with parts to play in a cosmic drama of redemption. God wrote the script, cast the parts, directed the

staging; Christ took the starring role; religion explained each act and scene.<sup>22</sup>

The phrase "God's Plot" is indeed the phrase Shepard uses for the divine plan, but his writing reveals a theatrical ontology that moves well beyond such easy metaphors, into the seeing, and the doubled seeing, that characterizes much of Western theatre. On March 18, 1641, for example, Thomas Shepard writes in his diary:

I saw if my mind acted it spun nothing but deceit and delusion; if my will and affections acted, nothing but dead works. Oh, how do I need Christ to live in me! Yet I saw if a man hath eyes and life he will not lean on another to lead him and carry him as when he wants both; so here. I saw the Lord made me live by faith by making me feel a want of both, to distrust myself and trust more unto the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

The incantatory use of the prophetic and quintessentially theatrical "I saw," (and even more compelling "I saw if a man hath eyes") in this passage is typical of Shepard's style, and occurs throughout his diaries. But this "I saw" expresses more than mere stylistic mannerism. The intense self-observation throughout his diaries is the *raison d'être* of the genre itself—by carefully recording the movements of mind, belief and action, the Puritan writers hoped to objectify and thus control the vagaries of desire and sin. They are ostensibly private forms of expression (unlike the sermons and sacred poetry, for example) but this very privacy underscores the performative qualities of the self's struggle to understand and thus re-construct itself, because the process of self-observation requires, or rather ratifies, the deep split within the self that allows for an observing self to monitor a self observed, and finally to observe the observing itself. The diarist, in other words, in watching his own watchfulness, activates and also represses that quality of consciousness, *qua* consciousness, that I have called the theatrical. Moreover, the process of observation that occurs in these diaries is not merely the idle action of mind that we so casually call "theatrical." Rather, this is a discipline that requires the individual to marshal a whole panoply of observational techniques. Sight lines must be opened. Emotional recall must be sharpened. Memory of part and dialogue must be recollected. In short, the Puritan technique of self-observation demands the realization of the field of illusion as illusion itself, the *mise en scene*.

What is arresting about the entry quoted above, for example, moves well beyond the discovery of the "primal wound" that is consciousness/theatre. The

observation enters quickly and quite unwittingly into the serpentine ontology that theatre itself inhabits: for the very mind/self that observes is itself defined by its own "deceit and delusion." Consciousness, and that high consciousness that is theatre, observes deceit and delusion as its own substance. But how can that observation be believed, made as it is, by the deluded mind?

More than the mere riddling quality of such a statement however, is the deep ontological anxiety over appearances that runs throughout much Puritan theology and metaphysics, an anxiety well noted by those writing about Puritan culture. For the acute observations of Shepard the diarist are undercut by the realization that salvation can only be had by those who cannot observe, those who "want eyes and life"; salvation can only be had, in other words, by those capable of seeing the necessity of blindness, because those who want eyes and life are thrust into faith by their own distrust of themselves and their ability, thus inability, to see. And there is no reliance on "the wisdom of the body" either—both will and affection are as much to be distrusted as the mind.

This convolution of mind and desire, of consciousness and blindness, erupts in another passage by Shepard:

I saw that I was worthy to be left to myself and in my misery and sin, (1) not only because I had sinned, but (2) because of my very desires to come out of it.<sup>24</sup>

Abandonment by God is deserved, Shepard seems to be saying, not only because I have sinned, but because I have desired to stop sinning, and thus come out of abandonment. This is the psychic conundrum of an emergent solipsistic tautology, similar in some respects to the convolutions one reads about in the practice of Zen meditation—as long as meditation is directed at "liberation" it is not true meditation; as long as the seeker seeks something through sitting, s/he is still lost. And yet obviously the reason one sits is because one wishes not to be lost, but wishing not to be lost renders it impossible to be any other way, and so on.

There is a similar conundrum in the Puritan attitude toward history. In Calvinist Christianity, and most pointedly in Puritanism, who we were in the past, and who we are now is, in the doctrine of predestination, moot—even though our fate has been cast in some divine past, that past is concealed from us. What matters is the future—either eternal life or eternal torment. But that future depends on the past that is hidden from us. Past is thus recast as future. Robert K. Merton, in his controversial essay, "Motive Forces of the New Science," sees this recasting of past as future leading to the Puritans "fervent belief in progress," which induces them eventually to embrace science and empiricism as proper



modes of thought. One can see in Shepard's diaries the intense mood of self/doubt intrinsic to much Puritan writing, an attitude of observational skepticism that could very well bolster an emergent empiricist search for "true causes." Indeed, out of the work of Merton and Sacvan Bercovitch one might see the insistence on materiality in theory and historicism as more properly Puritanical than more phenomenal or ontological approaches to performance theory.

The salient difference, however, between Calvinism and other modes of spirituality is that in the Puritan mind the moral battle of blindness and insight plays itself out through a "self" that is seen as the origin, and not the product, of the wounded consciousness that observes it. The self appears to the Puritan writers as a lack, as something which is at the moment of its appearance depraved and stunted. But in observing and trying to correct and recorrect the self, the diarists end up obsessed with the self, and so construct and reconstruct it again and again. The self, in other words, is for the Puritans real, but depraved, and so *causes* delusion and is not caused or generated by it, as is the case in Buddhism, for example. This confusion between cause and effect, or rather the confusion between causes and reasons, explains in part the confusion in Shepard's work between the necessity and desire for blindness, and the fact that it is sin that is the cause of blindness. Salvation necessitates sin, to be sure, as sin necessitates salvation. What is fascinating is the sense that at some level of the Puritan mind, sin and salvation are the same:

I saw that sin did blind, and God also for sin, three ways:

- (1) Sin blinds by driving God, the God of all wisdom, from the soul, and so there is nothing but darkness; a man sees no spiritual things.
- (2) It spoils the understanding of all light also inherent in it that when the Lord opens the truth against it, cannot see it.
- (3) The soul when it endeavors to conceive of spiritual things, it grows more blind . . .<sup>25</sup>

The passage is fairly straightforward until we recall that the author makes this observation having earlier sought blindness from God so that he might find faith. The "I saw" trope in Shepard is recapitulated again and again by the repetitive use of a thematics of blindness. The more intensely the self observes, the more it is led into blindness, the more the self seeks truth, the more it sees only delusion, until finally it sees seeing itself as merest delusion, but delusion well observed.

This observation of delusion also opens out into Shepard's ministerial work. In the confessions, we see an activation of a form of piety that comes

tantalizingly close to theatre itself. In the confessional displays,<sup>26</sup> would-be members of the congregation had to stand before those already accepted, and tell of their sin and salvation. The speeches were carefully written and rehearsed again and again in order to straddle the fine dramatic line between humble admission of sinfulness, and glorification of God's power in one's life. If one erred in one's presentation, and suggested, for example, that salvation came because one accepted God, or some such formula, it could easily seem as if one were taking credit for one's salvation. Thus the confessions were anxious affairs, and sometimes provoked the audience to angry questioning of the confessee's sincerity and intent—in the language of Method acting, the confessee would be accused of "indicating" instead of experiencing. While the scenes unfolded, moreover, Shepard would sit to the side, quill in hand, and carefully record the script, stage directions and all, as it played itself out. But such displays and performances fall well short of anything like a morality or miracle play. Personal identity is still firmly, if problematically, attached to each subject, and the stories, even if carefully constructed, are still perceived to be true. The idea that American Puritan culture could take the step into theatre, even sacred theatre, remains unthinkable.

And it is small wonder that the Puritans could not make the break, finally, into theatre, a theatre which would supply them with the paradigm by which they might find salvation from salvation, so to speak. For like Artaud, they could not carry the alienated self to its acting conclusion. They were caught in the ontology of authenticity/falseness, and were not able to find release in the rejection of the authentic, and the tentative embrace of the mask. They were condemned to the lucid blindness of a theatricalized life devoid of theatre, an inversion of Artaud's pain: the blind lucidity of a theatre devoid of life.

At the level of the simply theatrical, it is not hard to imagine the Puritan penchant for observation mutating in later ages into an obsession for the spectacle—if seeing, even seeing blindness, is the means to finding truth, what better truths than spectacles—circuses, wild west shows, tent revivals, freak shows, Mardi Gras—whose entire truth lies purely in the seemingly seen? And what better protection from recognizing the emptiness of spectacle than a belief in an authentic behind it, an authentic constructed *through* the illusions of spectacle? What final way to solidify such a belief than through an enduring belief in the material, in the seen, as the means to truth? In response to the materialist captivation of current theory, Peggy Phelan, writing of the substance of the unseen and unseeable in cultural performance, writes a plea that might have flowed from the pen of Shepard himself, a prayer both moving and unnerving in its challenge to, and recapitulation of Puritan thought:

At the limit of the physical body, at the limit of the blind eye, at the limit of the signifier, one sees both the knowledge of failure and the performance of belief propped up on all sides by serious and comic doubt. Certain of failure, I inscribe, again, my hope for blind (and forgiving) eyes.<sup>27</sup>

The recent dominance of the performative over theatre, the tendency to relegate theatre to but one form of performance and in doing so to erase the insubstantial substance of theatre, is also to resuscitate the Puritan solipsism. In trying to find forms of performance that seemingly elude theatre, we delude and finally lose sight of ourselves.

## Notes

1. See for example, Jeremy Collier's attack on the English stage, "A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage," written in 1689.

2. Blindsight refers to a peculiar neuropathology in which the patient seems to be blind, but will, for example, catch a ball thrown to him or her. Even though professing blindness, the patient seems to see, but seemingly wills not to.

3. I am not suggesting that America was the Puritans, or vice versa. I am suggesting, along similar lines as Sacvan Bercovitch and others, that the Puritan sense of self became and remains the dominant "allegory" of the self in America. Thus, although other groups, ideas, and forces challenged the supremacy of American Puritanism even within Puritanism (i.e., Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson), such challenges and others were still defined by the allegory of Puritanism itself.

4. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove P, 1958) see page 51.

5. Artaud 122.

6. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) 233.

7. Artaud 116.

8. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or The Whale*, volume six of *The Writings of Herman Melville, The Northwestern-Newberry Edition*, edited by Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tansel, (Evanston: Northwestern UP and the Newberry Library, 1988).

9. Melville 434.

10. John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *An American Primer*, edited by Daniel Boorstin (New York: Penguin, 1966) 36.

11. Winthrop 40.

12. Frederick Dolan, *Allegories of America: Narratives, Metaphysics, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994) 24.

13. Everett Emerson, *Puritanism in America: 1620-1750* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1977). Page citations appear in the text.

14. Emerson 123.

15. Winthrop 40.

16. Much of the problematic "placement" of Wigglesworth diaries in the literature of Puritanism was suggested to me by the introduction to his diaries, written by Edmund S. Morgan. See following note.

17. *Diary of Michael Wigglesworth*, ed. Edmund S. Morgan (New York: Harper and Row, 1946) 27.

18. Wigglesworth 71.

19. 4.

20. The parenthetical phrase, interestingly enough, was written in code, which I will discuss further below.

21. See "Introduction," *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth*.

22. Thomas Shepard, *God's Plot*, ed. Michael McGiffert (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1972, 1994) ix.

23. Shepard 87-88.

24. 97.

25. 113.

26. *God's Plot*, "The Confessions."

27. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993)

33.