

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 the face of drama with his 'Theatre of cruelty' which is also known as TOC. He worked as an actor on stage and in film and as a writer he was involved in the surrealist movement where people used visual imagery from the subconscious mind to create art. The theatre of cruelty argued that drama needs to abandon its emphasis on text and rely on more mysterious expressions of sounds, movement and light which are the primal expressions for human beings. However, Artaud was viewed as a madman for his ideas about theatre which were radical and breached the conventions of his day and age. It is also said that Artaud soon became addicted to the drug opium after a few months of taking it to alleviate some pains he had. On top of a drug addiction, he spent the beginning of the final phase of his life in different asylums where, in some, he received electric treatment which was believed to eliminate his 'symptoms' which included disturbing drawings and crafting magic spells.

However, there was much controversy at the time about how ethical it was to administer these shocks to another human being. His theatre was a break from the traditional western theatre. Artaud's ideas were very different by means where the artists assault the senses of the audience, resulting in making them feel uncomfortable and also making the piece uncomfortable to watch. He achieved this by exposing the harsh truths about society.

Some of Artaud based performances included nudity which 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

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often deemed unstageable in his lifetime. Nevertheless, Artaud's work was carried on and other artists reflect his work in their own productions. People such as Jean Genet and Peter Brook. One of Artaud's strongest beliefs was that there was a universal language which was expressed by body language and sounds, but not words, as it was found 80% of our communication is non-verbal. This explains why we hear lots of screaming and uncomfortable sounds during Artaud's productions, because it is a language everyone can understand.

The surrealist movement helped shape his later theories. It reflected the belief that the unconscious mind is a source of artistic truth. Artaud was inspired by a Balinese dance troupe performance and was moved by the intense physicality of the dancers and how they expressed themselves through their bodies.

When we first studying Artaud in class, we thought of our worst nightmare and devised 3 freeze frames with or without sounds from it. To get into the right frame of mind to tackle Artaud was difficult as it isn't like any other type of theatre around. We had to warm up and feel confident to act a little weird around each other, which we did by all screaming at the same time so we couldn't be the only person to be heard. We used our bodies increasingly to represent feelings and emotion but to do this we had to be in touch with our bodies and be very aware of them. One of the primary emotions we portrayed in our three freeze frames was the feeling of being trapped. As it is a feeling most people will have experienced in their lives, whether it's being emotionally trapped or physically trapped. To achieve this we started by

creating a physical wall, entwining our bodies together with someone reaching outwards to try and escape from it. Our next piece of classwork was to perform a short 2-minute piece about a man who was rebelling about the common trends people follow in society.

Instead of our piece telling a story we tried to make it indirect by using symbol which was the main component to the TOC. He was a big believer in symbols and thought a lot of the piece did not have to be obvious to the audience. We used a grid to represent the order and format in society but then broke out of it by making noises which were psychotic and completely unrelated to one another, accompanied by gestures and random movements. The piece was difficult to put together as it wasn't a piece which had a clear plot line, which is what I am used to performing, but rather a piece showing emotion through symbols which was what Artaud tried to portray in his performances. I liked learning about Artaud because he allowed the actors to bring out modern day issues but in an abnormal and slightly theatrical way. It would shock the audience and make them think about the issue being addressed.

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

Later-on in his playwriting career, his plays criticized the injustices and inequalities of society. Brecht didn't want the audience to feel involved or relate to the piece being performed, but instead he wanted them to take away the message he was trying to get across so they could think about it, process it and hopefully the world could do something about it. He used techniques to remind the audience that they were only watching a play, not real life. Techniques like placards told details of the story without gaining the audience's empathy. Brecht plays would also include the actors directly addressing the audience, which again drew the attention away from the plot itself and drew a more direct line to the overall message of the play. These types of theatrical conventions came together and formed Epic theatre. Within this type of theatre, Brecht devised the alienation effect, also known as the 'distancing effect' or 'V-effect'. It was a central idea which Brecht hoped would prevent the audience from becoming emotionally invested with the production.

He believed that an audience member would appear to relate to a character even when they may not have anything in common. The audience may cry when the character is upset and cry themselves, and they usually laugh when the character laughs, this was believed by Brecht to be emotional manipulation which he sought to fix through his alienation effect. We then adapted Artaud's style to a scene in '5 Kinds of Silence' by Shelagh Stephenson. The play is about an abusive father who has OCD and his two daughters and wife who are mentally and psychically abused throughout their time with him. The daughters are 35 so have been in this '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 pleasure out of everything being organised and in order.

I played the role of one of the daughters although I didn't follow the typical role in the book; my character was more of a symbol for her emotions and her subconscious. We spoke very little during the performance with the only words used being a sentence from the 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 not 100% Artaud style, we wanted to add some naturalistic acting so that it wasn't too intense the whole way through. We replaced the majority of words with sound effects including shouting and ill sounding noises like coughing and heavy breathing to show how broken down the daughters and the mother had become by Billy's constant abusive behaviour towards them. I also performed a short dance duet within the piece to create an abstract feeling, and to show how in sync the 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 we understood his approach towards theatre. We followed this on by adapting his style to the opening scene of '5 kinds of silence'. This scene is all about when the two daughters, Janet and Susan and the mother named Mary, kill the father as his abusive behaviour towards them was reaching its limits. As the opening scene was all about murder, or self-defence, whichever way somebody may choose to look at it, it provided a perfect basis to introduce the political aspect of our performance.

We performed the piece twice, once naturalistically and once sarcastically. We did this to offer two views on the situation. Firstly, we performed the scene very naturalistically but with Brechtian styles still obvious to the audience. We had a placard saying 'Alcoholic' on it which we placed on Billy, as he was a heavy drinker, which then changed to say display the words 'Drunken mess' for the sarcastic version, again offering the two perspectives to our piece. As well as the placards, I entered the stage from the audience, reminding them that the actors are just acting and it is not real life, preventing them from coming emotionally invested with the performance. By doing this it also broke the fourth wall.

During the first performance which was naturalistic, we had sarcastic comments at intervals during the piece. This contrast showed the controversial situation the sisters were in, some may have believed that they should not have shot their Dad, as it is still murder, whereas others may believe the girls had no other way out of this miserable life and shooting their Dad would have set them free from the miserable life they had been stuck in. On the second-time around, we completely changed our tone of voices with every line being heavily sarcastic. We primarily did this to draw attention to the alienation effect because we didn't want the audience becoming emotionally invested; therefore, adding sarcasm also added elements of humour, separating them from the realistic and serious nature of the play. At one point the daughters mentioned drinking whiskey which had previously belonged to Billy, but since he is now dead the girls use this as an opportunity to rebel. When the thought of a drink was mentioned all of

the characters on stage shouted ' wheey!' including Billy who was splayed on the floor.

This emphasized the sarcasm and the seeming lack of importance of their father's death. To add to this, we added in some facts about domestic violence at different points throughout the scene which brought the audience back to the 'real life' element of the play, reminding them how serious the subject was that we were talking about and not to let the sarcasm whitewash it.