

An Absurd Manifesto

It's absurd to write a manifesto of the Absurd.

A manifesto is affirmative, absolute and legitimate while the Absurd is not.

A manifesto is positive while the Absurd is itself a negation.

A manifesto is serious while the Absurd is arbitrary.

A manifesto is justifiable while the Absurd is gratuitous.

A manifesto is to make sense of things while in the Absurd nothing makes sense.

A manifesto brings forward a point while there is no actual point to the Absurd.

What Norms? What Reason?

We were born and live in a universe with (written and unwritten) social contracts to obey, the so-called 'norms.' The normality rests on the habits and conventions accepted by the majority which has barely been into question. There is a reason with no reason in normality. Normal is a fact in the world, the rational, the logical and the sensible. It is point zero for reasoning. The moment we step back to reconsider our systematic exploration of reasoning, which controls our rituals and norms and gives a sense to our habits, we notice that there is no way to defend the reason, that which is the starting point of the doubt, scepticism; but instead of a cynic pessimism, it is the vital emergence of the absurd.

The absurd though is not opposed to normal—or its absence, as abnormal— it is (an)other way of understanding (normal) things, an alternative reasoning and not the absence of it. The Absurd suggests 'other' reason, 'other' rational and 'other' norm. Everything that is anti-normal/anti-reason is capable of becoming absurd but not every abnormality/unreasoning is absurd. Absurd is an attribute to the unconventional real, it is a quality, a further property of things that seem not to have any apparent normative value; a deliberate misreading of reality that reshuffles it.

How can we trace back and challenge, restructure the (normal) rationale we follow? How was the norm established? The need for the normal or social contract is coming from the need for truth and the truth as Foucault says, "centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it."¹ But what if the truth is beyond norms? What if the truth is actually an absurd beyond what we could discover in the universe, or perhaps it is not even necessary for it?

This is the moment when we face a conflict between our assumed desire as human beings to find the ultimate truth, the rational and the system of justification and our inability to find one. Because we are looking at the world from an obscuring lens of absolute truth. The absurd rises right from this discrepancy, between the hypothetical truth in the universe and the prospect that there is no truth, no system of justification, no solid reason, no rational. In this universe that is lacking meaning and sense, the normative human feels alienated, they feel an 'outsider', an 'other', distant from the stories that make the 'world.'

The absurd, however is not a solution to this conflict and it does not aim to provide another answer nor even put things into question or to provide a definition or explanation for the way things are. Even though it is not an anti-solution either.

Absurd in its negativity provides though an absurd affirmation on how things should be: "This is absurd!" lays out a different sense (not an anti-sense) to a 'non-sense', creating an absurd manifestation that is positive, active however has no real purpose and does not contribute to anything beyond it.

Sense indeed becomes relative, in its fluid course encounters countermeasures, which at first are perceived as absurd as something nonsensical, and then concedes in the logic of reasoning and becomes 'common sense'. Absurd might be bordering with senseless or be synonymous with it; occasionally could even be incompatible with any sense though it never loses its tie to it.

1. Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Coling Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books), 131

Absurd is not!

The absurd as a lack of sense, meaning and purpose has been used as an umbrella term to define extremely varying aesthetic and philosophical approaches. The absurd however is paradoxical in its nature. Therefore, any attempt to give a categorical definition to it is impossible and in itself, absurd.

Existentialism is not the Absurd.

Existentialism is seeking to find meaning and essence in life. The meaning in absurdism, on the contrary, is meaningless. The absurd indeed rise out of the meaninglessness that humans confront, existentialism though is aiming to construct a meaning, just as a way to avoid the absurd.

There is an eventual mission in existentialism, a teleological end. The end in the absurd however is just the beginning but the beginning is not even an end as well.

Nihilism is not the Absurd.

Nihilism is exposing the 'nothingness' behind anything. There is no doubt in nihilism, it is explicit. It has one truth to declare and that is the ultimate nothingness. Absurd, however, is vague and implicit, not conclusive.

Even though both absurdism and nihilism have meaninglessness embedded in their nature, they do not present the same causation.

Every meaninglessness is capable of becoming the absurd but not every meaninglessness is the absurd. A deep scepticism or cynicism could turn absurd but the absurd is not intrinsically sceptical of something, though radically meaningless.

Surrealism is not the Absurd.

Surrealism is dealing with the unconscious and dreams, which could be absurd or weird at times. It is constructing an absolute alternative reality or super-transfigured reality.² Surrealism might incorporate elements of absurdity, yet it is not absurdism. The surrealists see the destruction of conscious reason and a confrontation with the mindful reality as the only way out (or in). For the absurd, however, there is no way out (nor in). The absurd embraces the meaninglessness of reality, does not combat it. For the surrealists, surrealism is the solution. Yet the absurd does not search for a real solution.

Dadaism is (not) the Absurd.

Dadaism is as nonsensical, irrational and satirical as the absurd is. Dadaism is definitely associated with absurdity, yet it is not identical to it.

Dadaism employs absurdity as a way to reject conventional aestheticism. It is a negative reaction, and it has a message to declare. The absurd though is neither a declaration nor an emissary or testimony of something external to it.

Dadaism is anti-bourgeois, anti-art³ and anti-system. It is pessimistic and critical. The absurd however, is not pessimistic or optimistic nor anti-anything; the absurd is in between and does not aim anywhere.

Not(s) is Absurd / Absurd is Not(s)⁴

Not as we know is a strong negation of a being, of an actuality, of a fact. Albeit is "not merely negative."⁵ As in its negativity there is a confirmation: "this is not!" has the same force as "this is absurd!"; it is a negative confirmation, which in its ambiguous complexity suddenly becomes outright.

2. See Andre Breton, *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1924), 23

3. Anti-art is a term coined by Marcel Duchamp around 1913 when he made his first readymades.

4. Not(s) is a reference to Mark C. Taylor, *nOts* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago press, 1993)

5. Taylor, *nOts*, 1

Not cannot exist by itself as it always depends on the existence of something to negate it. Same as the absurd that is dependent on the normal, sensible, rational, etc. If none of these exist, then the absurd doesn't exist, because the absurd is a negation of all these. Absurd is 'not' the norm, 'not' the sensible and 'not' the rational. However, absurd, more than being simply binary, it suggests and embraces an alterity, as 'not' suggests (to think) otherwise.

Absurd is not! yet not is not precisely absurd. Because not(s) is affiliated to language, absurd on the other hand with the action and the space, it is theatrical in its shifting incarnation and embodiment, therefore the actor/body plays a significant role.

Theatre of the Absurd and Spatial Absurdity

As already seen, in the absurd, there is no greater question, no moral lesson, no essence and no story. There might be the appearance of a tale... only the wait for Godot; the story never consummates, but the space for it latently exists.

As paradoxical as the absurd is, the setting produced out of absurdity is indeed elusive.

If we see the world as a stage of the theatre and humans as the actors (*Theatrum Mundi*), then looking at it from an absurdist point of view, our life is a theatre of the absurd where the divorce between humans and their life, the actor and their circumstance is the motif—the absolute feeling of absurdity.⁶ Therefore, each piece in this absurd theatre is considered foreign with its definitions of anything and everything upon the stage as if it were its own separate world.

In the theatre of the absurd there is a nonsensical assemblage of episodes, a series of altered events without sequence, linked (and unlinked) by random causalities; it is anti-story.

6. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 13

Every narrative that is anti-story is capable of becoming the absurd but not every anti-story is absurd, because its ultimate purpose gives it unneeded consistency.

The space of the absurd may have the appearance of normality, all the elements might be certainly there; but there is a degree of oddness in the articulations, what perhaps Eugène Ionesco calls "the inscrutable enigma of the unknown."⁷ As well as its general shape, it is borderless and shifting and endless as well as beginningless. There is a random simultaneity in the absurd theatre that affects the bodily engagement with it, the events seem serious and focused, but the seriousness is truly arbitrary, and it makes no sense. The action is detached from a certain reasonableness and as Ionesco says, "devoid of purpose."⁸

This results in a collision between the intention of the actor (body) and the actuality of the stage (space). When a person finds themselves in this absurd setting, they will try to correspond to it by bringing aspiration into better accord with actuality, or by detaching themselves from the situation completely.⁹ We are though not able to remove ourselves from a situation in which absurdity has already become clear to us. The sense that our engagement with life/space as a whole is a theatre of absurd arises when we perceive a desire or intention which is inseparable from the everyday space, and which makes its absurdity inescapable. The actor in this stage, therefore, becomes estranged, an outsider searching pointless but insistently for an ultimate meaning in a never-ending labyrinth.

7. Eugène Ionesco, "Notes on my Theatre," *The Tulane Drama Review* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1963): 128.

8. Ionesco, "Notes on my Theatre" 132.

9. Thomas Nagel "The Absurd" *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 20 (1971): 718.