

RITUAL INTO MYTH — CEREMONY AND COMMUNICATION IN 'THE BLACKS'

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"But what exactly is a black? first of all, what's his colour?"

That this question is posed at all is significant. It suggests that "black" means more than it seems, that any answer provided by *The Blacks* will be determined by whatever "black" is shown to mean to black actors or white audience or to the white playwright between them. This clash of meanings leads to an assault on the audience's perception of "black". The audience is confronted simultaneously with its own image and with its distortion by the blacks, as well as with its image of the blacks and the blacks' "corrected" image of themselves.¹

The purpose of this paper is to examine the terms in which Genet attacks his audience and the part played by audience conceptions (and misconceptions) in the dramatisation and interpretation of these terms. This will enable us to demonstrate that the power of the play lies in the way in which these misconceptions are challenged rather than in the intensity with which Genet launches the attack.

In order to establish the audience's central place, it is necessary to avoid categorising Genet's work as "absurd drama" (Esslin, 1977) or as "theatre of revolt" (Brustein, 1964), because these focus on the plays as the private expression of a "spiritual condition" (Brustein, 1964, p.9) of individual isolation and revolt against the "harsh facts of a cruel world" (Esslin, 1977, p.228). I would agree that this illuminates Genet's earlier plays, as regards his subjective transformation of ritual - essentially a public form of communication through ceremony - as a means of personal revolt against the Establishment. Nonetheless it does not explain the effects of these transformations on the audience, nor does it account for Genet's appropriation of the historical situation of the blacks to his personal attitude of revolt. In fact, Brustein and Esslin are both careful to exclude programmatic aspects of revolt from their discussion, despite the fact that the play is more effective if the audience is aware of, and troubled by, the situation to which the play refers, however obliquely. White fear about black revolt will be engaged only if the audience responds.

Genet's approach to the situation of black exploitation by white is similar to Fanon's in Black Skins, White Masks. Both recognise that this exploitation operates on the most fundamental levels. The black cannot but define his identity and his revolt in terms that take white as the point of departure. So Genet's use of the black/white opposition has historical import. It is clearly more than a convenient form for Genet's characteristic rage

against the Establishment from the point of view of the outcast, be he Negro, Arab or criminal. Yet where Fanon's ultimate concern is the end, Genet's is the means of the revolt. He is less concerned with the black alternative to white oppression than with the tension between the two, and with using this black alternative to undermine white 'myths' about the black through challenging audience preconceptions.

It is in this recognition of the audience, rather than the demands of either Romantic self-expression or political action that The Blacks is significant. On the one hand, we move from the self-reflecting parodic ritual of The Balcony in which characters and meaning are but the "hundredth-thousandth-reflection-within-a-reflection in a mirror", to a dramatic situation in which ritual becomes a weapon used against the audience. On the other hand, despite the revolution 'behind' the ritual, the sharpening of the weapon is more significant than its use, the elaboration and transformation of the ritual is more significant than any extrinsic end it serves.

The force of the play is then felt, not in the threat of revolution, but in the audience's response to the ritual exposition of this threat. It is here that preconceptions about white supremacy are undermined. For ritual - in the form of the Mass of the proceedings of a court of law - is evoked as a traditional and reassuring ceremony that proclaims its universality, only to be undermined by a parody which prevents the audience from taking this reassuring form for granted.

The power of the weapon lies in the link between ritual and parody. The audience is not allowed to forget the connection: "Politeness must be raised to such a pitch that it becomes monstrous. It must arouse fear." (The Blacks, p.28), nor the artifice behind it: "Perhaps they suspect what lies behind this architecture of emptiness and words. We are what they want us to be. We shall therefore be it to the very end, absurdly." (p.95). So the play's significance is to be found, not in any detachable content but in the forms used to present and distort this content and so affect the way in which it is perceived.

Of these forms, Genet writes³: "One cannot but dream of an art that would be a profound jangle of symbols capable of speaking to the public in which nothing would be told, everything presented" (Hayman, 1977, p.153). The audience must be shocked to attention: "This language must have the power to cause thinking" (Artaud, 1958, p.69) (my emphasis). In the case of The Blacks, the audience must be able to recognise and criticise itself in the parody. Despite distortion, the ceremony must still be meaningful; the audience must remember the ritual while being disturbed by the parody. There must be both a link and a gap between the two. As Genet writes:

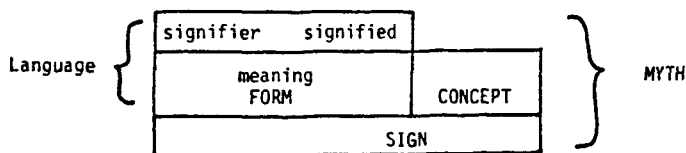
"I tried to obtain a rupture, while allowing for a declamatory tone, that would bring the theatre to the theatre. I hoped in this way to obtain the abolition of characters to the advantage of signs⁴ which would initially be as far as possible from what they should signify, but nonetheless connected to those later significations⁴ in order thereby to forge the single link between author and spectator" (McMahon, 1963, p.116) (my emphasis).

This "single link" is the successful communication of meaning. The signs are the means of this communication. That the signifier should initially be far from the signified nevertheless implies that they are essentially linked in the sign. Genet disrupts this connection between form and content only to put that connection in relief. In ritual, familiar form harmonises with familiar content to produce a sign both familiar and reassuring, in other words,

'natural'. In parody, a distorted form takes the audience far from the original reassuring content only to bring them back by producing a sign connected to the original in that it is hostile to it: the politeness becomes monstrous. What is crucial here is that this takes place on a different level of signification, dependent on the prior signification of the ritual sign. The distorted form comprises the sign of the original ritual. The familiar meaning of this sign (form and content) is distorted to become the form of a new sign, whose function is to deny the meaning of the original.

The connection between the theatrical presentation of ritual parody and Barthes' exposition of myth (Barthes, 1976) may seem perverse. Yet its usefulness goes beyond that of providing a model for analysing second order signification; it provides for an analysis of its function. Myth is second order signification motivated and at the same time distorted by the intention to disguise signification, to deny that myths - notions by which a culture explains itself or another culture - are anything but natural.

Barthes introduces myth as language (Barthes, 1976, p.111), as a system in which meaning is communicated by means of signs. What distinguishes myth formally from first order signification such as natural language is that the signifier of mythic discourse (the form) is already a cultural sign which has meaning within a first order semiotic system. Thus (Barthes, 1976, p.115):



The power of myth, Barthes suggests, lies in the ambivalent nature of this signification, which has its source in the complexity of the mythic form, which as a sign with meaning prior to the mythic signification, is never entirely obscured. This ambivalence is evident both in the creation of the myth - the whites' ritual affirmation of their identity (which we never see in its pure form) - and the parody of that affirmation, which is recognised as parody because the pressure of the original is still felt, however ambiguously.

To consider the white myth and its place in The Blacks, let us change Barthes' example a little⁵ in favour of the more general sign of a photograph of a Negro in Western clothing. This sign has meaning as a result of a combination of a signifier (medium, composition, matt/glossy finish) and signified (black man in a suit-and-tie). As such the sign functions mythically to whites as a form, distanced for the moment from its value as sign, to express an unacknowledged concept - the reassuring value of "white civilisation".

The use of mythic here is not a modish alternative to connotation. As Barthes demonstrates, myth is defined as much by intention as by procedure. It is in the interests - conscious or not - of whites to believe in this myth, especially if they are colonial functionaries. The duplicity necessary in the use (deformation) of a suitable image is perpetrated by a sleight of hand:

The essential point ... is that the form does not suppress the meaning; it only impoverishes it and puts it at a distance ... it holds it at one's disposal⁶ ... The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history ... which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation: the form must constantly be able to be

rooted again in the meaning and to get what nature it needs for its nutriment; above all it must be able to hide there (my emphasis) ... The form of the myth is not a symbol ... the Negro has too much presence, he appears as a ... spontaneous, innocent, indisputable image. But at the same time, this presence is tamed, put at a distance ... it becomes the accomplice of the concept. (Barthes, 1976, p.118) (author's emphasis).

At the same time, this concept is difficult to expose because it is not named. A certain attitude to the world (faith in white civilisation, say) is associated with the 'innocent' information provided by the photograph so as to re-treat behind it if examined too closely. This attitude to reality,

the knowledge contained in the mythic concept, is confused, made of yielding shapeless associations ... the concept ... is a formless unstable ... condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function. (Barthes, 1976, p.119).

This function is the deformation of the meaning in the direction of the concept. "Myth transforms history into nature" (Barthes, 1976, p.120) so that the reader of the myth - the white audience at the beginning of the play - sees in the photograph simply and naturally a Westernised Negro - simultaneously an innocent image and the "very presence" (Barthes, 1976, p.142) of beneficial white civilisation. To the myth consumer, this is a fact, not a sign (Barthes, p.131). The myth is read as neutral, unpolitical, essentially natural and unchanging - what-goes-without-saying.

What Genet does is to repoliticise the myth. He does this by using familiar white ritual - which the audience takes for granted - to communicate (black) concepts opposed to the ritual's original significance and so to transform it into a counter-ritual. On the one hand, this deciphers the white myth:

if we clearly distinguish the meaning (of the photograph, in the example) from (its role as) form and consequently the distortion which the latter imposes on the former ... undo the signification of myth and receive it as imposture. (Barthes, 1976, p.128).

The Negro in white's clothing becomes the alibi of colonialism. In terms of The Blacks, the 'innocent' reference - blacks performing for whites - is exposed as part of a white myth of supremacy. On the other hand, there is a further signification operation: white myth is used as a form to express contempt for the whites. Thus deciphered the myth is held at Genet's disposal as a weapon.

Genet uses white myth to undermine itself by expressing it in ritual form. Whereas myth is usually a fragmentary discourse, discernible only in snatches (Barthes, 1976, p.7) like the photograph, ritual, as an ordered series of ceremonial gestures, provides for a more extended articulation of these myths and for a more arresting exposure of their duplicity.

Because of its stylised execution, ritual is not natural in the same sense as the photograph. The gestures used are natural rather in that they have a publicly acknowledged significance which is not questioned. Genet's inversion of the ritual destroys the easy communication of shared audience values and provides in its stead a parody whose threatening aspect is clear, though its exact significance may be remote or mystifying. In the audience's acknowledgement of its mystification lies the possibility of exposing the myth as a false notion and of reopening the line between ceremony and communication so that the audience might perceive this falsity. Ritual - as a mode of theatrical performance - thus both articulates and challenges what appear to be formless associations when abstracted from the play - the agglomeration of

ideas whites have about blacks and vice versa, particularly in the colonial situation.

However vague these notions, they must be present if the audience is to be affected by the presentation. It is not enough to say that the audience is "confronted with a gross mirror-image of itself on the stage" (Esslin, 1977, p.210) in the form of masked blacks, nor to say that Genet's clownshow is a simple inversion of the minstrel show: instead of 'blacks' whom we know are (safely) white, we have 'whites' whom we are forced to acknowledge as (threateningly) black. (McMahon, 1963, p.191). Both interpretations are valid in so far as they focus on the white audience's response, but they take for granted the paradigms governing such a response.

This is not simply a question of rigour. To establish the importance of the white audience, one must confront the contrary implications of Genet's preface. While the idea of a token 'white' ushered in with due ceremony does make precise the contempt for white civilisation which informs the action, a dummy white in a black audience removes from the play a good deal of its power. An assault on the audience must assume an audience that understands the insult. The absence of whites in the audience breaks that link between author and spectator that Genet intends to forge. For, as McMahon writes:

the play is undoubtedly a Western play, dependent on a sense of Western theatrical tradition ... An African would be puzzled by it and, white dummy or no, would not have the equipment to understand any more than that the play was in some way an attack on whites ... Any Negro who does understand the play as an aesthetic moment would be so westernised as to be subjected to the same level of attack as directed against the whites (McMahon, 1963, p.193).

As important as the theatrical or artistic tradition is the historical reference hovering over the play - white fear about black nationalism - located in the 'backstage' action, the shooting of the Negro traitor.

The connection between this attack on Western mores and solidarity with the blacks remains problematic. On the one hand, there is Genet's undeniable contempt for the white audience that he insults on the blacks' behalf. On the other, though the play is designed to condemn its audience, it presupposes an audience "sophisticated enough to appreciate the shifts in tone indicated by the use (or abuse) of Western ceremony" (McMahon, 1963, p.191), though it is for this very sophistication that the audience is condemned. In other words, the audience must start off adhering to the naturalised myth - contained in the image of the black in whites' clothing - before their preconceptions can be attacked. Once these preconceptions have been engaged by the residue of a familiar ritual, they can be challenged by the parody which exposes the myth.

The effect of the parody is particularly striking in the assignment of roles and in their subsequent enactment, as dictated by the ritual. Particularly when the actors consciously assume or change roles, the audience is made aware both of their own unarticulated assumptions and the players' attack on these assumptions. The audience is not allowed simply to consume the myth in the manner of the photograph. In that case, meaning and form co-exist in an ambiguous way (both levels of signification operate) so that the signification of the myth concept is (con)fused with the neutral meaning. The concept hides behind the meaning (Barthes, 1976, p.119) so that the black becomes the natural fact of beneficial white civilisation. By contrast, the figures that make up the court at the beginning of the play undo this process of fusion, are emptied of their original (white) meaning for the sake of their

value as signifiers for the mythic concept made of associations contrary to everything evoked by "beneficial white civilisation". Thus the intention - the communication of black contempt - and the distorted tableau which parodies white culture are made clearly visible. The Queen here is an example (Barthes, 1976, p.128) of colonial rule from a black perspective. She retains just enough of her original meaning - the superb gown - to make the signification process clear to the audience. For the rest, once the connection between this process and the end it serves has been established and the weapon "activated", the Queen is reduced to her nostalgia, her tears, her prudery and her ineffectual rule, at the expense of any positive (white-centred) values.

The function of the blacks in this initial tableau is a precise mirror image of the 'whites'. The precision of this opposition is crucial; once the action begins, the ritual organised by these blacks can only be followed if their initial attitude vis-à-vis the 'whites' is clear. Just as the 'whites' of the court are the blacks' view of whites, so the performing blacks are the whites' view of 'blacks' - it is Genet's contemptuous assumption that the white is incapable of seeing the real black. Hence Archibald's repeated reference to blacking, emphasizing white obsession with white as norm. The normative element applies also to white civilisation and its artifacts. Thus the blacks wear evening dress "in the height of bad taste" against the Queen's superb gown. This norm is offset by its opposite: the grotesque masks of the 'whites' are set against the faces of the blacks, which are authentic despite the blacking and so challenge the idea of white as natural. The blacks do not, however, transcend the myth. They invert it so that black is now the norm.

Because this is a process of inversion rather than a revolutionary departure, one can justifiably subsume black nationalism/negritude under the same mythic concept as white civilisation/white culture. In other words, the outer action - the shooting of the Negro traitor - far from grounding the black revolt in the reality outside the play, is presented as a ritual alternative/inversion of the white trial.

As Hayman writes:

"The fiction has one foot in the reality of black resentment against white exploitation and the other in Genet's undisguisable glee at the prospect of Western culture's overthrow" (Hayman, 1977, p.153).

The latter position can only be held by a (French) white who shares (even if he rejects) the associations surrounding "Chopin, French cuisine, Cartesian principles" etc. This is responsible for the tone of the ritual which is sometimes close to petulance. For example, the Queen's and the court's response to Felicity's threat:

"We'll let out a fart and blow you out" (p.79)

namely the exchange:

"THE QUEEN (infuriated): Governor, General, Bishop, Judge, Valet!
ALL (gloomily and without moving): Coming."

The register here is that of reprimanding a servant (Felicity) who has been impertinent and one may say that the petty tone is one further way to ridicule the Queen.

Yet the audience's response to this immediately after the Queen's discourse on ruins is not likely to be outrage fostered by guilt (which may well be constructive), but deliberate indifference to manifest pettiness, which can not but undermine the blacks' case, particularly as regards the seriousness

of the outer action. The value of this outer action lies not in its truth (a real revolution) which is held in doubt by the references to "backstage" and "theatrical illusion". It lies rather in its potential meaning which is deliberately withheld from the white audience who are denied access to the "event", and so prevented from identifying (with) the black cause.

So the outer action does not take the audience beyond the play, out of the myth and its inversion embodied in the ritual, but offers rather a shadow ritual that makes possible a more complex articulation of the basic myth, and so brings the audience all the more firmly back to the play. The backstage action is thus one of several transformations the ritual undergoes. The progressive complication that these entail can be seen if one takes as illustrative the murder of the white woman - the central ritual - and trace its transformation from random to ritual act.

This murder is initially no more than the killing of an old tramp (p.19). This is elaborated into an attack that is both more powerful - since it takes in all whites - and less - since it is entertainment: "The only domain in which we're allowed to operate" (p.22). The question is: allowed by whom? If the answer is "the whites", then the black revolt is simply the impotent obverse of white domination. Meaning is still defined by the whites: "the masters contract (language)"; all the blacks can do is "distort it sufficiently to wrap ourselves in it and hide" (p.23), which reinforces rather than undermines the whites' self-confidence, since the whites can dismiss the blacks' incompetent use of white language as they dismiss their "bad taste" in evening dress.

The ritual murder goes beyond this since it is enacted from the black point of view and their intention is directly opposed to the whites'. The ritual then enacts the mythic concept of black resurgence over white, which is the inverse of white domination over black. The original myth (white domination) reasserts itself in a further signification. The meaning of the ritual murder (violent black revolt) becomes the form of a new myth whose concept is the innate primitive savagery of the black. This is realised theatrically in the black movement - the conventional Negro dance. This stereotype effectively depoliticises what might be a political act - the murder of a white woman - and provides whites with a temporary escape in the reassurance of familiarity and their own superiority.

A similar depoliticisation follows in the transformation of the Mass. The grey host (p.26) is suggested by Diouf, the collaborator, who is therefore damned by becoming an "honorary white", abandoned by the other blacks. The political import of this is defused by Diouf's alternative status as the "Mother" of the dolls representing the court. This suggests that the objects of the blacks' hatred are, like the dolls, fabricated by those very blacks: this is as self-reflecting as the whites' elaboration of the myth of the black savage.

This myth/anti-myth structure and the ironies it affords is later more fully explored in the exchange between Felicity and the Queen (p.78 ff.). This is framed by the proceedings of the 'white' court of justice; their exchange explores the ramifications of the murder beyond that of a single criminal act. Contrasting this with the trial that precedes it indicates a shift in the level of signification: the trial begins (p.75 ff.) with the ceremonial bows implying the white myth of black subservience, juxtaposed with the black inversion - effective attack through parody. The signification process here is the same as that of the opening tableau: the figures are unambiguously filled by their respective concepts. Whatever the original meaning - white

conceptions of justice - has been distances in favour of black contempt for these conceptions. This contempt is communicated by ritual gesture. The most precise example is the blacks' orchestrated laughter which, like their trembling, is by its very orchestration a parody of the white courts's fear.

So when the Queen comes to face Felicity, it is on the latter's homeground below the court's platform. The territory is Africa - which embodies, amplifies and justifies the crime:

"No one could possibly deny it ... that crime of mine is all Africa."

This speech recalls her earlier negritude evocations, for example:

"Sulking Africa, wrought of iron, in the fire, Africa of the millions of royal slaves ... drifting continent, are you there? ... It's a block of darkness, compact and evil ... A deep somnolence emanates from you ... hypnotises them" (p.60).

The lyrical power of the words is reinforced by her stance hands on hips, exploding. But the extent of her power - the black antimyth concept - is undermined as her role for form for this concept is undermined by her ambiguous connection with the Queen. Initially, the two women seem directly opposed; in her speech about the ruins:

"But what a ruin! ... And I haven't finished carving ... myself in the shape of a ruin. An eternal ruin ... It's death that's shaping me." (p.79)

The Queen challenges Felicity. Her faith in a decadent white civilisation offers an alternative, however feeble, to negritude, which she perceives as no civilisation at all.

Despite this opposition, the Queen's second speech and the accompanying stage direction suggest that the two women and, by implication the two cultures, are not only linked but fundamentally dependent on each other. The Queen's challenge:

"If I'm dead, why go on and on killing me in my corpse?"

is echoed later (p.95):

"Without us their revolt would be meaningless, wouldn't even exist."

That this is more than an indication of white illusion about the impotence of black revolt (part of the myth that white is naturally superior) is demonstrated by the stage direction: side by side, almost amicably, the two women move forward to the front of the stage (p.80), and later (p.82): she and Felicity talk to each other like two women exchanging recipes. In between (p.81), is the verbal parody of Felicity's negritude speeches. If the refuge available to the Queen is limited to Kipling and the White Man's Burden, then the black alternative becomes nothing more than a self-reflecting inverse of white culture:

"So will the opera to which we will go, black as we are, in black Rolls Royces to hail black kings - beneath chandeliers of black crystal".

This revolt is impotent. It is like the minstrel show, safe for whites because they can take refuge in the fact that what they see is really white property.

There are two possible ways out of the "hall of mirrors": white violence (the Judge suggests a hanging) or black violence (to demonstrate black strength by first executing the Negro traitor and then the Court). It is the latter course which concludes the play. The question is whether the

resumption of the ritual after the traitor has been dispatched (from the Valet's cue: "Resume the tone", p.87) produces the ceremony in a more powerful form, the more compelling for having sustained the shock effect of the unmasked actors, or whether the exposure truncates the ritual and cuts short its power.

The answer to this question lies in examining this shock effect. By unmasking themselves, the actors suggest that the ritual is no longer useful now that the "real action", the execution, has taken place. Nevertheless, this "real action" is quite clearly a theatrical trick, organised backstage. Even at the crucial moment, the firecracker is definitely not a gun: Suddenly a firecracker explodes backstage ... The sparks of fireworks are seen against the black velvet set (p.84). Then follows the unmasking which, though devastating at this point, has in fact been hinted at and prevented at an earlier stage in the play, when Newport News comes in to report on the progress of the traitor's trial (p.62). Initially, the shock of the five black faces hitherto hidden behind the masks of the Court seems indeed to be the shock of reality. The myth has been deciphered, the possibilities for action liberated:

"Our aim is not only to corrode and dissolve the idea they'd like us to have of them, we must also fight them in their actual persons, in their flesh and blood. As for you (the actors), you were present only for display. Behind ... " (p.85)

Most particularly, there is the renewed possibility that the execution as effective political act will be able to inform and intensify its parallel on stage, so that, while the ritual may be attenuated by the audience's recent perception of its exposure, it will be all the more powerful for having broken from the parody within parody to confront reality. This possibility is reinforced by departures from the ritual - in particular, the loud free laughter (p.88) as against the orchestrated laughter earlier, and Archibald's final praise:

"Just a moment, the performance is coming to an end. My friends, allow me first to thank you all - you've given an excellent performance" (p.95);

both imply a reality behind the performance. The Court's response - the members of the Court take off their masks and bow - is a conventional ending. It suggests that the performance which the audience has been allowed to watch is now over and that what follows is a preparation for a further ritual with which the audience has nothing to do. Yet whether this reinforces the value of the outer action by enacting the burial of the traitor, or whether it is simply a preparation for the next performance, is not revealed.

In resolving this problem, the last words of the play - the exchange between Village and Virtue - are significant in that they remain within the anti-myth of negritude, here presented as a sentimental alternative to white culture:

"At least you won't be able to wind your fingers in my long, golden hair" (p.96),

whose value as alternative is belied by the persistence of white culture in the form of the Don Giovanni waltz. This kind of juxtaposition is quite consistent with the rest of the play: Felicity's major negritude speech (p.60) is undermined by being followed by the "strains of the Dies Irae". The final action reinforces this ambivalence: either the ritual is to begin again or the catafalque contains the traitor's corpse and the ritual has

thus served its purpose. This is not simply a formal difference. A corpse is not the same kind of prop as two chairs; it reinforces the outer action rather than the pure theatrical illusion.

Nevertheless, the final message is clear: neither outcome concerns this audience since it can have no part in the execution of traitors nor can it be affected by a second performance of the "ritual that never changes". The dramatic evidence (the persistence of white culture in the waltz) seems to be in favour of the continuing ritual. Genet's bias is towards shattering and recombining contemporary myth and its parody, pushing ceremony to its limits as a form of communication, rather than communicating a programme of action. So the question of the blacks' colour is answered only to be posed again and again. There is no answer that initiates action.

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Notes

1. Note that this defence of the blacks' case does not remain univocal. As Brustein writes: "The rebel develops into the very image of the authority he wishes to annihilate" (Brustein, 1964, p.14).
2. The term is quite currently used to imply false notions held by one about another.
3. Though Roger Blin, Genet's director, denies any connection between Genet and Artaud (Brustein, 1964, p.378), the links, of which those quoted here are only a sample, are too obvious to ignore.
4. There is a non-trivial problem of translation here: instead of "sign" Esslin had "symbol". In view of the analysis sketched in this paper, I prefer the precision afforded by the opposition: signifier/signified, to either Esslin's or McMahon's translations.
5. Barthes' example is a Negro in French uniform, signifying mythically to the French patriots during the Algerian crisis, the strength and universal validity of French imperialism.

6. Links between this "distance" and Brecht's "alienation" are significant in so far as Genet, like Brecht, makes his audience think by repoliticising and so alienating familiar myths. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Genet's immediate concern is to shock and bewilder his audience rather than to make them critical. Once again the connection with Artaud's "cruelty" is clear.

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