Theatricality, Materiality, and Social Critique in the work of Georges Rouault

In a photograph of the artist Georges Rouault (1871-1958) at work in 1953 [fig.1], Rouault appears as part-artist, part-clown. The white surgeon's coat and hat, given to him by his physician son, Michel, and which Rouault habitually wore to paint, closely resembles the Pierrot-like hat he depicted in numerous paintings of clowns. It is also there in a self-portrait from 1925, consolidating the idea that Rouault, like many other modern artists, identified closely with the figure of the clown. There is, Jean Starobinski writes, a nostalgic complicity with the microcosm of the Parade and its 'outsider' status in this identification, but it is also an indirect and parodic way of questioning the role of the artist and the nature of art itself.[1] This derisory vision of art and artist contains a critique of bourgeois respectability that was taken up by Rouault and numerous other painters in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as a way of positioning themselves outside the main stream or at a critical distance from social convention – but it is also, as Starobinski points out, an auto-criticism that targets the aesthetic vocation itself.

The clown stands for various things in Rouault's oeuvre: witness, commentator, sacrificial victim, and sad outcast from the modern world. Rouault's repeated depictions of clowns and performers meant that the spaces of performance – the theatre, the circus, and the fairground – were always closely bound up with his construction of the space of the painting. This is also the case for his images of judges and various 'types' of bourgeois, public figures. Rouault represents these figures as types, not individuals, veering away from psychological depth through the tableau-style of his compositions and the mask-like faces.

[1] Jean Starobinski, 'The Grimacing Double' in Jean Clair (ed.), *The Great Parade: Portrait of the Artist as Clown*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 16-17.

This article is concerned with the ways in which various notions of theatricality inform the aesthetic of Rouault's interwar work. It will argue that the theatrical form of address taken up by works such as *Le Clown blessé* (1932) [fig.2] is indebted both to aspects of Gustave Moreau's aesthetics (Moreau had been Rouault's tutor at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts, and Rouault was the first curator of the Moreau Museum) and to the radical stagecraft of the Parisian marionette theatre. Rouault's familiarity with the latter was deepened from 1914 when he became involved in Ambroise Vollard's illustrated book projects for Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* and Vollard's own Jarry-esque *Ubu coloniale*, which would eventually be published in 1932 as *Les Réincarnations du Père Ubu*. In the course of working on these projects, Rouault, as his letters to Vollard show, was intensely engaged with the subversive characters of Jarry's Ubu, which arguably have much in common with the kind of guignol-esque figures that had dominated Rouault's work in the first decade of the twentieth century – in *Jeu de massacre* [fig.3], for example. As well as discussing the importance of the 'theatrical' to Rouault's developing aesthetic, this article will argue that it is *through* aspects of stagecraft, particularly the immobile aesthetic of the marionette, that Rouault's work is able to take up a critical position vis-à-vis the 'real' and perplex world of twentieth-century France.[2] Finally, and drawing upon Rouault's reading of Blaise Pascal, I want to suggest that the form of expression that emerges from this engagement becomes a deeper existential critique, that is to say, a way of thinking about being. As André Malraux wrote in 1929, 'Rouault is not a man who strives to *see*, but a

[2] A note on my use of the word 'theatricality' is necessary here. My use of it is based upon a general sense of theatre rather than indebted to any specific form, and I am using it to indicate a particular emphasis upon surface appearance in Rouault's work that is structured to undermine the authority of that appearance. Similarly, Rouault's use of the 'marionette', which although more specifically oriented towards the gauche and jointed version of the marionette, is again a relatively un-nuanced borrowing of the form.

man who strives *to be*.' Rouault's models, Malraux continued, do not exist: 'they are but a potentiality, they will be that which his brushwork – at times crude and thickly laid, other times kneaded as in the stained glass windows of Chartres – will make of them. […] Rouault differs from practically all the painters of his day because he does not expect to find a balance in his colors, but a *significance*; his art is not expressed in terms of beauty but in terms of existence.'[3]

Painted in oil on paper mounted on canvas, and measuring 200 by 120 centimeters, *Le Clown blessé* is a monumental work with a thickly painted densely ornamented frame, complete with a grotesque that is reminiscent of French baroque carving and which resembles, in a faintly parodic form, Rouault himself. The details of the frame are in fact a close imitation of the carvings on a cabinet standing in the main sitting-dining room in Rouault's apartment – an indication of the way in which Rouault's process takes up and plays with sources to his own ends. Inside the frame, on the upper left, is the raised curtain, painted in vertical slabs of red and blue-black. The work depicts a stricken clown with lowered head supported by two other clowns, one on either side. By this period, many of Rouault's clowns had become increasingly Christ-like, and here, set against the darkened scene of the eclipse, the hill is clearly Golgotha, and the wounded clown Christ descended from the cross. In this setting, the curtain also harks of the torn veil that, with the eclipse, followed the crucifixion. The tangled lines and mixed media of Rouault's early works are gone; in comparison this work is static, the heavily layered oil setting out in slab-like marks and outlined patches a fragmented aesthetic. The limbs of the clowns are solid, marionette-like parts, with the feet lined up in the manner of figures from

[3] André Malraux, 'Notes sur l'expression tragique en peinture à propos des œuvres récentes de Rouault', *Formes*, (December, 1929), pp.5-6.

the art of ancient Egypt, or as if in a frieze along the bottom of the picture plane.[4] The totality of the surface is threatened by the visibility of the many parts that make up the whole, from the knee-caps of the clowns to the encrusted blobs and ossified dabs of the frame.

The painted frame (which, since the work is also conventionally framed, becomes a frame-within-a-frame) and the curtain draw attention to the conditions of representation, which here revolve around, paradoxically, both the impermanent dramatic spectacle and the permanence of the framed painting. In this, the structure of Rouault's work draws upon a much older conflation of the theatrical and the painterly, which is exemplified in Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (1513-14). As Hubert Damisch, following Heinrich Wölfflin, points out, Raphael's painting contains the theatrical, and therefore fleeting, in its organization: 'the curtains are raised, as in a theatre, to reveal the actors; the divine characters descend to the stage, here given material form by a single plank'.[5] Raphael's characters stand upon clouds while Rouault's stand as if upon the painted frame itself, but both teeter between representational orders.

This complicity between dramatic spectacle and figurative representation has a history in the *tableaux vivants* and early street theatre in which actors were arranged in front of decorated and architectonic structures (originally actual buildings, and then constructed booths) – and revealed to the spectator by the raising of a curtain. Quattrocentro painters, Damisch writes, were respectful of the material aspect of the theatre prop – 'the rocks that shelter Uccello's

[4] There are postcards of Egyptian and Byzantine art amongst Rouault's papers. See also Angela Lampe 'Les oeuvres inachevées', in *Georges Rouault: Forme, Couleur, Harmonie*, Musée de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, 2006-2007, p.214.

[5] Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud: Toward a History of Painting* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.67.

dragons, for example, are cardboard caves, and the clouds of Mantegna or Signorelli appear wooden or resemble painted canvas or even the wadding used to cover the bodies of theatrical machines'.[6]

The scene within the frame in *Le Clown blessé* has a highly 'staged' or arranged, even tableau-like, quality, to the extent that the marionette-like figures are placed against a flat backdrop, and the eclipse appears as a prop-like addition set upon this backdrop. Even bodily movement is artificially constructed, or reconstructed, in the combination of the stasis of the archaic relief with the machinic aesthetic of the modern marionette. This 'scene', in its constructed materiality, intensely worked facture and crafted composition appears as a highly mediated vision – exacerbated by Rouault's placing of himself on the frame as the grotesque-like head. Looking out at the implied audience from within and above his work, it positions the artist as an intermediary, as director and master of ceremonies, as witness and constructor of the scene, combining the artist's vision with the heavy mediation of the theatricality of the construction.

In the early 1890s Rouault had enrolled as a student in the studio of Jules-Elie Delaunay at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. In 1892, within a year of Rouault's enrollment, Delaunay was succeeded by Moreau. This change was crucial to Rouault: Moreau became a significant personal and artistic influence upon the younger painter, and Rouault would eventually act as Moreau's executor and as the first curator of the Moreau museum. It was from Moreau that Rouault inherited a sense of the grand décor as a framing device. This can be seen in the architectural settings of Rouault's very early work, such as *L'Enfant Jésus parmi les docteurs* (1894) [fig.4], and arguably returns, albeit in a different form, in the elaborate painted frames of his later work, including *Le Clown blessé*. The architectural forms that structure Moreau's *Jupiter et Semele* (1894-5) [fig.5], for example, echo the space of the theatrical proscenium, and in the

[6] Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud* (2002), pp. 70-71.

excess of ornamentation, symbols, and iconographic references that draw the viewer into the tableau, the work proposes a theatrical model of exhibition and absorptive beholding (to use Michael Fried's terms) that Jennifer Wild describes as 'vertical'. Such verticality as a mode of address is aligned with the formal terms of Renaissance perspective in which the classical upright autonomy of the picture is correlated with the upright spectator – a correlation that privileges vision.[7] This mode of address is also aligned with the axis of transcendence, of the conceptual and immaterial, which accords with the Symbolist notion of art as a form that aims towards the evocation of the ideal or immaterial. At the same time, the material labor that can be seen in both the detail and heavy facture of Moreau's backgrounds seems to work against this, leaving an irreconcilable tension in Moreau's work between the physical and metaphysical, the laborious and the conceptual.[8]

In the 1860s, Moreau had turned against the conventional theatrical paradigm to which the academic genre of history painting still adhered. This convention held that 'a picture should be considered as a stage on which each figure plays its role',[9] and accordingly, history painting was understood to revolve around the dramatic staging of figures in action. Despite his own academic training in the studio of François Edouard Picot, and his self-identification as a history painter, Moreau sought an alternative means of expression more appropriate to the plastic terms of painting. For Moreau, the immobilization and isolation of figures – even the

[7] Jennifer Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema 1900-1923* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), p.145.

[8] See Sarah J. Lippert 'The Temporality of Imitation in the work of Moreau and Gérôme' in Lippert (ed.) *Space and Time in Artistic Practice and Aesthetics: The Legacy of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing* (New York and London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2017), p.115.

[9] Peter Cooke, 'Gustave Moreau and the reinvention of history painting', *Art Bulletin*, vol.90, no.3 (2008), pp.395-417.

dancing Salomé [fig.6] – was a way of compelling the spectator's attention to dwell upon pure pictorial beauty. This immobile contemplation is, in one sense, inherited from a Kantian disinterest, and Moreau aimed for an evocation of an immaterial 'sublime' state through contemplative immobility – as opposed to action and movement. This 'la belle inertie' was, as espoused by Moreau, the ideal quality of a purely plastic work, which is, he wrote 'sublime in its apparent immobility, and in its minimal pretension to the dramatic'.[10] At the same, Moreau's work differed from the isolated passive figures of Ingres's work, in that through his *mise-en-scènes*, Moreau combined this immobility with temporally-poignant details suggestive of dramatic spectacle.

Although aspects of this can be seen in Rouault's *L'Enfant Jésus parmi les docteurs*, it is in fact in works like *Le Clown blessé*, or *Danseuse* (1939-1944) [fig.7] that Rouault fully realizes the force of Moreau's immobility – but on his own terms. *Danseuse*, similarly monumental in size, has the same visual apparatus as *Le Clown blessé*: the frame painted onto the canvas (with Rouault-like face), the curtain, and a figure who stands on the verge of the frame and the scene within it. The constructed solidity of the surface is especially fragmented, made up of chromatic and textural units of thickly applied paint that gives the surface a pattern reminiscent of the pieces of a mosaic or stained-glass window – also a vertical, contemplative form of visual address, and influenced by Rouault's early apprenticeship to a stained-glass maker. The brush marks have a more rigid appearance; even in the limbs of the figure they are applied as block-like slabs that lend the limbs, and also the dog and the vase of flowers, a flattened, static, and built

[10] Piere Sérié, 'Theatricality versus Anti-Theatricality: Narrative Techniques in French History Painting (1850-1900)', in Peter Cooke & Nina Lubbren (eds.) *Painting and Narrative in France from Poussin to Gauguin*, (New York & Oxford: Routledge, 2016), p.146.

quality. The relatively raw quality of the colors, which are almost garish, contributes to the brutish *cloisonnisme* this produces.

As in *Le Clown blessé*, *Danseuse* combines the stasis of archaic relief with the mechanical, and the immobility of these forms is especially noticeable when applied to the usually mobile form of a dancer.[11] In fact, despite the thick fixity of these surfaces, there are indications of mobility within *Danseuse*: for one thing, the machinic divisions of the marionette-like figure imply their own mobility through the representation of a matrix of parts, a matrix that extends beyond the body to the aesthetic of the whole surface. This mobile immobility reached its apotheosis in Rouault's designs for the sets and costumes for Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russes production of *The Prodigal Son* in 1929 (music by Sergei Prokofiev and choreography by George Balanchine) [fig.8]. The costumes overlaid the dancers' bodies with the mechanical divisions of Rouault's marionette-like figures, which were then animated by the ballet itself. In the painting, however, the animation of the surface occurs as it might in a pattern; in the interplay between the segments and colours. 'Natural' movement, though, is non-existent, which speaks to a critical move away from nature, or the natural, or even the 'real' or observed subject as a stable source in painting. Here, instead, the sources of this highly constructed painting are themselves artificial: the frieze, the marionette, the space of theatre, the paintings of Moreau.

The composition of *Danseuse* revolves around a single figure – the titular dancer, and there are specific echoes of Moreau's *Salomé dancing* (the tattooed Salomé) [fig.6], such as the angle of the legs and the proximity of the feet to the edge of the picture plane. Rouault's dancer also

[11] For Rouault's repeated use of the 'vertical thrust' in architecture as well as dance, see Gael Mooney and Stephen Schloesser in *Mystic Masque: Semblance and Reality in Georges Rouault 1871-1958*, McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Boston, 2008, p.112

stands, with outstretched arms, with her face in profile and adorned like Salomé with a necklace and hanging earring. And, although the composition is the reverse of Moreau's, where, in relation to the dancer in Moreau's work, there is a panther with a jeweled collar, in Rouault's there is a dog with a clown's collar. Rouault transposes the grandeur of Herod's court to a domestic setting, where the ornamental detail and grandiose figures behind Salomé become frames on the wall behind the dancer, a table and chairs, and a vase of flowers. This was not an uncommon move in modernism, and represents both a 'lowering' of the tradition of oil painting and a 'raising' of the ordinary.

The use of facial expressions was central to the form of history painting Moreau was set against, which he found to be over-theatricalized and symptomatic of the kind of theatricality in painting that annihilated pictorial form.[12] As well as ridding his own work of gesture, then, Moreau also eradicated such codified expression – hence the mask-like faces of Oedipus, the Sphinx, Salomé, etc. which emphasize the interiorization of the action, pushing it to the psychological and moral level. If the faces are mask-like in Moreau's work, they become masks in Rouault's – even in his early work. Across Rouault's early twentieth-century oeuvre, exemplified by paintings such as *Jeu de massacre*, the faces are all roughly the same, and by 1920, as the black outline simplifies and dominates figuration in his work, the faces become indistinguishable from masks. In 1958, Courthion justified the 'lack of outward variety in [Rouault's] paintings' and 'the monotonous repetition of the faces of the clowns' in terms that sound close to Moreau's aesthetic aims: 'a moral order', Courthion wrote, 'is substituted for a physical order, inner emotion for delectation, intense and significant life for spectacular

[12] See Peter Cooke, "Gustave Moreau`s Salome. The Poetics and Politics of History Painting," *Burlington Magazine,* no. 149 (August 2007), pp. 528-36 and Scott C. Allan, 'Tyrannical Inopportunity: Gustave Moreau's Antinarrative' in Cooke & Lubbren, *Painting and Narrative* (2016), pp.181-203.

pageantry'.[13] Similarly, Rouault himself wrote that 'the '[death] mask of Beethoven with its closed eyes moves me as much as a whole century of epic actions. In fact, what is beautiful remains hidden and has always been so.'[14]

In their defacement and abstract immobility, the marionettes in *Danseuse* and *Le Clown blessé* also exemplify an aesthetic that arose around Symbolist theatre in the late nineteenth century. In the 1890s, Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art (1890-92) and Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre (1893-97), rejected the defined, descriptive staging of naturalist theatre, and proposed a form of theatre based upon suggestion and evocation – a model that would require an active engagement on the part of the audience and that promoted the visual language of theatre over the verbal.[15] Their particular conception of the marionette, which differed radically from the life-like puppet described famously by Kleist in the eighteenth century, represented an alternative to the flesh-and-blood actor, whose personality, actions and gestures on the stage threatened to produce what Adrien Remacle called 'the execrable banality of the learned gesture'.[16] For the playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, for example, the self-effacing and deliberately strange marionette was a more effective way of embodying the inner nature of archetypal beings. And in a similar vein Anatole France described the concentrated form of expression of the marionette as possessed of 'a naïve grace, the divine gaucheness of statues

[13] Pierre Courthion, *L'art indépendant, panorama international de 1900 à nos jours* (Paris : Editions Albin Michel, 1958), p. 69.

[14] Rouault, 'Stella Vespertina', *Sur l'art et sur la vie: le métier de peindre* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1971), p. 160.

[15] See F. W. J. Hemmings, *Culture and Society in France 1848-1948 - Dissidents and Philistines* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 240-1

[16] Adrien Remacle, 'Petit Théâtre: Le Sage de Khéyam de Bouchor', *Mercure de France* (April 1892), p.355.

who kindly consent to be made into dolls […] These marionettes resemble Egyptian hieroglyphs, that is to say there is something mysterious and pure about them, so that when they act out a play of Aristophanes or Shakespeare, it is as if I am watching the poet's thought unrolling across the walls of a temple in sacred characters.'[17] Moreover, in 1892 Remacle, the writer and director of the short-lived literary *Revue Contemporaine* (1885-86), wrote of the marionette that 'The hieratic slowness of their movements, the unexpectedness of their frequently jerky gestures, the absoluteness and rigidity of their poses – all this is very artistic because, taken as a whole, it creates a separate world of its own, very distant from us, far from the stage itself, where the reality of the ideas and the types presents itself to our mind in a very stark form, thanks to the obvious lack of reality of the performance.'[18]

The marionette theatre in Paris took many forms, from the guignol (glove puppet) to the marionettes of the Petit Théâtre des Marionettes, which were about thirty inches high and manipulated by actors using levers.[19] Rouault did not reference with any exactitude one particular form of marionette but rather absorbed a generalized idea of the gauche marionette into his work. In a work like *Jeu de massacre*, whose title is a direct reference to the fairground stall where wooden balls are thrown at puppets depicting bourgeois 'types', this errs towards the guignol. Later, he took up the idea of the articulated-marionette, very probably influenced

[17] Anatole France, 'Les Marionettes de M. Signoret', in *La Vie littéraire* (Paris, 1899), vol.2, p.148, quoted in Jill Fell, *Alfred Jarry, an Imagination in Revolt* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press,2005), p.147.

[18] Adrien Remacle, 'Petit Théâtre: Le Sage de Khéyan de Bouchor', *Mercure de* France (April 1892), p.355, quoted in Fell, *Alfred Jarry* (2005), p.150.

[19] See David Rose, *Oscar Wilde's Elegant Republic: Transformation, Dislocation and Fantasy in fin-de-siècle Paris (*Newcastle, 2015), pp. 114.

by the affinity of this form to the mechanical or armored body and the obvious resonances of this with the recent image of the body at war.

Although they come from almost oppositional philosophical perspectives (insisting respectively on existence and essence), both Malraux's description of Rouault's art as one of 'significance' and 'being', and Gaston Diehl's observation in 1945 that the hieratic motifs of Rouault's later work molded individuals into 'beings true to their essence',[20] speak to the resemblances between the various theories surrounding the 'geste incantatoire' and Rouault's aesthetic. Even more so than the puppet-theatre itself, the heavy facture of Rouault's work exacerbates the rigidity of the figures and the distance of the world of painting, sealing it within its frame-within-a-frame (in the case of works like *Danseuse*) such that the figures are wholly controlled by the visual language of the work. In *Danseuse* or *Christ aux outrages* (1932) [fig.9], this is a particularly intense effect, as the fragmented articulation of the bodies in thick black lines and slabs of color continues across the canvas. The marionette-aesthetic works across the composition, drawing the figure or figures into the ground, and foregrounding – as the marionette did – the material construction of the scene. In this light, the brutish *cloisonnisme* described above becomes an extension of the marionette aesthetic.

It is not, then, that Rouault merely represents the marionette within his paintings, but that the notion of the jointed-marionette and all that its gaucheness, immobility, and uncanny distance represented, becomes integrated into the very structure of his work. Understood in this way, the visibility of the construction of the work is an essential part of the overt artifice of this structuring aesthetic. Paint operates solidly as paint-matter, analogous to the strings and materials of the obviously 'unreal' marionette.

[20] Gaston Diehl, 'Georges Rouault', *Les problèmes de la peinture*, (Paris : Confluences, 1945), pp.35.

Underlying this aesthetic is a belief in a hidden reality beneath the material surface of things and the anagogic potential of art: principles that echo Jean Moréas's call in his 1886 Symbolist manifesto to 'clothe the Idea in a perceptible form'.[21] Importantly, this 'perceptible form' did not have to be derived from nature, a move that in Moréas's writings, and also in G. Albert Aurier's, rejected the inspiration of the physical, natural world, and the dominant assumption of nineteenth-century aesthetics that it was through nature that art reached an insight into the human condition.[22] The implication was that if it was not the understanding of nature that opened up access to these deeper truths, then art must look beyond to something other than nature. This claim also challenged the assumption that 'natural matter' was somehow in itself deeper, of greater integrity, and capable of revealing more 'truth' than the artificial.[23] This challenge to the sacrosanct status of natural matter is significant because it legitimizes materials more widely as carriers of meaning, including the man-made. The notion of the machinic marionette as a more expressive embodiment of deeper truths than the flesh-and-blood actor concurs with this, as does Rouault's application of paint as declaratively paint-matter, his use of multiple representational vocabularies, and his fusion of painting with the artifice of theatre as a form that could signify or address higher orders of meaning. (This is despite his oft-repeated remarks about always beginning with nature, which are at odds with

[21] Jean Moréas, 'Le symbolisme', repr. in Henri Dorra (ed.) *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*a (California, California University Press, 1994), p. 151.

[22] G. Albert Aurier, 'Symbolism in Painting: Paul Gauguin' (1891), repr. in *Symbolist Art Theories*, p. 192.

[23] For a further discussion of this aspect of Symbolism, see Michelle Facos, 'Introduction', *The Symbolist Roots of Modern Art* (Oxford & New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), p.9.

both his claims to begin with the materials and with how much of his work begins with established forms of expression).[24]

In taking up the marionette, and in the intimate domestic space of a work such as *Danseuse* (particularly in relation to the grand spaces of Moreau's work to which *Danseuse* points) , Rouault's work echoes something of the relationship between Symbolist theatre and the work of the Nabis. In the 1890s, this group of painters, which included Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Paul Sérusier, Paul Ranson, and Edouard Vuilliard, were closely involved with both Fort's Théâtre d'Art and Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre (indeed Vuillard and Mauclair were founders of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre) and played an integral role via set, costume and playbill design in their developing aesthetic.[25] The Nabis also wrote, designed and performed puppet shows, which were staged semi-privately in domestic spaces – the intimacy of which was prized by Alfred Jarry, whose play *Ubu Roi* was initially staged by the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1896 with a backcloth painted by Jarry and the Nabis. As Jill Fell notes, the London reviews of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre productions in 1895 remarked upon a harsh jerkiness that verged on caricature, which indicates an increasingly gauche marionette aesthetic moving towards the heavy segments of Rouault's surfaces.[26]

In the later moment in which Rouault's marionette aesthetic is at its height, in the interwar years in France, it could be argued that the immobility and ordering structure of the marionette-aesthetic of Rouault's surface cohered with the rhetoric of order and unity in the atmosphere of the *rappel à l'ordre* (call to order), or retrenchment, in France. In the aftermath

[24] Rouault's letters to Vollard, published and unpublished, contain such claims, as do the essays and letters collected in *Sur l'art et sur la vie*.

[25] For a detailed discussion of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre *see Le Théâtre de l'Œuvre 1893-1900. Naissance du théâtre modern* (Paris/Milan: Musée d'Orsay/5 Continents, 2005).

[26] Fell, *Alfred Jarry* (2005), p.154

of the trauma of the First World War, this retrenchment was accompanied by a return to the defensive musculature of the neo-classical body – and a rejection of the fragmented, dysmorphic appearance of the Cubist body.[27] Although the articulated limbs of the marionette had existed in Rouault's work before the war, they had certainly become more dominant, and arguably the heavy divisions that suggested affinities between medieval enameling and the vitreous qualities of the surface structure found a new resonance with the call for a return to older, stable aesthetic forms.

That said, in a work such as *Christ aux outrages*, the structuring contours of the surface are on the verge of disintegration. Instead of wholly unifying the parts within a coherent whole, the roughly applied black marks and lines make up an incomplete, fractured structure around and over which the equally rough patches of color exceed or bleed out of their designated segments. This is very different from the calm, immobile figures of Derain's post-Fauvist realism of this period, or the clean linearity of Gino Severini's neo-classicism. The segmentation of the body of Christ, as well as the raw fleshly colors, applied over thick dried layers with a palette knife and brush to excoriated effect, keeps the wounded as well as the armored body in play. Flanked by two soldiers, represented by two of Rouault's recognizable clown figures, the image of the mocked Christ is not an image of wholeness or recovery but rather, as *Le Clown blessé* is, an image of a broken world.

The crude facture of the surface of *Christ aux outrages*, then, works against the sense of an underlying order to the surface, and against the elevated aesthetic of the marionette described by Remacle and France. Disrupting the mystical distance of the marionette as actor, the

[27] See Maud Ellmann, 'More kicks than pricks: Modernist body-parts', in Jean-Michel (ed.) *A Handbook of Modernist Studies* (Oxford & Massachussetts: Wiley, 2013), pp. 255-280 & Hal Foster, 'Prosthetic Gods', *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol.4, no.2 (1997).

roughly hewn qualities of the marks and the excoriated texture arguably let the body back in – not as literally represented but analogously through the brute physicality of the paint, and in emphasizing the active work of the painter upon the surface. This is particularly achieved by the intermittent presence of white paint. Aside from the loin cloth where it is used representatively, there has clearly been a thick layer of white underpainting and this appears in the scratches of the palette knife as another layer of color has been applied – such as in the area of green to the left of Christ's head – or appears more faintly beneath a scuffle of brush marks of other colors, as on Christ's torso. Bulking out the texture of these areas, where the white appears it also gives the effect of a highlight or luminescence that contributes to the lapidary qualities of the surface. These moments are taken up by areas where white has been applied on top of color, such as the brush marks that add highlights (although not depth) to the forehead and cheekbone of Christ's face, and in the thickly scraped application of white paint between the clown on the left and the dropped black vertical line. This latter patch of paint in particular is wholly material, empty of semiotic or mimetic movement, and its visibility forces the materiality of the surface upon the viewer. It also draws out the other 'moments' of white, creating, as the patches of red do similarly, an inner pattern within the matter of the surface.

The verticality of a work such as *Le Clown blessé* is under threat in *Christ aux outrages*. Despite the monumental size of the canvas, and the important dropped vertical black line on the third, the body is brought right up against the edge of the canvas unmediated by a painted frame. The clowns – an incongruous presence alongside the figure of Christ – press insistently in from either side, an intrusion from a lower cultural form into the space of oil on canvas.

The relationship between facture and an anti-bourgeois critique of society was evident in Rouault's earlier work, notably in *Jeu de massacre*, in which Rouault borrowed from the fairground and the marionette theatre, depicting a row of puppets dressed as bourgeois types

(and a clown) in grotesque fashion, the dark violence of the lines operating as a vocabulary of satire and condemnation. In his later work, the relationship is perhaps less overt, although the material detail and crude facture of a surface such as that of *Christ aux outrages* establishes a vulgar material presence. As Aldous Huxley put it, 'too particular and detailed accents of physical actuality'[28] are signs of vulgarity, an observation premised on the old division between form and matter, where form is understood as generalized and conceptual as opposed to the low particularity of matter. This vulgar materiality, combined with Rouault's use of 'low' forms of entertainment with which to 'stage' the man of sorrows, is a disruptive presence. It is starkly different to the finished register of Maurice Denis's religious painting or even to the more expressive brush work of Georges Desvallières, whose facture ultimately worked towards an emotive realist end in his depictions of the suffering Christ. A similar 'vulgar' materiality can be found in the work of Kees Van Dongen, where it is wielded as a way of laying hold of the materialities of modern life, from make-up to electric lighting. In Van Dongen, as in Rouault, it can also be read as an indictment of the values of modern society as it emphasizes a crassness and artificiality. Van Dongen's use of heavily-painted mask-like faces also proposes a society of appearances.

In combining the immobility and elevated terms of what I have been calling the marionette-aesthetic of Rouault's surfaces with this crude facture and incongruous theatricality, Rouault's work has an analogous duality to the marionette theatre itself, which was both a place of metaphysical expression and social caricature.[29] Important to understanding Rouault's

[28] Aldous Huxley, *Vulgarity in Literature: Digressions from a Theme* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930), p.15.

[29] See Kang, *Rouault in Perspective: Contextual and Theoretical Study of His Art* (Lanham, MD: International Scholars Publications, 2000). p.131 and Roger-Daniel Bensky, *Structures textuelles de la marionette de langue française* (Paris: Editions A. G. Nizet, 1969), p.11.

continued interest in the marionette, and to the increasingly abstract engagement with this interest in his work, is Rouault's direct involvement from 1914 with the work of Alfred Jarry – and the fact that this involvement took the form of both painting and etching. In 1914, Rouault had agreed to illustrate a group of texts written by Ambroise Vollard but based upon Jarry's notorious character, Ubu. Vollard, who was passionate about publishing *livres d'artiste* (limited-edition books in which a text is printed on fine paper accompanied by specifically designed original prints by an artist, in any variety of mediums), had published Jarry's original texts in *Almanach illustré du Père Ubu (XXe siècle)* in 1901 and the two were well-acquainted. [30]. In 1907, after the death of Jarry, Vollard bought the rights to the Ubu name. Vollard had become interested in Rouault's work around the same time, initially in his watercolors and ceramics, but by 1913 in his work more broadly. In July 1913, Vollard purchased the contents of Rouault's studio – '770 paintings, distempers, studies, etc.' in various stages of completion, and in the 1920s, as the result of further agreements, Vollard gave Rouault the use of studios on the upper floors of his home on rue Martignac.[31] It was during this time that Rouault worked on the illustrations for what would become *Réincarnations du Père Ubu*, published in 1932.

The original Ubu was a transformation of one of Jarry's hated school masters, a Père Hebert. Becoming an archetypal tyrant and despicable bourgeois as Jarry developed him, Ubu is, as Jill Fell notes, 'recognizably cast in the mold of Kasperle, Polichinelle, Punch, and Papa Guignol, as the receptacle of and medium for man's baser instincts, especially selfishness,

[30] On Vollard's interest in *Livres d'artiste*, see Rebecca A. Rabinow, 'Vollard's *Livres d'artiste*' in Rabinow (ed) *Cezanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde*,(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p.197.

[31] Receipt signed by Rouault, May 5, 1917 (payment had been delayed by the war), Vollard Archives MSS 421 (9,17), fol.I.

cruelty, and cowardice'.[32] *Ubu Roi*, Jarry's first play about Ubu, conflates bits and pieces of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, and *The Winter's Tale* in describing the monstrous progress of Ubu and his wife as they kill and usurp the king of Poland, massacre the bureaucrats, and, after the death of Mère Ubu (hacked apart by Ubu – a violence reminiscent of Polichinelle), the flight of Ubu from an uprising to begin his scheme again in Paris. Everything, from the self-interested gluttonous appetites of Ubu to the dialogue is base, vulgar, and explicit; it is a scatological farce satirizing – and condemning – the values of bourgeois society in France. *Ubu Roi* opened for one night only in 1896, prompting an outcry, in part at the opening word 'merdre' with its disruptive nonsensically-added 'r', and in part at the increasingly simplified and theatrically crude nature of the performance.

In the early 1890s, Jarry had joined commentators such as France and Remacle in their rejection of the affected theatrical gestures of the actor in favor of the marionette, but, like Rouault, Jarry moved away from the mysticism and evocative emphasis of Symbolism towards a stagecraft that was drastically simplified and declarative of its basic material construction. For *Ubu Roi* Jarry had moved from puppets to actors-as-puppets, but although finances prevented him from putting the actors in full body masks (something Rouault would do in his designs for Diaghilev's *Prodigal Son*), the aesthetic of the marionette remained paramount, and in his speech before the curtain at the opening night, on 10 December 1896, at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in Paris, Jarry announced that:

> Our actors have been willing to depersonalize themselves for two evenings, and to act behind masks, in order to express more perfectly the inner man, the soul of these overgrown puppets you are about to see.

[32] Jill Fell, *Alfred Jarry* (2005), p.142.

In the same speech, Jarry emphasized the constructed nature of his performance, continuing that:

> However much we'd like to be marionettes, we haven't hung all our actors on strings, which, even if it weren't absurd, would have complicated things badly. In the same way, we haven't been too literal about our crowd scenes, whereas in a puppet-show a handful of strings and pulleys will serve to command a whole army. You must expect to see important personages like M. Ubu and the Czar forced to gallop neck and neck on cardboard horses that we've spent the night painting in order to supply the action.[33]

Jarry's use of such a stripped down and clumsy theatrical mode was designed to emphasize the fairground origins of his work, and to activate the spectator in a manner reminiscent of the audiences of puppet-booths or fairground participants. The effect was a parody of theatre that anticipated Dadaist strategies of a similar ilk by two decades. Satirically, the force of Jarry's play came from the impressing of 'types', such as the grotesque Ubu whose every action is designed to highlight the ultimate hypocrisies of modern societies – from his greed to his colonialism. His exaggerated form was intended, Jarry wrote in an article for *La Revue Blanche* in 1897, to expose the 'double ignoble' of the bourgeois public, whom, Jarry added, needed to be attacked in order to draw their attention to themselves.[34] The marionette was an important part of the way in which this revelation of types was presented, as was Jarry's interest in the mask and its use in Far Eastern theatre and in antiquity. Jarry often used masks, and when doing so, stated that only six frontal positions and six in profile were necessary to

[33] Alfred Jarry, 'Preface', *Ubu Roi* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p.2

[34] Afred Jarry, 'Questions de théâtre', *Revue Blanche* (1897), pp.16-18.

capture the entire range of emotions.[35] Again, this was embedded in a wider debate – the Symbolist playwright Paul Claudel, for example, would later write of the Japanese Noh mask that its creation was understood (in Japanese) not as a 'carving' but as a 'stamp'. This, he wrote, 'imparts the sense of a seal put upon something thereafter unchangeable; a crystallization of a character forever within the passion of which he represents the form, within the age of which he is the symbol, in the mythical or historical event that he has crafted'.[36]

The affinities with Rouault's project are to some extent obvious, particularly in relation to his use of mask-like faces arranged in a limited number of frontal and profile positions, and his repetition of types, such as the bourgeois male, who appears as a puppet in *Jeu de massacre* and in the monumental portrait, *Monsieur X* (1911) [fig.10]. Although Jarry would arguably become a specific influence on Rouault's unfolding project in the twentieth century, the significance of the affinities between their oeuvres also enables a way of understanding Rouault's work in the context of a wider sensibility. When Rouault encountered figures such as Léon Bloy and his vitriolic criticism of society, the idea of the marionette theatre provided an existent vocabulary with which Rouault's work could take up its own position within and against contemporary life. Much has been written about the influence of African masks on the avant-garde, but the marionette theatre was as wide a preoccupation, and moreover an immediate and – importantly for Rouault, who always identified himself with the city – Parisian art form. The marionette theatre had also existed as an alternative, or lower form of

[35] Alfred Jarry, 'De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre', *Mercure de France* (1896), also in Jarry, *Oeuvres Completes*, ed. Michel Arrivé, Henri Bordillon, Patrick Besnier & Bernard le Doze (Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1972-1988), Vol. 1, pp.408-9.

[36] Paul Claudel, 'Preface' to Tsunao Miyajima, *Contribution à une étude du theatre japonais de poupées* (Kyoto: Institute franko - japonais du Kansai, 1930), p.90 quoted in Fell *Alfred Jarry* (2005), p.214.

theatre, on the outside of mainstream art forms, and as such offered the artists who took up its imagery, a means of positioning themselves outside social norms and 'high art'.

Ironically, the formal aspects of Rouault's work that I am suggesting are derived from the marionette theatre (although not necessarily exclusively), such as the aesthetic of the mask and the structuring form of the marionette-aesthetic, are also the qualities that allow for a 'higher' reading of Rouault's surfaces: as concerned with the essence of being, or with universal gesture, or as anagogical. And it is in this duality – between vulgar materialism and mystical expression, between critics who did not know whether to laugh, be horrified at, or deeply affected by, his 'dark' images – that the aesthetic and historical force of Rouault's painting becomes legible.

If this duality has not been drawn out in relation to Rouault's painting, the comparison between his figures and marionettes was made, by Louis Vauxcelles, as early as 1907.[37] More interesting, however, is Marcel Zahar's discussion of the coming together of Rouault and Jarry in Vollard's *Réincarnations*. Reviewing the publication in 1933, Zahar wrote that Rouault was hardly out of his natural zone in undertaking the illustrations. In fact, Zahar asked, 'is he not the obvious historiographer, the faithful draftsman of Ubu?'[38] And hinting at the double nature of Rouault's work, he adds 'The universe [Rouault] creates is both circus and hell.' Zahar's main point, however, is the synchronicity between the materiality of the etching and

[37] As Kang notes, Vauxcelles, Gustave Kahn, Claude Roger-Marx and Bernard Dorival called them 'guignols' (glove puppets), Jacques Maritain, Marcel Arland and Waldemar George called them 'fantoches', while most recently Fabrice Hergott has referred to them as 'poupées' and marionettes. Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.128.

[38] Marcel Zahar, 'Georges Rouault ou le retour au grotesque dramatique', *Formes*, no.31 (1933), pp.354-355.

engraving processes Rouault used in making these illustrations, and the wider ends of the project. 'The rough technique of wood engraving', Zahar wrote, 'served [Rouault's] concept perfectly. The contrast between the opaque masses and the whites exacerbates the cruel articulation of the characters. The heroes wear sufficiently abject masks, or have hebetudinous expressions inscribed in bold lines.'[39] Ubu, Zahar continues, is 'inscribed as if a figure of stained-glass, frozen in the thick outline of his silhouette. It is as if he assumes his own charcoal carapace […].'[40] Rouault's etchings, he adds, 'mark the events of the spectacle with more flexibility, but they remain in harmony with the wood engravings and the typography.'[41]

The fixity and contrast of which Zahar writes can be seen in the image 'Le Père Ubu chantre' [fig.11], which has a suggestion of a traceried window in the background and belongs to an incident in Vollard's text in which Ubu sings in a church. The abstract shapes, both of the body of Ubu and of the background, are more ambivalent than in Rouault's painting to date, and the contours of Ubu more strident in etched form. As Rouault worked during the 1920s on these etchings and engravings for *Réincarnations*, the dividing contours of his paintings strengthened and it seems highly likely that this represents an interest in treating his increasingly thick – and increasing viscous, dryly-applied paint – in the coarse manner of the woodblock or lithograph. Not in precise imitation of the latter, but as if working against the same kind of resistance. (Rouault's somewhat turbulent relationship to printmaking emerges in his letters to Vollard from 1922, in which, at the beginning of the year he declares 'do not

[39] Zahar (1933), p.354.

[40] Zahar (1933), p.355.

[41] Zahar (1933), p.354.

speak to me of lithos, it is impossible!'[42] and then early in the following year: 'the future seems clearer to me with lithos'.[43])

There is a fluidity and expressive abandon to the paintings associated with the Ubu project that elsewhere is only found intermittently in Rouault's early twentieth-century oeuvre. Rather as it had for Bonnard, who illustrated Jarry's *Almanachs du Père Ubu* (1898 and 1901), Rouault's work on Ubu drew out the more unruly qualities of his art and gave them focus. Bonnard's loosely scrawled images to accompany Jarry's words can be hard to reconcile with the intimism of his domestic scenes, and yet, like Rouault, Bonnard was capable of combining – at times subtly – the beautiful and the grotesque. In Jarry's words, Bonnard was capable of painting 'that other side of beauty,' and Lugné-Poe remembered Bonnard as 'the humourist among us, with a satirical element in his pictures'.[44] In Rouault's Ubu-related work, there is an almost violent form of expression, which can be seen, for example, in *La Mère Ubu* (1920-1930) [fig.12]. This work has a collage-like construction, made up of single strident brush marks, and areas of impasto where the layering remains visible because of the transparency of the oil diluted with turpentine. Large, isolated brush-marks denote the remnants of a frame-like structure, which, in comparison with the framing devices of a work such as *Le Clown blessé*, draws close to Jarry's attack on theatrical conventions in displaying minimally a highly crude and partially incomplete version of a frame.

This consciousness of pictorial fragmentation, which a work such as *Mère Ubu* forces upon the viewer – but which arguably is also there in the multiple parts and visual orders of *Le Clown blessé* – induces a self-awareness and alienation in response to the represented world. Such a

[42] Fondation Georges Rouault: LVGR19220127

[43] Fondation Georges Rouault: LVGR19231003

[44] Marieke Dubbelboer, *The Subversive Poetics of Alfred Jarry: Ubusing Culture in the Almanachs du Père Ubu* (London: Routledge, 2012), p.59.

response is provoked by works that, in pursuing this fragmentation, do not withdraw from the alienated social environment of *the* world into an aesthetic world nostalgic for an ordered and organic sense of wholeness and reconciliation. In denying, or actively upsetting the sense of a coherent superstructure, the image remains firmly yoked to its existence as aesthetic object, an existence that is contingent and heterogeneous.

The argument for the alienation of the pictorial fragmentation of Rouault's work is positioned against the readings of his oeuvre that see a harmony and symmetry in his aesthetic that transcends the structures of oppositions to find resolution in the whole. Gael Mooney makes such a case, reading the proximity of the sacred and the profane in Rouault's late work as emphasizing the communal aspect of an 'horizon of grandeur' that strives for homogeneity and the resolution of barriers dividing social existence.[45] Mooney's arguments are compelling, but they overlook the vulgar materialism of Rouault's surfaces which is an insistent presence. This is combined with the alienating effects of the clowns and marionettes as 'actors' or 'stand-ins', and the materiality of the surface, which, analogous to the mask-like faces, confront the viewer with the object rather than drawing the gaze into an aesthetic that resolves meaning.

That said, as has already been suggested, it is not the case that Rouault's interwar works are devoid of a higher order, but this has to be seen as engaged in a struggle with the alienating, crude, and subversive aesthetics of the surface. This is certainly the case in the monumental painting that arose around the book projects Rouault was working on in the interwar years. The marionette-aesthetic of *Le Clown blessé* has, as Geofffrey Kantaris puts it in his discussion of early cinema, a double disposition that on the one hand engages with the shocks and jolts

[45] Gael Mooney, 'Georges Rouault: Encountering God's Beauty' in Margaret Pfeil & Tobias Wainwright (eds.), *Violence, Transformation and the Sacred: "They shall be called Children of God"*, *College Theology Society*, Vol.57 (New York, 2011), pp.106-8.

of an alienated and alienating social environment, and on the other withdraws from that into a structured aesthetic that – almost – conjoins the parts into an organic sense of a whole.[46] Partaking of both these impulses at the same time, works such as this are internally split: neither wholly condemnatory nor wholly reconciliatory or redemptive.

In this, Rouault's project appears to concur with the view of a schizoid modernism, whose works are at once aligned with a reactionary anti-bourgeois politics and yet are also governed by a desire to re-organize the shattered fragments of modernity. Such works reinforce the autonomous sphere of art, in which it is possible to believe that one is free, and yet that space belongs to the same bourgeois system it also denigrates. This understanding of modernism as an ultimately self-protective mode of art, sits in opposition to a notion of an avant-garde that, instead of taking up aspects of mass or popular culture, enters *into* these forms, and turns towards a dissolution of art into social life in an attempt to transform the whole social sphere.[47] While Rouault cannot be described as engaged with this form of political avant-gardism, and although his works address the modern world from the preserved space of the work of art, the heightened fragmentation of his work and his montage-like use of aspects of different visual orders at least approach the aesthetic principles of the politicized avant-garde. The heterogeneity of the collage or montage fundamentally resists a totalizing aesthetic order, and the principle of construction it lays bare represents an engaged form of art that breaks open the 'closed', unified, and resolved work of art.

On the one hand, then, the influence of the marionette theatre on the structure of Rouault's work can be described as akin to the use of myth that T.S. Eliot described in James Joyce's *Ulysees* as 'simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the

[46] Geoffrey Kantaris, 'The Last Snapshots of Modernity: Argentine Cinema after the "Process"', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, Vol.72, no.2 (1996), pp.19-44.

[47] See Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'.[48] And yet, at the same time, the way in which the monumental synthesis of Moreau's canvases becomes the articulated limb-like of the surface of *Danseuse* sets up a more unsettling oscillation between the sense of a lost totality and a new liberation that this remembrance of a former order represents.

The most profound critique which arises from this disjunct in Rouault's work is that the worlds of art and reality are dominated by appearances, or a façade. The question as to whether there is either nothing or something behind or in that façade is something that haunts Rouault's oeuvre. The self-conscious address of works such as *Le Clown blessé*, as well as the indicated act of lifting the curtain on these scenes, present a re-staged vision of a world that is itself a staged artifice, and which Rouault first described in 1905. Writing to the theosophist and writer Edouard Schuré in one of the most quoted passages in the Rouault literature, Rouault described a vision:

> At the fall of dusk, [a] circus wagon of wandering gypsies halted on the roadside, the old jade browsing the sparse grass, the aging clown seated beside his van patching his glittering motley-colored costume, *the contrast* between these scintillating garments of entertainment and this life, *of infinite sadness*, loomed before my eyes... And then I blew up the picture, and I suddenly recognized who the 'clown' really was. It was I, you, practically *all of us*... this richly spangled costume is a gift dealt out by life; we are more or less all of us, *somewhat clowns*, wearing a 'spangled costume'. But if we are suddenly caught unawares the way I caught the old clown, why then, oh God! Who'd dare deny that his heart would be rent with infinite compassion? I have the mania, or the failing (if indeed it be a failing; in any case it is a source of ceaseless agony) of *stripping every one of their glamorous or pompous spangled costumes*, be he the King or Emperor […][49]

[48] T.S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', *The Dial* (November 1923), p.483.

[49] Rouault, letter to Edouard Schuré, circa 1905. The original is lost, but it was published in *Le Goéland* (June 1951) and reprinted in *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.150.

In this attack on the social façade, and even on existence itself as a form of façade, Rouault was deeply influenced by Blaise Pascal. In the *Pensées* (which, since his time as Moreau's student, Rouault apparently kept by his bedside), Pascal argued that political power, justice and social order become socially established not because of an inherent justice or fairness, but rather because of power and force. He examines the role of the human capacity for 'imagination', and writes that it is the uniforms of judges, soldiers, lawyers, and even the King himself, which invest these individuals with power. For Pascal, this imaginative capacity to associate uniforms with legitimate power is often exploited by imposters – and indeed is wielded by those holding, and wishing to hold onto, power:

> Our magistrates have shown themselves well aware of this mystery. Their red robes, the ermine in which they swaddle themselves like furry cats, the law-courts where they sit in judgement, the fleur de lys, all this august panoply was very necessary. If physicians did not have long gowns and mules, if learned doctors did not wear square caps and robes four times too large, they would never have deceived the world, which finds such an authentic display irresistible. If they possessed true justice and if physicians possessed the true art of healing, they would not need square caps; the majesty of such sciences would command respect in itself. But, as they only possess imaginary science, they have to resort to these vain devices in order to strike the imagination, which is their real concern, and this, in fact, is how they win respect.[50]

Rouault's debt to Pascal is evident in a later essay of his entitled 'Toque Noire, Robe Rouge' (Black Hat, Red Robe) in which he addresses the question of 'noble' subjects and 'human grandeur' as 'the negation of what men generally believe to be great and admirable'.[51] This is intermingled with a discussion of the 'language of forms and colors', which hints that painting is equally capable of deceiving the viewer with empty gestures. Rouault ends with the provocative statement that 'Black hat, red robe, made of beautiful spots of color; that's all it takes, and then the good judge only has to go to sleep'.

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[50] Blaise Pascal, *Oeuvres de Blaise Pascal: Pensées* (Paris: Librairie Hachette & Cie, 1904), fragment 44-82.

[51] Rouault, 'Toque Noire, Robe Rouge', *Sur l'art*, p.65-66.

Rouault took up this theme of the 'uniformed imposters' in various paintings of judges. In his early work, including *Le Condamné (ou l'Accusé)* (1907) [fig.13] – possibly affected too by the final stages of the Dreyfus affair – the setting is relatively precise, it is clearly a courtroom, and there are two layers of figures, including soldiers, lawyers, a judge, and the accused. The Pascalian theme is exacerbated by the clown-like features of all the faces aside from the accused, and the darkness of the painting, against which the flashes of white and red of the uniforms stand out as the organizing details. By 1913, in *Trois juges* [fig.14], and in the versions that followed in the 1920s, Rouault abstracted the motif of three judges from the earlier works, depicting them as increasingly clown and marionette-like, posed frontally and pressed up against the picture plane. The theatrical aspect of these works plays into the question of power, and the wielding of authority – the staged performance becomes interchangeable with Pascal's argument that social authority is no more than a series of props, and the actor or puppet becomes emblematic of the 'imposter'. And the marionette, too, with its strings and invisible animator, brings into question the location of power and represents a vision of the human being as automaton. The role, and motive, of the artist is also brought into question in this way, as an operator of visible agents.

Rouault's judges are exemplary of the way in which the mode of address of his painting turns towards a representation of a mode of existence – an 'inauthentic' mode of existence, in which being is defined by the demands of a social role, of a 'type'. The translation of those types, via a crude painterly facture and the echoes of his own clowns in the physiognomy of the judges, into an idiom associated with the aesthetics of the marionette theatre begins, in Rouault's work, to undermine the deception of the 'authentic display' Pascal described. Which brings us back to the significance of Malraux's insight that Rouault was not striving to *see*, but *to be*,

and that Rouault's models 'are but a potentiality, they will be that which his brushwork will make of them' – 'his art is not expressed in terms of beauty but in terms of existence'.[52]

Fig.1: Georges Rouault dans son atelier de la rue Emile Gilbert, 1953. Photograph by Yvonne Chevalier. Fondation Georges Rouault. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.2: Georges Rouault (1871-1958) © ARS, NY. *Le Clown blessé*, 1932. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 199 x 119.5cm. Inv.: AM1987-564. Photo: Philippe Migeat. Museé National d'Art Moderne. © CNA/MNAM/Dist.RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.3: *Jeu de massacre*. 1905. 52 x 66.3 cm. Watercolour, gouache, Indian ink, colour chalk on paper, 52 x 66.3 cm AM1989-560. Photo: Philippe Migeat. Museé National d'Art Moderne. © CNA/MNAM/Dist.RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.4: *L'Enfant Jésus parmi les docteurs*. 1894. Oil on canvas. D1921-1-1. Museé d'Unterlinden. © Musée d'Unterlinden, Dist.RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.5: Gustave Moreau, *Jupiter et Semele*, 1894-5. Oil on canvas. © Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, France / Bridgeman Images.

Fig.6: Gustave Moreau, *Salome Dancing before Herod*, c. 1874. 92x60 cms. © Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, France / Bridgeman Images

Fig.7: Georges Rouault, *Danseuse*, 1939-1944. oil on paper mounted on canvas, 85 x 46 inches. Photographe Jean-Louis Losi. Fondation Georges Rouault. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.8: Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russes production of *The Prodigal Son* in 1929 (music by Sergei Prokofiev and choreography by George Balanchine). Fondation Georges Rouault. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.9: *Christ aux outrages*. 1932. Oil on canvas, 36 ¼ x 28 ½ " (92.1 x 72.4cm). Given anonymously. The Museum of Modern Art Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.10: Georges Rouault, *Monsieur X*, c.1911. Oil on paper mounted on wood panel. 31 1/2 x 23 inches (80.01 x 58.42 cm). Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Edmund Hayes Fund, 1952. © Estate of Georges Rouault / Artists Rights Society (ARS),

[52] Malraux (December 1929), pp.5-6.

New York. Image courtesy of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.11: Georges Rouault, 'Le Père Ubu chantre' from *Les Réincarnations du Père Ubu*, Ambroise Vollard (editor), Paris, 1932. Fondation Georges Rouault. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.12: Georges Rouault, La Mère Ubu, 1920-30. Oil diluted with spirit. 27.5 x 18 cm. Photo Jean-Louis Losi. Fondation Georges Rouault. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.13: *Le Condamné (ou l'Accusé)*. 1905. Oil on canvas, 76 x 106 cm. Inv. AMVP1914. Photo: Bulloz. Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Fig.14: *Trois juges*. 1913. Gouache and oil on cardboard, 29 7/8 x 41 5/8". Sam A. Lewisohn Bequest. (17.1952). The Museum of Modern Art. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris