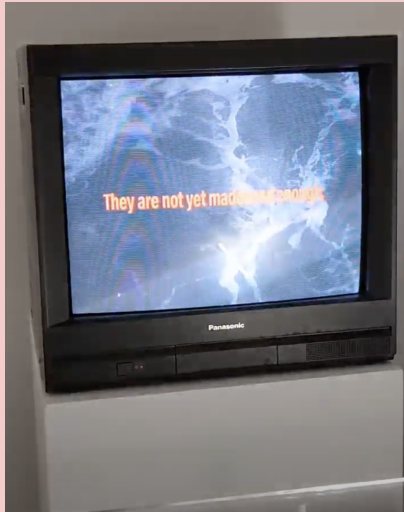


*Preseennols*  
Dylan Huw  
(English version)



*They are not yet maddened enough, they are not yet unleashed enough, one against the other, and the more furious they are and the more enraged, the closer and the more intimate they become...* These words of Antonin Artaud's were written as he experienced a period of simultaneous disintegration and explosive creativity, as he considered at length the death of God, the futility of language, and the end of the world, in prodigiously composed manifestos and letters to associates. He would spend the following nine years, which included the entirety of the Second World War, in various asylums.

A short video by Karolina Urbaniak sets Artaud's words against violently crashing waves; we could be anywhere, or nowhere. Urbaniak's piece elides who 'they' are, where the fury and rage Artaud writes of is rooted, ('unleashed enough' from what,) but the crashes of the waves elucidate the urgent force of the words more than any details could. I stand, I watch, and time disintegrates.

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~~It is half an hour earlier, and the old man has been standing still for a long time. The two men are in a public bathroom, around lunchtime. Their shoulders, not touching but almost, are the only parts of their bodies facing each other, the old man's left staring down the young one's right. The old man turns towards the younger's face and their eyes hold a gaze for a second before the younger zips up, washes his hands, and leaves. This being a fictional encounter — fictional encounter fictional public bathroom fictional gallery fictional town — I cannot say whether the old man's propositions register as overt or merely suggested, explicit or even imagined. Nonetheless, the sense of time being suspended, of each moment melting into the next with a slow intensity, is charged.~~

~~This did not happen, I repeat. I am merely writing it down.~~

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Everything, yes, collapses: this we know if we know nothing else. Language's collapse, it's literally becoming an impossibility, speaks loudest in this little room, its inadequacy to meet the weight of all the *everything* it's tasked with communicating, the poor thing, exposed, but also suggesting ways towards new mythologies, new ways of grasping the ungraspable beyond linear understandings of history and its mediation in the written word.

Time spent inside *Anathemata* is time spent having such paradoxes ex/implode in front of you, all around you, seep inside your bloodstream. It is a safe space for endless

perverse associations involving language, violence, intimacy, history, and their extremities, as dense and digressive as a half-legible ancient manuscript. Unifying it all is an exploration of the Epic, as an idea, a strategy, and a set of questions, in the works and spirits of an assemblage of influential experimenters, from high modernism to the contemporary, tracking twisty lineages from *The Anthemata* (and thus the vast swathes of Western, particularly Welsh and British, mythologies and literary canon which David Jones' poem itself incorporates) through to a group of visual artists working today with and around complementary ideas and references.

The mementoes, ephemera and documents assembled — crucially spanning different geographies as well as temporal chapters of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries — manifest as a provocative curatorial study of language which dares you to penetrate it, to get close to it, to probe its in-betweens, its outsides, its elsewheres and its impossibilities. Everywhere, words and images and artefacts collapse into each other, collide, melt. *What the fuck can language possibly do* is not a proposition here but a cry, charged with world-historical force and whispered seductively in your ear all at once.

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I have noticed in recent months my tendency to grow obsessed with certain verbs, to compulsively overuse them for a while before growing bored and discarding them, not with shame exactly but with someone that looks a little like it. That this process has a lot in common with that of losing interest in a lover — even a tentative one, with whom

back-and-forth grows tiresome — is not lost on me: it has in fact become in its own way an equivalent obsession.

*Narrativise* was one of these words for a while, during my former life as a Film Studies major. *Collapse* is a current beau. My upbringing and political allegiances tell me I should hate the English language, have no uses for it at all beyond those which life in a crumbling late-capitalist British state demands of me. And I do in a way, but in reality, it has hosted some of my hottest and most enduring such love affairs.

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In GCSE drama I remember learning about Antonin Artaud and his madness, as an inexorable facet of his genius and its influence, but I do not remember the link between these two extremities, madness and genius, so over-familiar as to be almost assumed, being probed or problematised in any meaningful way. Artaud was no producer of mythologies, no flawed or complicated living breathing person existing in times of permanent crisis, but a mere vehicle for an easily digestible historical narrative. In *Anathemata*, his apocalyptic pronouncements are given space to breathe, are part of a continuum of avant-garde engagements with life-and-death questions at their most primal. Projected on a wall next to portraits of Artaud and rare copies of his famed letters is a new body of work by James Richards, illuminating the centrality of mutilation and narrativization to both artists' work. Here, x-rays in silver gelatin of seemingly found objects and images, projected onto a wall, assume the force of high poetry, even mythos, collapsing the photographed object(s) and its mediation and the

technology used to render it and the little room in which I view it.

Narrative and the threat of violence are also ubiquitous in the remnants and testimonies of original Sarah Kane productions which pepper the exhibition, and transport me to the era of my birth, modernity already dead. For Sarah Kane, football was charged with a mythological force, its players competing for possession of the sun. A degraded video of a Manchester United match, roughly contemporary with the production of Kane's most important works, is included in the exhibition as a kind of epilogue. It is an auspicious coda, appropriately theatrical, primal and erotic.

In this little room is all of history, and nothingness, if you want it. *Anathemata* conveys the theatre of the present tense, blown up and exposed for its most monstrous and yes, yes!, historical force. I believe *bwystfilaidd* to be a better word than *monstrous*; beastlier, more in tune with a sense of the abject. The *bwystfilaidd* emerges as a dominant mode throughout *Anathemata* in all its evocations of the immense ungraspability of conflict, from the ancient to the contemporary.

But *Anathemata* also finds room to question how tenderness is maintained, its presence asserted as an ethical imperative, when faced with insurmountable terror. So Pierre Guyotat, who, informed by what he witnessed as a French soldier in the Algerian Revolution, did more than more or less anyone else to push language to its most obscene and obscure extremities, is represented most memorably by a series of nude self-portraits, unpretty but inviting, situated in the exhibition as one open book among many, as if to say, is it not after all the body that cries, screams, writes.

As elsewhere, as everywhere, immediacy itself is the subject and the stench in the air: being alive, being live, being here, being now, witnessing.

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Inside *Anathemata*, the desire I held as a sixth-form student in a Welsh-medium comprehensive school to write a project about Jones' poem — which I hadn't yet read, and still have not in full — comes rushing back. I try to remember what it was that so entranced me about the idea of it, this foreign and impenetrable thing which felt, somehow, like mine. The kind of ludicrous idea I think maybe you have to be sixteen to truly believe. I was seduced by the idea of it, which is to say the associations thrown up by what I gleaned from what little I'd read describing it. I see now of course that the foreignness and impenetrability is exactly what seduced my young mind.

~~The fictional encounter, the fictional old man whose fictional gaze held the fictional boy's for a brief fictional second, lingers, how it made the passing of one second to the next seem utterly meaningless, fictional, even.~~

The walls of the exhibition ooze with the permanent lingering threat of the unleashing of — something. Epic collapses, everywhere, visible. The present tense, after all, is all there is.

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