

# [The with his ‘theatre of cruelty’ which](https://assignbuster.com/the-with-his-theatre-of-cruelty-which/)

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The first of my two practitioners is Antonin Artaud(1896-1948). He was a French actor, costume designer and writer who changed theface of drama with his ‘ Theatre of cruelty’ which is also known as TOC. Heworked as an actor on stage and in film and as a writer he was involved in thesurrealist movement where people used visual imagery from the subconscious mindto create art. The theatre of cruelty argued that drama needs to abandon itsemphasis on text and rely on more mysterious expressions of sounds movement andlight which are the primal expressions for human beings. However, Artaud wasviewed as a madman for his ideas about theatre which were radical and breachedthe conventions of his day and age. It is also said stated that Artaud soonbecame addicted to the drug opium after a few months of taking it to alleviatesome pains he had. On top of a drug addiction, he spent the beginning of thefinal phase of his life in different asylums where, in some, he receivedelectric treatment which was believed to eliminate his ‘ symptoms’ whichincluded disturbing drawings and crafting magic spells.

However, there was muchcontroversy at the time about how ethical it was to administer these shocks toanother human being.  His theatre was a break from the traditional westerntheatre. Artaud’s ideas were very different by means where the artists assaultthe senses of the audience, resulting in making them feel uncomfortable andalso making the piece uncomfortable to watch. He achieved this by exposing theharsh truths about society.

Some of Artaud based performances included nuditywhich for starters would make the audience feel awkward.  Artaud only produced one play in his lifetime called’Jet of blood’ also known as ‘ Spurt of blood’; however it was often deemed unstageablein his lifetime. Nevertheless, Artaud’s work was carried on and other artistsreflect his work in their own productions. People such as Jean Genet and PeterBrook. One of Artaud’s strongest beliefs was that there was a universallanguage which was expressed by body language and sounds, but not words, as itwas found 80% of our communication is non-verbal. This explains why we hearlots of screaming and uncomfortable sounds during Artaud’s productions, becauseit is a language everyone can understand.

The surrealist movement helped shapehis later theories. It reflected the belief that the unconscious mind is asource of artistic truth. Artaud was inspired by a Balinese dance troupeperformance and was moved by the intense physicality of the dancers and howthey expressed themselves through their bodies.

When we first studying Artaud in class, we thoughtof our worst nightmare and devised 3 freeze frames with or without sounds fromit. To get into the right frame of mind to tackle Artaud was difficult as itisn’t like any other type of theatre around. We had to warm up and feelconfident to act a little weird around each other, which we did by allscreaming at the same time so we couldn’t be the only person to be heard. Weused our bodies increasingly to represent feelings and emotion but to do thiswe had to be in touch with our bodies and be very aware of them. One of the primaryemotions we portrayed in our three freeze frames was the feeling of beingtrapped. As it is a feeling most people will have experienced in their lives, whether it’s being emotionally trapped or physically trapped. To achieve thiswe started by creating a physical wall, entwining our bodies together withsomeone reaching outwards to try and escape from it. Our next piece ofclasswork was to perform a short 2-minute piece about a man who was rebellingabout the common trends people follow in society.

Instead of our piece tellinga story we tried to make it indirect by using symbol which was the maincomponent to the TOC. He was a big believer in symbols and thought a lot of thepiece did not have to be obvious to the audience. We used a grid to representthe order and format in society but then broke out of it by making noises whichwere psychotic and completely unrelated to one another, accompanied by gesturesand random movements. The piece was difficult to put together as it wasn’t apiece which had a clear plot line, which is what I am used to performing, but rathera piece showing emotion through symbols which was what Artaud tried to portrayis his performances. I liked learning about Artaud because he allowed theactors to bring out modern day issues but in an abnormal and slightlytheatrical way. It would shock the audience and make them think about the issuebeing addressed.

This idea of problems with modern day society co-insides withthe next practitioner we are going to be using. Bertolt Brecht was born in Bavaria in 1898 and diedin 1956 aged 58. He was a German theatre practitioner, playwright and poet andalso one of the most influential figures of the 20th centurytheatre. Brecht helped as a medic during WW1 after studying medicine for a numberof years. He was shocked by the horror of war and started to question the politicalside of it.

Later-on in his playwriting career, his plays criticized theinjustices and inequalities of society. Brecht didn’t want the audience to feel involved orrelate to the piece being performed, but instead he wanted them to take awaythe message he was trying to get across so they could think about it, processit and hopefully the world could do something about it. He used techniques toremind the audience that they were only watching a play, not real life. Techniques like placards told details of the story without gaining theaudience’s empathy. Brecht plays would also include the actors directlyaddressing the audience, which again drew the attention away from the plotitself and drew a more direct line to the overall message of the play. Thesetypes of theatrical conventions came together and formed Epic theatre. Withinthis type of theatre, Brecht devised the alienation effect, also known and the’distancing effect’ or ‘ V-effect’. It was a central idea which Brecht hoped wouldprevent the audience from becoming emotionally invested with the production.

Hebelieved that an audience member would appear to relate to a character evenwhen they may not have anything in common. The audience may cry when thecharacter is upset and cries themselves, and they usually laugh when thecharacter laughs, this was believed by Brecht to be emotional manipulationwhich he sought to fix through his alienation effect. We then adapted Artaud’s style to a scene in ‘ 5Kinds of Silence’ by Shelagh Stephenson. The play is about an abusive fatherwho has OCD and his two daughters and wife who are mentally and psychicallyabused throughout their time with him. The daughters are 35 so have been inthis ‘ hell’ for much of their early life. We chose a scene when the father, called Billy, went to the army barracks and he explained how he got pleasureout of everything being organised and in order.

I played the role of one of thedaughters although I didn’t follow the typical role in the book; my characterwas more of a symbol for her emotions and her subconscious. We spoke verylittle during the performance with the only words used being a sentence fromthe father’s monologue. We did this in order to set the scene for the audience, to give them a vague idea about what our piece entailed.

As the piece was not100% Artaud style, we wanted to add some naturalistic acting so that it wasn’ttoo intense the whole way through. We replaced the majority of words with soundeffects including shouting and ill sounding noises like coughing and heavybreathing to show how broken down the daughters and the mother had become byBilly’s constant abusive behaviour towards them. I also performed a short danceduet within the piece to create an abstract feeling, and to show how in syncthe girls had to be with each other when Billy was around to uphold the ‘ order’which he so desperately craved. In class we explored and researched Brecht so weunderstood his approach towards theatre. We followed this on by adapting hisstyle to the opening scene of ‘ 5 kinds of silence’. This scene is all aboutwhen the two daughters, Janet and Susan and the mother named Mary, kill thefather as his abusive behaviour towards them was reaching it limits. As theopening scene was all about murder, or self-defence, whichever way somebody maychoose to look at it, it provided a perfect basis to introduce the politicalaspect of our performance.

We performed the piece twice, once naturalisticallyand once sarcastically. We did this to offer two views on the situation. Firstly, we performed the scene very naturalistically but with Brechtian stylesstill obvious to the audience. We had a placard saying ‘ Alcoholic’ on it whichwe placed on Billy, as he was a heavy drinker, which then changed to saydisplay the words ‘ Drunken mess’ for the sarcastic version, again offering thetwo perspectives to our piece. As well as the placards, I entered the stagefrom the audience, reminding them that the actors are just acting and it is notreal life, preventing them from coming emotionally invested with theperformance. By doing this it also broke the fourth wall.

During the firstperformance which was naturalistic, we had sarcastic comments at intervalsduring the piece. This contrast showed the controversial situation the sisterswere in, some may have believed that they should not have shot their Dad, as itis still murder, whereas others may believe the girls had no other way out ofthis miserable life and shooting their Dad would have set them free from themiserable life they had been suck in. On the second-time around, we completely changed ourtone of voices with every line being heavily sarcastic. We primarily did thisto draw attention to the alienation effect because we didn’t want the audiencebecoming emotionally invested; therefore, adding sarcasm also added elements ofhumour, separating them from the realistic and serious nature of the play. Atone point the daughters mentioned drinking whiskey which had previouslybelonged to Billy, but since he is now dead the girls use this as anopportunity to rebel. When the thought of a drink was mentioned all of thecharacters on stage shouted ‘ wheey!’ including Billy who was splayed on thefloor.

This emphasized the sarcasm and the seeming lack of importance of theirfather’s death. To add to this, we added in some facts about domestic violence atdifferent points throughout the scene which bought the audience back to the’real life’ element of the play, reminding them how serious the subject wasthat we were talking about and not to let the sarcasm whitewash it.