

Artauds theories essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ The paradox of Artaud lies in the fact that it is impossible to carry out his proposals. “- (Grotowski) Discuss how this statement is true in light of what you know about his theories.

There is no straight forward answer to this question as there are many points to consider. The dictionary states that a paradox is; ‘ A statement etc. that seems to contradict itself or to conflict with common sense but which contains some truth’ Grotowski wrote an essay on Artaud and his theories which was called “ he wasn’t entirely himself”. In this essay he sums up Artaud’s achievements as they reflect on his own practices in his idea of theatre but at the same time he challenges Artaud’s theories which trivialise him.

To try and answer this question I am going to investigate some of Artaud’s theories for a successful theatre of cruelty, one which involved the audience, one that terrified and shook the audience to the point of real emotional fear. During Artaud’s life he made many proposals to stand against the usual. Artaud dismissed all Stanislavskian realism ideas as uninspired. Artaud wanted to tap into the unconscious; he envisioned theatre as a sensory experience which was to be cruel in the way it bombarded and overwhelmed the audience’s senses. He achieved this idea of theatre becoming a sensory experience by setting different objectives to be incorporated whilst performing.

These are the objectives that I am going to investigate into as to see whether the statement above contains any truth or if in fact all of Artaud’s theories were possible to achieve. Artaud’s main objective was to make the

audience live through an experience The spectator will be shaken and set on edge by the internal dynamism of the spectacle' Innes, 1993 He wanted theatre to challenge and heighten the spectator's emotional response, a total sensory identification with the show. The audience had to maintain a constant state of uncertainty; this would lead to a huge emotional response. One of Artauds theories was to use sound in a fresh and different way, this would startle and shock the audience.

Artuad placed great emphasis on sound because it has the power to engage the audiences' inner sense. One way he used sound in a different way was in his play ' Cenci' when he recorded bells from the four corners of the theatre to greet the audience, performer's footsteps were recorded and played at full volume and voices which shouted and whispered the name of the Cenci which rose in crescendo this was then immediately silenced. This usage of sound captures the audiences imagination, it puts pictures in their heads which are all unique and important to themselves as it is their imagination and may have links with their past which they can then link the sound to, making the whole experience a lot more personal to them. In order to decide whether this theory was possible we tried a number of different ideas upon an audience. We used different pieces of music to see how it made the audience feel, we used our voices in different pitches and tones to see what kind of reaction we could get from the audience, use of giggles and children's cries have also been used.

By doing this we did find that the different use of sound could provoke quite a different reaction from the audience to if we did not use any music. This theory is commonly used by other theatre companies, by television

programmes and in movies; soundtracks set the mood for the audience watching the film in the cinema. In the film 'Shindlers list' a piece of music played by a violin creates a sad slow mood this provokes the audience into a sad and low mood making the film a more emotional experience, that piece of music can then be listened to alone after having watched the film and provoke the same kind of reaction from the audience, not necessarily because it is a sad or emotional piece but because the audience relates it back to the emotions that the film had. The same can be done with sound effect, the sound of a child crying may relate the audience back to a memory from their own childhood this again makes the performance more emotional and personal for the audience involved, none of the audiences memories will be the same and therefore they may come out with mixed emotions some may have related the sound back to a happy time others to a time when they were sad. Another of Artaud's theories was to use language in a different way; this theory is linked to Artaud's theory on sound. Artaud had ideas for a 'new language' he mentioned this in many of his essays including *The Theatre And It's Double* but they were never clearly articulated.

He wanted actors not to use the spoken language to communicate but a 'bodily language' that was based on signs and not words through gestures, postures and air-borne cries. This idea came from when he went to see the Balinese Theatre which he saw in the Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931. e said " I am well aware that a language of gestures and postures, dance and music is less able to define a character, to narrate a man's thought, to explain conscious states clearly and exactly, than spoken language". Here

himself Artaud points out the problem with using gestures rather than spoken words, that a characters personality would not be completely known. Though this may not necessarily be a bad idea, this leaves the audience to decide themselves what a character is like, possibly relating what they know to someone they know themselves. Artaud wanted theatre to be anti-character and anti-psychological so in his ideas for theatre this idea was perfectly acceptable and he did not want the audience to know the character as there was no character.

He also used poetry created by surrealists to create a different response from the audience an example of this is Klaver striva cavour tavina scaver kavina akar triva We reproduced this into our own form to see what kind of reaction we could achieve from the audience. We took the poem 'ring-a-ring of roses' and said all the lines backwards. This way we were using the language in a fresh and different way to which the audience is used to. When asking the audience how this made them feel they said that they did think of their school days in the playground they also said that by saying it backwards it was weird and almost dream like, almost real life but had the edge which twisted in to the subconscious where it does not quite make sense. Artaud also said that the scream was an important emotional release. Nowadays no one knows how to scream, actors have become so fixated on learning their lines and talking from the head up they have forgotten how to have that emotional kind of release, they do nothing but talk and seem to forget that they have a body on stage as well.

Artaud stated that modern actors have lost the use of their throats, so in order for us to see if we could use that release to shock the audience we

tried to release that emotion inside of us. In class we all sat in a circle and closed our eyes, one by one we ran across the circle and screamed each scream as different and gave us an idea of how to scream. Also by doing this the different screams put different images into our heads an example of this is when a male member of our class screamed it seemed to be a cry of frustration and anger so I had an image of quite a large man screaming at someone quite smaller than themselves but when a female in our class screamed it was considerably higher and her pace of running across the circle was quicker so I had the image of her running away from something in fear. So I feel that Artaud was right that we need to consider the usage of language in a fresh way if we are not going to have set characters with set personalities how ever if we want to have characters with definite personality traits we can't follow his theories on the use of signs instead of speech we can however we can use the language in a fresh way (use of backwards speech). Another of Artauds theories involved the positioning of the audience and the theatres ' stage' being around them so as to surround them. the auditorium will be enclosed within four walls, stripped of any ornament, with the audience seated below, in the middle, on swivelling chairs, allowing them to follow the show taking place around them.

' (T&ID, 1985 p. 75) Artaud wanted total sensory identification with the show he wanted the audience to feel like they were part of the show by including them in the show. He invaded the audience's personal space which forced the audience to take part with no show whether they wanted to or not, this was forcing them to share the actor's emotions and was making them live the experience, which was Artauds main idea. Artaud suggested that '.

.. a kind of single, undivided local without partitions of any kind and this will become the very scene of the action' in other words there would be no traditional divide between the actors and the audience , this would enable and in fact force the audience to become part of the show themselves. In class we have been trying this theory a lot by placing the audience in the middle in different seating arrangements we were able to test how they felt safest and feel they felt the most exposed and involved in the actors movements.