

Antonin artaud's work essay



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Antonin Artaud's work never made the theatre till around 1920 and when he did many people disapproved with his work, and found it offensive in comparison to what theatre had been like before his time. To go back to the end of the 18th century would be a sensible place to start as that was a major change in the way playwrights sought to write their theatre pieces. The end of the 18th century was the beginning of the industrial revolution, this meant most of the work that was originally done in rural parts of Britain was done by machine in many of the larger towns. Many people moved from the countryside to the towns in search of work and they soon became crowded.

To escape their lives of poverty, struggle and starvation people sought excitement, forgetfulness and the vision of a better world through entertainment. Playwrights turned to styles of melodramatic pieces to satisfy their audiences. These usually were either nautical, gothic, oriental, or domestic in style. Appealing to people wishing to escape to an idealistically straightforward world.

Lasting for over a hundred years writers soon felt the need for a change and naturalistic drama worked its way on to the stage. Writers such as Galsworthy, Granville-Barker and Ibsen were extremely popular at the time. These writers tackled issues influenced by socialist ideals and the deprivation of the working class, intended to shock audiences. He wanted them to be involved in a theatre that could become as much a part of us as our bloodstream.

He envisaged a theatre that could awaken, organise and present the latent dream images of our mind, and would grip us with its power and amaze us with its spectacular presentation. This carried on right up until Artaud put his theories into practice. Artaud had one main theory about theatre. This was, if theatre is the double of life, life is the double of true theatre. This theory was known as Theatre and Its Double, this was soon to be the title for the book he had written.

There were three types of doubles that Artaud had found over the years, these were production and metaphysics, theatre and the plague, theatre of cruelty. Metaphysics is generally used to express anything that has no rational explanation. Artaud breaks metaphysics down into a further three early influences that he identifies as having contributed to a formulation of the theatre of cruelty. One of these influences was a set of Balinese dancers he saw at the Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931.

This gave him one of the particles to form his Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud wanted to interpret the effect of gesture and facial expression on an audience. He wanted to communicate through signs and expressions, far more than a substitute for words. He said that the skilled artist could communicate whole scenarios, but that these still relied on a straightforward narrative explained in gesture. He wanted to attach deeper meaning to gesture. Artaud was enthralled by the language of 'signs'.

It would appeal to the senses and minds of his audience. This would give them a premonition that something more than words was being declared.

The second double that Artaud thought he had found was The Plague. Artaud used the plague as an allegory for theatre.

He claimed the plague took dormant images, latent disorder and suddenly carries them to the point of extreme gestures. Theatre also takes gestures and develops them to the same limit' he is trying to change our views of theatre through using the certain collapse of society through a plague. This suggests that he wanted the theatre stripped of bourgeois constraints and all that these apply, just as a population in the grip of the disease would be. Artaud says that in reality, there are no real limits to which the theatre cannot make an effort. Theatre is intended to challenge and disturb to release in us a sense of free licence, to unlock our sense of decorum and to act as a catalyst for our dreams to become reality.

Theatre of cruelty was the third double. Artaud wanted to indicate the combination of three presences involved in the process of making theatre. He wanted them to be involved in a theatre that could become as much a part of us as our bloodstream. He envisaged a theatre that could awaken, organise and present the latent dream images of our mind, and would grip us with its power and amaze us with its spectacular presentation.

Artaud wanted the theatre to challenge and heighten the spectators' emotional response through stimulation of the physical and emotional senses. To achieve this Artaud set out to empower the actor-audience relationship. His aim was to set the audience in the middle of a auditorium with four plain walls around them bearing no ornaments or imagery. His

image was of a vortex, a circular and shifting shape into which the performance could erupt, drawing the audience, on swivelling seats, into total sensory identification with the show.

Artaud's final vision was a theatre as '... some kind of barn or hanger rebuilt along lines culminating in the architecture of some churches, holy place..

.. ' This abolishment has been a crucial development in the 20th century theatre. The invading of the audience by the actor was one of the finest practical developments from Artaud's theory and led to the creation of theatres where such boundaries were re-examined and, in some cases, abolished. Artaud also had a vision about the effects and the creations of the use of sound. He realised its power to engage an audience's inner sense, and in his production of *The Cenci* (1935) he was able to demonstrate its potential with a carefully scored accompaniment to the text.

He recorded sound at full volume, and also used musical instruments as an effect to create his idea of sound, to engage an audience's inner sense.

Artaud was interested in new forms of lighting. He wanted to use lighting as an active force, to be used in connection with other aspects of staging to become an almost physical part of the action. Nowadays, this technology can now be seen in all sorts of productions, from musicals to so called 'straight theatre'. During this time another practitioner across the water's in France was working along similar lines.

Although they did not know of each other their work was increasingly similar, this can only be noticed today now as we look back through history.

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Many people abolished Artaud's work and thought him to be a mad man, and he never 'made it' during his time as a practitioner. He challenged theatre during the 20th Century and has changed the course of theatre today.

Nowadays Artaud's work is practiced by many practitioners such as Jean Genet and Peter Brook. They use the similar styles of emotions being expressed through symbolic gesture and movement, that a theme or idea cannot only be expressed through actual script or sounds, but expressions and movement also.

The idea that Artaud was a mad man is not far from the point. I believe that he was a man before his time, like Vincent Van Gogh, he challenged theatre and people were afraid of the change. The line between mad man and genius is a very fine line, seen differently through different people's eyes. I think that a genius has to be a little mad to be able to confront the public with a totally different approach to something new.