

The Artaudian Audience/Performance Relationship: Theatre of Cruelty and
Modern Possibilities

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Abstract

In 1938, Antonin Artaud established his undiminishable place in theatre history with the publication of his manifesto *The Theatre and Its Double*. His writing concerning Theatre of Cruelty has challenged theatre practitioners to reexamine popularly accepted theatre practices and possibilities. The fundamental problem with Artaud's theories, one that has persisted for the past 70 years, lies in the interpretation of his writing. The precarious nature of those theories has taken widely varying shapes in the works of theatre artists in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Chapter II examines the possible interpretations and (mis)interpretations of Artaudian theory as applied to group theory and concepts of drama therapy. While many scholars and directors have interpreted Artaud's writing as a means of therapy that is conducive to the emotional stimulation experienced by the audience, others argue that Artaud's theories are most accurately applied to audiences as a mass entity for the purposes of political manipulation by the likes of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.

Chapter III follows The Living Theatre, whose performance history has beginnings in conjunction with the birth of Artaud's theories. As the oldest surviving experimental theatre, The Living Theatre claims to directly embrace Artaud's writing and ideology in the production of their own works. When considering a repertoire that began in 1947, how has this company applied (or misapplied) theory to performance practice?

In Chapter IV, the performance biography of Peter Brook takes primary focus. While the ideas behind Theatre of Cruelty comprise a fundamental part of Brook's own directorial approach, how have those theories undergone a very distinctive evolution in 60 years of application?

Chapter I

Introduction

For theatre practitioners, the work of Antonin Artaud occupies a fundamental position in the evolution of modern theatre. His concept of a “nonnarrative theatre that could transform its audience through primitive and violent expressions of unconscious fears and longings” was theorized in his pivotal text *The Theatre and Its Double* (Rafael 142). In theatre, he found a vehicle for purging the pains of daily life that would undeniably have an effect upon the spectator and actor’s own sensibilities. Rather than language-based theatre that would affect an audience on an intellectual level, he dreamt of a theatre of images that would rouse audiences and invoke change within them, disturbing any previously existing peace of mind. His was a “theatre of magic, which would transform its audience” (Leach 172).

His writing has certainly influenced 20th and 21st century theatre artists who have sought to eradicate the traditional viewpoint of text as supreme authority in an effort to establish a more immersive relationship with audiences. The magnitude of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty is expressed by Martin Esslin, who describes it as a force that would “swoop down upon a crowd of spectators with all the awesome horror of the plague...with all its shattering impact, creating a complete upheaval, physical, mental, and moral, among the population it struck” (76). Robert Leach echoes Esslin’s advocacy for Artaud’s work, stating that “the fierceness of its actions, its

cruelty, shatters the defenses of performer and spectator alike, shatters the solitude of the self, and brings communion and personal metamorphosis” (170-171).

The inherent difficulty found in Antonin Artaud’s philosophies lies in their interpretation. He believed that theatre had the power to provoke change within a person and had the ability to transform a culture. However, the way he went about exploring those notions was not entirely clear. The result is the exploration of those theories that may result in manipulation or radical misinterpretation.

In Chapter II, Kimberly Jannarone and Ellen Mackay discuss the exploitative nature of Theatre of Cruelty as it is applied to group theory. The transformative qualities that Artaud felt his works contained are successfully applied within the setting of fascist Europe, identifying the harmful capabilities “Cruelty” can advocate. The implications of group theory accelerate the feasibility of Artaudian theory as a political weapon. Furthermore, we examine the dangers of blatant misinterpretation in the performance art studied by Gray Watson. What Watson claims as exhibiting Artaudian theory is simply a gross misperception of the meaning of cruelty and inserts harsh masochistic acts in fulfillment of that misinterpretation. While Artaud himself warned against the Cruelty taking on violent or sadistic tones, it is not difficult to find performance that cites Artaud under these implications. Wavering between the two approaches is Tom Riccio’s application toward drama therapy with the performance art installation *There Is Never a Reference Point*. His use of mise-en-scène and audience placement and interaction harkens back to the staging language Artaud expressed in his writing.

Chapter III focuses solely on the work of The Living Theatre, the oldest experimental theatre group that is still performing in New York. Despite Susan Sontag's warning against doing so, the group cites *The Theatre and Its Double* as its primary artistic manifesto. It is in utilizing the writing of Artaud that they mistakenly claim to make theatre that authentically recreates elements outlined in Theatre of Cruelty. Their focus on anti-literary theatre that manipulates the preconceived notions of the audience/performance relationship carries out what they believe is an authentic creation via Artaud's writing, a feat Sontag claims is completely and utterly impossible.

In Chapter IV, the work of renowned theatre director Peter Brook is examined in light of his use of Artaudian theory. While he directly cites the name Theatre of Cruelty in the use of his experimental performance group, he willingly distances his art from any claim of recreating what Artaud could not articulate. While The Living Theatre grasps onto the ideas written in *The Theatre and Its Double*, Brook willingly admits that he has no intentions toward authentically simulating Theatre of Cruelty. With this in mind, how *has* his work undeniably illustrated elements of Cruelty while maintaining the ability to evolve and change?

Chapter II

Artaudian Misconceptions and Varied Interpretations: Cruelty as Group Theory and Drama Therapy

In the sixty years following Antonin Artaud's death, artists in their own endeavors have embraced his ideas. Because the application of these philosophies is not clearly defined, the resultant interpretations follow distinctly separate directions. Many directors and scholars have interpreted Artaud's audience/performance relationship as a means of therapy that is conducive to the emotional stimulation experienced by the audience.

In the 2006 production of *There Is Never a Reference Point*, director Tom Riccio placed the audience in the middle of the stage, forcing them to cope with the surrounding environment on an individual level. As a result, the play employed what Riccio claimed to be an Artaudian philosophy as a means of eradicating the distance between audience and performance that traditional theatre exercises.

Conversely, scholars Kimberly Jannarone and Ellen Mackay argue in their respective articles "Audience, Mass, Crowd: Theatres of Cruelty in Interwar Europe" and "Toward a New Theatre History of Dionysus," with reference to specific performances from the 1930s and 1960s, that Artaud's theories, while most accurately applied to audiences as a mass entity, do not encourage healing through drama but present rather dangerous possibilities when employed as social and political forces. Jannarone points out that when the individuality of the audience is removed, inhibitions decrease as well. Mackay identifies Richard Schechner's 1968

production of *Dionysus in 69* as a seminal example of the inherent problems with the application of Artaud's ideas, while Jannarone explores the politics of fascist Europe pre- World War 1 as an ideal setting for his theories.

In my research I will explore these very different paths as they are discussed in the aforementioned settings in order to understand what Artaud may have intended for the application of his ideas concerning his audience/performance relationship. Furthermore, I will attempt to answer which interpretation is superior or if audience/performance relationship as therapy and the manipulation of that relationship as applied to crowd theory, two very different applications, simply exist simultaneously.

Antonin Artaud's life was plagued with illnesses. Suffering from meningitis at the age of five, he acquired a stutter that would affect his speech for the rest of his life. His tribulations with speech may have motivated his interest in departing from the text-based language in traditional theatre as he experimented with sound and speech in a different way, "enlarg[ing] the theatre's vocabulary" (Bermel 15). His later years would be spent in and out of sanitariums where treatment for mental illnesses ranged from electroshock therapy to medicinal opiate use that would turn to addiction. He turned to art in response to his treatments and "treated writing and drawing as anesthesia for his nervous disorders and as a means for creating his own alternative space" (Ho 14). Artaud insisted that audiences, to truly be moved, be presented with an experience based in ritual. As he underwent years of medical and psychological treatment that would ultimately fail, his belief in the transformative

power of theatre would remain. This conviction is one that has influenced a generation of artists that would follow his way of thinking.

Artaud's intentions for his Theatre of Cruelty were not to subject audiences to any punishment but rather to liberate them from suffering by means of direct contact with the performance through the elements of *mise en scène*. A French term literally meaning "putting on stage," Artaud described *mise en scène* as "the point of departure and touchstone of real theatre...[the] profound sense of the visual, auditory, and special power of the theatrical style of a written work" (Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings* 203). A close examination of his writings reveals a continuous struggle between the life he lived and the perpetual sense of a life unfulfilled that Artaud wished to directly confront, a struggle that he wanted to translate to the stage as well. In *The Theatre and Its Double* Artaud explains "I use the word cruelty in the sense of a craving for life...in the sense of this pain whose ineluctable compulsion is the enabling condition for the exertion of life" (98).

Antonin Artaud's theories concerning the relationship between audience and performer have established his place in theatre history. He advocated the transformative powers of theatre when he wrote in his essay "Theatre and the Plague," claiming "theatre, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative" (Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* 27). Rather than language-based theatre that would affect an audience on an intellectual level, he dreamt of a theatre of images that would rouse audiences and stimulate change within them. In a transition from the limited staging of his ideas to his writings, Artaud was never able to fully

articulate his work. As a result, the problem with Artaud's audience/performance relationship lies in the ambiguity of its intended format.

In her essay "Audience, Mass, Crowd: Theatres of Cruelty in Interwar Europe" Kimberly Jannarone views Artaud's theories most appropriately applied as an argument for political organizations, forcing an examination of "Artaud's ideal audience/performer relationship in the context of the rise of mass politics and its ramifications in the world of theatre" (Jannarone 192). Jannarone removes Artaud's theories from their popular setting in the avant-garde theatre of the sixties in order to impress upon her readers the dangerously propagandist nature of Theatre of Cruelty when assessed in terms of crowd theory. She provides Mussolini's *teatro di popolo*, "theatre of the people," as a primary example of a political attempt to redefine the role of audience and present, "theatre performances [that] were conceived of as "real" events that affected the spectator not as art but as truth, an essential step toward the necessary revolution" (199). Jannarone points out that Hitler used this same model. While she acknowledges other various applications of his theory, her stance is firmly dependent upon Artaud's work as "a foundation for a revolutionary poetics that forms an essential part of the theory and practice of experimental theatre and progressive thought," (192). It is with this in mind that she finds a connection between these two political leaders and their use of Artaud as applied to theatrical manipulation.

The shared vision of Mussolini and Hitler sparked the *Thingspiel* movement with large-scale productions of epic dramas in an effort to remove the individuality of the single audience member amongst audiences of thousands. As a result, the

audience/performance relationship would instill in the audience the feeling of invincibility, allowing a newly formed group to feel and do things otherwise forbidden. Despite Artaud's strict rejection of political agenda, Jannarone provides a strong argument attesting otherwise.

While Artaud argues, "theatre, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative," (Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* 27) Jannarone counters that "crowd feeling is always infectious" (206). This frightening idea puts into perspective the position into which Artaud's theories easily fall. In an effort to explore the audience/performance relationship, fascist theatre groups manipulated audiences, seeing theatre as an opportunity to use "provocation as a catalyst" and "impose [upon] an impressionable group of spectators" (Jannarone 196). This is a far turn from the nature many, like Gray and Riccio (discussed later in this chapter), view the Theatre of Cruelty as possessing.

In *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, a study of crowd theory, Gustave Le Bon states, "to know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds is to know at the same time the art of governing them" (71). While he never specifically defines the mathematics of what he considers a crowd, this startling statement encapsulates the motives used by the Western European political leaders Kimberly Jannarone discusses. Le Bon explains that crowds are most impressed by representation through imagery. As a result, the visual presentation becomes a motive for action. For this reason Le Bon argues for the influential power of theatre in its ability to transform a crowd and bring it together in pursuit of a common problem or agenda. He goes on to say "it is not, then, the facts in themselves that strike the popular

imagination, but the way in which they take place and are brought under notice. It is necessary that by the condensation...they should produce a startling image which fills and besets the mind" (71). It is probable, when applying Le Bon's theories, that crowds could easily be coerced to follow the endeavors of political leaders despite the consequences.

The idea of crowd theory proposes that when in a group, people act differently than they would otherwise. Twentieth century advances with technical elements such as lighting, development in theatres with the use of stationary, assigned seating, and the application of new theatre etiquette brought about the attentive and well-behaved bourgeois audience. Jannarone notes "spectator manipulation and audience obedience emerged as key terms for subsequent theatre artists to either develop or resist" (195). This obedience allowed many pre-war symbolist theatres to capitalize on the opportunity. They studied the idea that "theatre could create a hypnotizing world . . . [seeking] to annihilate the audience's world in favor of the ideal world on stage" (196). The fascist theatre extended upon this, using these ideas in its favor. Jannarone argues, "...while the avant-garde theatres were still conceiving an audience, fascist theatres, instead, conceived a crowd" (199).

Among the most identifiable political figures that wanted to replace the private identity of audience with the communal dynamic of crowd were Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. As audiences were enchanted by theatrical imagery, political leaders were free to project their own agendas upon them. With the reasoning abilities of the individual diminished through the assembly of the crowd, fascist and

socialist theatre presented enormous strength extremely appealing to political authorities. Jannarone emphatically points this out, asserting, “the fascist theatres established revolutionary ideals in terms of faith over reason, modeled in their plays and projected onto the audience” (202).

Helga Finter addresses Artaud’s realization of the turn political leaders were placing upon his ideas, claiming “new myths were not to be staged as the foundation for creating community; instead, cruelty, which makes community and society possible in the first place, was to be transformed into an experience in and for each individual” (Finter 17). With the manipulation of his audience/performance relationship, Artaud began to argue that a “community-building theatre that could have a therapeutic and cathartic effect” could not exist (Finter 18). Perhaps if Artaud had been capable of taking a more unyielding stand against manipulation of his vision, we would have a more clearly defined model of his intentions for Theatre of Cruelty. Instead we are left to fill in the blanks of a dream that was never fully conceived.

A distinct problem in evaluating Artaudian works is the misrepresentation of the ideas that make up the Theatre of Cruelty. Perhaps the most common fallacy is the misunderstanding of the word “cruelty” as employed by Artaud. In his book *Art and Sex*, Gray Watson argues for Artaudian origins in performance pieces such as Rachel Rosenthal’s *Performance and the Masochistic Tradition*, Ron Athey’s *Martyrs and Saints* and Louise Bourgeois’s *Cell (Arch of Hysteria)*. Watson claims that Artaud “demanded the enactment of violent spectacle,” imbuing the word cruelty with highly masochistic and brutal connotations (90). In fact, many of the performances

Watson references are sadistic or masochistic in nature, emphasizing his own misunderstanding of Artaudian Cruelty.

Rosenthal's *Performance and the Masochistic Tradition* was not a performance piece at all, but rather a lecture in which she attempted to leave the audience extremely uncomfortable through assuming a "masochistic personae" (91). *Martyrs and Saints* is the first performance of a trilogy in which patients are subjected to genital piercings and enemas as audiences observe (94). The sadistic dismemberment of the male body is the focus of *Cell (Arch of Hysteria)* (95). In categorizing the works under the context of Theatre of Cruelty, Watson focuses solely on the physical representation of what he believes the term to mean. Vivian Ching-Mei Chu confronts this problem in her dissertation *The Artaudian Theater of Images: The Language of Mise en Scene in the Theatre of Antonin Artaud and His Followers.*, stating "cruelty, Artaud's term, is neither bloodshed nor sadistic violence; rather it refers to a metaphysical cruelty, a rigorous self-discipline" (23). Artaud himself warned against the manipulation of the term when he wrote "this cruelty is not sadistic or bloody, at least not exclusively so. I do not systematically cultivate horror. The word cruelty must be taken in its broadest sense, not in the physical, predatory sense usually ascribed to it" (*The Theatre and Its Double* 79). If we are to derive our understanding of Cruelty from evidence in Artaud's writing such as this, it stands to reason that Watson (and the artists he endorses in his book) have not succeeded in representing those ideas.

Elements of Theatre of Cruelty have found their place in American periods of social upheaval, most notably the 1960s. Artaud wanted to utilize classic dramatic

literature in a redefined and reformulated manner. He also strove to destroy the separation between audience and actor, in effect blurring the lines between real and imagined. He wanted to “envelop both groups in his ritualistic action, to recruit the audience as participants” (Bermel 99). This shift in ideology is perhaps why avant-garde theatre of that decade focused on the ritualistic nature of Artaud’s ideas through the manipulation of interaction between the audience and performance. Perhaps the most seminal example of these ideas, and more importantly of the corruption of Artaudian theory, is Richard Schechner’s production of *Dionysus in 69* with the Performance Group. Ellen Mackay identifies the importance of dramatic interpretation as it is used here “as an art form that is not just culturally meaningful but [intended to be] socially constitutive” (71).

The Performance Group, under the direction of Richard Schechner, reconceived the classic play *The Bacchae* in their production of *Dionysus in 69*. The group intended to employ the ritualistic nature of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty while addressing popular social prerogatives of the decade. The result is what Ching-Mei Chu refers to as a “fake application of Artaud’s theory in the 1960s experimental theatre.” She expands upon this, saying “the adaptation was more like a narcissistic ritual of the actors rather than an illumination of an old text” (Chu 154, 45).

The adaptation of the classic play was an extreme departure from the original text, incorporating dialogue from *Antigone* and *Hippolytus* as well as bits of the actors’ conversations extracted from rehearsals. The performance space allowed for a representation of the “symbolic womb, a spatial metaphor representing the Dionysian rebirth” (Chu 102,105). The group renovated a garage on Wooster Street

for their performances. For *Dionysus in 69*, the performance space was circular with two large scaffolds on either end. Platforms and towers were scattered throughout the space, encouraging audiences to sit anywhere while providing seating that enabled all areas of the environment to be taken in simultaneously.

The performance involved actors taking part in ritualistic activities that were extended to include the audience. Actors were literally scattered throughout the audience, encouraging the spectators to join in on the events of the play. As an orgy took place onstage, spectators were encouraged to participate. Each night performers would attempt to persuade a woman from the audience to join in the sexual activities onstage, giving the performance an uncomfortably voyeuristic quality. Action took place simultaneously in all areas of the space, resulting in a loss of focus, “deviat[ing] from Artaud’s idea of a more intensely focused event for the impact of cruelty.” As the action of the play progressed, actors divulged to audience members personal information about themselves completely unrelated to the text. An array of deviations from Artaudian ideas ultimately resulted in a performance that severely misrepresented the elements of Theatre of Cruelty and corrupted the audience/performance relationship Artaud articulated (Mackay 78).

Complaints against the production vary in degree of criticism and even disgust. While the recognition of Artaudian theories by Schechner is apparent, their manifestation in *Dionysus in 69* failed. Because of the untrained nature of the actors, Schechner’s representation of carnal emotions through vocal stimuli fell short. In the 1968 review of the play, *Time Magazine* called the production “a trampoline for directorial acrobatics...shamelessly alive from the waist down and shamelessly dead

from the neck up.” Schechner was also preoccupied with the political aspects of the production, an application that falls in direct conflict with Artaud’s vision. The misuse of Artaud’s principles for Theatre of Cruelty, especially with regard to the audience/performance relationship, resulted in Schechner’s work appearing “shallow and self-obsessive” (Chu 146). While the Artaudian theatre is a director’s theatre, Schechner took this dictum too far. The then unconventional staging, harsh and blatant portrayal of sex and sexuality, and the forceful nature of the interactions actors pursued amongst the audience all worked to promote Schechner’s own political position concerning current cultural attitudes within art and everyday life.

In Artaud’s production of *The Cenci* the use of pantomime and gesture depicts the violation of Beatrice by her father, Cenci. With the disturbing issue of incest presented in such a physical manner, the audience was forced to wrestle with something that is often concealed and internalized by victims. By employing these elements that are key units in Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, numerous directors and artists after him have echoed this approach in their own productions. Ching-Mei Chu describes Artaudian gesture as “developed to echo a definite image reflecting the metaphysical cruelty of human existence” (15). If this is true, then surely his ideas can be used in further developing the fairly modern field of drama therapy. As treatment that uses techniques that often transcend the capabilities of language, it seems rational that Artaud’s theories would be successful. Considering the staging from *The Cenci* reminds us of the victim of some crime forced into silence, unable to find the words to speak about the incident. In the absence of words, the physical representation of that, though initially painful, would provoke the metaphysical,

ultimately leading to healing. While drama therapy, by definition, lends itself to the cognitive side of application, perhaps the *basis* of Artaud's theories could be beneficial in progressing this recently developed field.

Examining how Artaud's theories affect individuals in an audience, Albert Bermel argues in *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*, "if ritual has helped the one, it should help the other" (Bermel 91). In 2006 Tom Riccio attempted to put into practice the idea of using ritual to affect change in audience members with his production of *There Is Never a Reference Point*. His original play tells the story of Jamie Dakis, a woman suffering from dissociative identity disorder, more commonly referred to as multiple personality disorder. Rather than adhering to traditional audience/performance relationships, Riccio placed the audience directly in the action of the play. Small groups consisting of no more than twenty-five people entered the stage area to experience the eight performance installations representative of Dakis's separate and very distinct personalities. Jamie, the ringmaster of the group, asked spectators "how can I ever want to live through these things over and over and over again," yet those life-altering experiences were exactly what the audience was faced with (Riccio 4).

In visiting each personality, spectators witnessed the often violent and emotionally horrifying events of Jamie's life. Patty, the adolescent part of Jamie's mind, is raped onstage by her uncle in a state of alcoholic rage. Marta chastises spectators as she declares the importance of keeping a spotless home, all the while threatening to assault those that do not adhere to her strict guidelines. Rubber cleaning gloves and bleach are offered to those wishing to assist her. In a highly

inebriated state, Misty offers lap dances as she spins around a pole that has become a staple in her life. The nauseating stench of alcohol and cleaning chemicals permeates the stage as the audience is invited to play cards at a table with James, Jamie's alcoholic and abusive father.

In an attempt to heighten the ritualistic act of theatre, Artaud wanted the audience to surpass the role of spectator and act as participant (Bermel 99). An interactive relationship needed to exist in order to "bring the individual spectator into a personal relationship with the individual performer" (Bermel 100). Riccio's staging put this idea into practice, leaving audiences feeling as if they could identify with Jamie because of having experienced, to a small degree, the cruelty in her life. This was a form of communicating the incommunicable. In *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Jane Goodall explains the nature of Theatre of Cruelty as a way "to lift the veil of appearances which conceals the violence of creation itself, a violence begun in disastrous conjunctions but perpetuated as the disguised cruelty of a world of fixed forms" (Goodall 106). Goodall acknowledges the presence of facades used to conceal the cruel truth of human existence. *There Is Never a Reference Point* was an attempt to lift the veil of appearances by integrating audience and performance.

On February 17, 2006, the real Jamie Dakis, about whom the play was written, was present for the production. In the thirty-five minutes of the play, Dakis saw the physicalization of the personalities that still plagued her mind. She interacted with each, enjoying the company of some and loathing the presence of others. While it was apparent that she understood the world of the theatre as a representation of what is real, the boundary between physical and imagined had

certainly become obscure. For Dakis, this performance entered the realms of what Helga Fitner and Matthew Griffin refer to as “Theatre of the Real,” claiming that “only a discourse of the Real can actually touch the spectator” (Fitner and Griffin 19). They point out the immediate presence of real qualities (fear, danger, violence) in Theatre of the Real that directly work against the fantasy within theatre of the “as if” (20). The emotions Dakis showed during that particular performance ranged from ecstasy and elation to distress and horror.

Audiences this particular night were only further affected by her reactions, fully conceiving the subject matter for what it was. With such a harsh presentation of imagery and dialogue, it remained virtually impossible for spectators to ignore the content of the play. Issues of violence, abuse, self-deprecation, and drug use provoked thought in an unapologetically disturbing manner. The cast was urged to allow the text to transform as deemed appropriate to the audience. Unlike the meaningless improvisation from actors in *Dionysus in 69*, the actors in *Reference Point* improvised in an effort to directly affect each audience. This further established the idea of the Real as the actors manipulated lines to incorporate audience members into the action. With each performance the play took on unique qualities that were never precisely duplicated.

Shortly after *There Is Never a Reference Point* finished production, Jamie Dakis contacted Tom Riccio to discuss the show. She shared with him the transformative powers it had, explaining the effect it directly had upon her. The tremendous physical representation of her different personalities had given her the ability to let go of one of them. She claimed that for years she had considered them

friends and confidants, but seeing them in front of her helped her to understand the detrimental power they had over her life. In this aspect, *There Is Never a Reference Point* fulfilled Artaud's idea that theatre "impels us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall" (Artaud 22). For Dakis, the mask that fell was the oppressive, threatening, and sadistic figment of her personality that she called Marta.

In appealing to the audience and raising the stakes for what experiencing theatre entails, modern theatre professionals might redefine their approach by taking a particular interest in Artaud's theories. Furthermore, a reassessment of the perseverance of theatre's ritualistic nature might prompt a rebirth of Artaudian philosophies. The spectacle and didacticism of theatre would then be replaced by the necessity of the art, for "a theatre that merely depicts life is not sufficient," but rather should "question the very fundamentals of life and its relationship to art" (Dasgupta 3). A shift like this would certainly challenge the contemporary norms of theatre practice.

In resolving the problem of best applying Artaud's ideas, Helga Finter and Matthew Griffin argue that the questions Artaud posed are inherently more important than the answers he supplied. One of the most important questions he asked concerned the role of the spectator. "Artaud was motivated by a desire for a direct and violent attack upon the senses of his audience in order to achieve a collective purgation of the audience . . . consider[ing] the involvement of the audience in a single space the most important step in achieving his ideal of the theatre of cruelty" (Chu 94). In *The Theatre and Its Double* Artaud continually evaluates a central concern of the effect the theatre has on its audience. Still,

Jannarone points out that “Artaud himself never articulated a social vision that could frame the Theatre of Cruelty in a socially or politically coherent way” (192).

Considering the disconnect between theory and practice, it is easy to argue that because Artaud’s ideas were never concretely defined they are rather malleable. Perhaps this is why his ideas have persisted over the past sixty years; without definitive answers about how to put into practice the theories, artists will continue to manipulate them in search of the best application. Furthermore, it is possible that Artaud himself was either unsure of how to best apply his ideas or did not know how to clearly articulate them, leaving the task of working through the details to his followers. If this is true, Artaud established theories that will inevitably experience change and revision as new generations of Theatre of Cruelty advocates are born.

It is undeniable that Artaud revealed possibilities in theatre that extended beyond language-based performance. His work has inspired a legacy of artists experimenting with theatrical forms and seeking to affect society through the use of ideas that constitute the Theatre of Cruelty. Charles Marowitz defines cruelty as “the exposure of mind, heart and nerve ends to the grueling truths behind a social reality that deals in psychological crises;” however, the concept of truth provides ample room for interpretation (147). Moreover, the social reality of which Marowitz speaks differs from person to person, or at least culture to culture. The fact remains that Artaud left no clear model for future generations wishing to use his work as an example, for the transition from theory to execution for him was often problematic. Perhaps, then, Artaud’s work is unfairly deemed “Theatre of the Impossible.”

While Artaud's body of work includes an abundance of writings that call for a shift in theatre practice, the concepts themselves are entirely ambiguous. Furthermore, models he presented illustrating his ideas are in short supply. As a result, various interpretations of Artaud's ideas have been put into place. Because of the unanswered nature of his work, the various forms of artistic contributions claiming to be Artaudian can and will continue. In proposing an anti-literary theatre, Artaud "advocated a theatre that would [deal] with spiritual aspects of man's existence in a cruel world" (Chu 20). If theatre is a collaborative art, why should the audience be excluded from this? With a cultural audience that demands more, perhaps the most beneficial route for artists to take is one of healer, repairing the emotional apathy that constricts the possibilities theatre should be allowed. The idea of possibilities, above all, remains one of Artaud's greatest contributions, one that should be considered in all aspects of theatre.

Chapter III

The Living Theatre's Theatre of Cruelty: Establishing a Relationship Between Theory and Performance

For all the validation given to the theories found in *The Theatre and Its Double*, equally voiced are those critiques that aim to reveal the fundamental difficulties found when moving away from written theory and approaching Artaud's writing through a lens of practical application. Despite the incredible profundity attributed to Artaud's ideas, the criticisms of Susan Sontag completely discredit the theatrical evidences offered in Artaud's performance history. While she supports Artaud's work from a theoretical standpoint, claiming that it "encourage(s) the notion of art as an instrument of revolution," she addresses a failure of evidentiary application of these ideas, stating, "his influence derives no support from the evidence of his own productions" (42). It is essential to recognize, however, that "what he said about theatre had enough weight to influence a whole epoch" (Féral 89). While his ideas may have held more weight in theory than his own implementation of them shows, they were certainly powerful enough to affect an immensely varied theatrical discourse for the past sixty years.

It is from Artaud's influence that theatre practitioners like Peter Brook have found inspiration and give credit in their own work. Brook adhered to Artaud's demand that theatre be "an unrelenting assault upon the senses of the spectators" with productions at the Royal Shakespeare Company (Gilman 21). So great was his interest in the theorist, that in 1964 the RSC produced a season of Theatre of

Cruelty, consisting of Artaud's *The Spurt of Blood*, among other productions (Leach 188). Brook's staging of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* in 1955 at the RSC, as well as the 1964 "astonishing tour de force" *Marat/Sade*, established a "combination of spectacle, drama, and physical experience" through which Brook would establish his own style as influenced by Artaud (Gilman 21).

When considering the practical application of Theatre of Cruelty, perhaps most notable, however, is the work done by The Living Theatre, as it too subscribes heavily to the theories Artaud established. The Living Theatre, the oldest experimental theatre group still existing in the U.S., strives to restructure the common perceptions of power from one driven by a "societal hierarchy" to "cooperative and communal expression...while continually challeng[ing] the forms, content, and style of the theatre and its relationships to and with the audience" (Burgess). These stated efforts echo Artaud's own writing. In his essay "The Theatre and the Plague," Artaud states, "beneath such a scourge, all social forms disintegrate" (15). One of The Living Theatre's primary methods of fulfilling this particular goal, and that will receive primary focus in the remaining discussion, is by "counteracting complacency in the audience through direct spectacle" as the performance "attempts to take the spectator to such an intense level of emotional involvement that he is forced to react" (Neff 32). The Living Theatre's intense focus on the audience/actor relationship acts as a primary method of delivery for not only its performance style, but the singular interpretation of Artaud's theories.

By examining a select history of The Living Theatre, I will consider the various methods by which this company has translated Artaud's theories to actual

performance practice. Furthermore, I will pay special attention to the 1959 and 2009 productions of Jack Gelber's *The Connection* in order to evaluate the performance evolution that may have taken place between those productions. While the fifty years separating these two productions certainly contain an extensive performance history of original and new works, my focus here will remain primarily with *The Connection* in an effort to localize the company's methodologies. If "the theory of Artaud exceeds in desire anything he could ever realize," how, if at all, has this company translated those theories to practice (Blau 442)?

Established in 1947 by Judith Malina and Julian Beck, The Living Theatre was created by not only taking influence from Artaud, but by citing his text *The Theatre and Its Double* as its primary artistic basis. While many other artists of the twentieth century draw from particular elements of his writing, The Living Theatre claims his theories as their principal authority. Leach finds this approach problematic, identifying "any attempt to suggest a comprehensive 'theatre practice' with Artaud's name stamped on it... [as] singularly fruitless" (174). Sontag extends this, saying "one can be inspired by Artaud...one can be scorched, changed by Artaud. But there is no way of applying Artaud" (qtd. in Leach: 174).

In discussing Artaud's work, Graham Ley and Jane Milling describe his writing as "an engagement with the community, [with] the incentive [as] the right of a mind to a place in a culture" (97). The Living Theatre takes a direct cue from this idea, positioning it within the group's very mission. Julian Beck states that their mission is:

To call into question who we are to each other in the environment of the theatre, to undo the knots that lead to misery, to spread ourselves across the public's table like platters at a banquet, to set ourselves in motion like a vortex that pulls the spectator into action, to fire the body's secret engines to pass through the prism and come out a rainbow, to insist that what happens in the jails matters, to cry 'Not in my name!' at the hour of execution, to move from the theatre to the street and from the street to the theatre. This is what The Living Theatre does today. It is what it has always done (Burgess).

Despite the mission's seemingly self-sacrificial tones, The Living Theatre has always maintained what may be viewed as an imposing politically activist agenda when shaping its performance practices. Neff claims that it is "impossible to separate the Living Theatre's art from its political ideology" (12). While Artaud might have cringed at the sharp political messages that The Living Theatre pushes, their work is, nonetheless, deeply saturated in the theatrical ideologies Artaud's writing promotes.

In "No More Masterpieces," Artaud speaks of a shift away from what he considered the exhausted forms of expression that he believed reflected the bourgeois characteristics of theatre that surrounded him. His claim that "masterpieces of the past are good for the past; they are not good for us," elaborates the idea that "we have the right to say what has been said and even what has not been said in a way that belongs to us, a way that is immediate and direct...and understandable to everyone" (74). His demand for the production of new works is answered in the fundamental practices of The Living Theatre. While they have

produced more classical works (with their own unique interpretation) such as Racine's *Phaedra* in the summer of 1955 and Sophocles' *Antigone* produced in 1984, the bulk of their work, particularly in the mid-twentieth century, has focused on new plays.

Despite the tendency to rely on new works, the company would later shift to creating what Artaud referred to as "expression in space" which would "allow art and speech to be exercised organically and altogether, like renewed exorcisms" (89). They did not "act a written play, but [made] attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works" (98). Their "collective creation(s)" were an effort to evolve from an authoritative (and authorial) approach within the company to greater collaborative works (Harding 29). As their performances became more deeply rooted in this new direction that embraced performance style and theory, the shift to an Artaudian treatment of language was more firmly realized.

Regardless of the type of works The Living Theatre was producing, its focus remained on creating theatre that would provoke change within its audiences. They weren't just concerned with creating art, but with "their audience's ethics as well as aesthetics" (Harding 36). At the peak of his theoretical development, Artaud was writing about a true theatre that would demand a "sense of life renewed by the theatre;" the Living Theatre answered the call to arms (13). They viewed theatre as a revolutionary force through which they could affect social change. Just as Artaud was seeking a theatre free from bourgeois influence, Malina and Beck regarded their theatre as "force and revelation...an antidote to bourgeois existence" (Gilman 330).

For them, theatre was not just an artistic outlet. The stakes were much higher than that. Malina comments on the necessary participation of the audience, not for the sake of physical interaction between performer and audience, but as an avenue to exploring the moral implications and responsibilities of the theatre. “My interest is in the unification of the performers...with the spectator, to find some key to the horrible alienation of people sitting there listening.” Her primary focus here is to “[create] for the audience a true role in which choices must be made that will reveal to them their own decision making processes” (qtd. in Callaghan: 24-25). Theatre, for The Living Theatre, was and is a mutually participatory experience.

In 1959 the company produced Jack Gelber’s play *The Connection*. The play delivered a very graphic depiction of heroin addiction amidst the lives of jazz musicians and junkies. The play, directed by Judith Malina and designed by Julian Beck, took on a completely collaborative nature as playwright Gelber assisted and became involved in several areas of the production. An audience of filmmakers, creating a play-within-a-play setup, recorded the addicts that made up the cast. As the play progressed, “the division between art and life was blurred again... [as] actors improvised with spectators in the audience space, panhandling for the next ‘fix’” (Harding 28). With a completely new text to work with, the company was able to employ methodologies they found appealing without the backlash of answering to the traditions that classics would employ. With new works like *The Connection*, they found an outlet that provided the artistic freedom that would work to reinforce their “revolutionary” approach to theatre.

With the production of *The Connection* in 1959, the practices of The Living Theatre had not yet crossed over into the politically obtrusive and demanding agenda that would pervade their overall repertoire in the twenty years that would follow. The staging elements employed in *The Connection* were not to overtly push any expressly social or political agenda (a practice that would be seen with many of their later productions), but to promote critical perspectives regarding a localized example of societal downturn. While the makings for their strongly seated political perspectives may have very well been present, they were not aggressively forced upon audiences. This production did not present audiences with what to think, but instead offered them something to think about. The balance between social message and a push for change was perfectly suspended amidst Artaudian methodology that would cause the company to attract widespread attention for its then groundbreaking approaches.

With *The Connection*, the fourth wall was broken down in order for life onstage to permeate the lives of those in the audience. “The Living Theatre tried to use expression to create a sense of frustrated desire and out of this awareness, action” (Harding 53). Actors portraying the documentary filmmakers were interspersed with audience members, an effect that reiterated the voyeuristic nature of the experience. Rather than being led to pursue action in the streets, so to speak, audience members were presented with a choice concerning the degree of voyeurism or active participation to which they would subscribe. By placing performers within the confines of the audience, the theatrical event transformed from passive to immediately present and applicable. Complete interaction was just

as viable a choice as submissive spectatorship. In addition to the immersive placement of the documentary filmmakers, the addicts onstage crossed the boundary confining them to that space, thus exploring the unavoidable presence of their own context, a context that extended beyond the doors of the theatre. The result (when compared, perhaps, to Schechner's *Dionysus in '69*) was a more tentative, though fully effective, presentation of art as life and life as art. Audience and actor alike, through the performance style employed, were able to establish the immediacy of theatre in relation to real life happenings.

Perhaps most notable in its 60-year performance history is The Living Theatre's use of performer/spectator interaction as it relates to the Theatre of Cruelty. In defining the performance space in true theatre, Artaud wanted "a direct communication [to] be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator" (96). For many of The Living Theatre's productions, the audience is a participant as much as those onstage. The performances "ultimately provide no answers," but rather "lead the spectators to engage a variety of questions regarding aspects of our personal lives in the context of larger cultural and political frameworks" (Callaghan 31). Furthermore, the line separating onstage and offstage, play and audience is often difficult to identify, if not altogether nonexistent.

The company has employed audience-utilizing techniques for the purposes of shocking them out of the distanced spectatorial position audiences traditionally maintained. In *The Rite of Universal Intercourse*, a segment of the 1968 *Paradise Now*, audience members were encouraged to join the naked company members

onstage to participate in sexual acts. While many found the staging to work solely through shock tactics, the group sought to deliver a message of deteriorating social boundaries by breaking down those that were most immediately applicable between spectacle and spectator. A shift between a *call* to action and *enforcing* action took place at the end of the performance segment when actors led audience members into the streets “to begin the revolution that [would] bring Paradise now” (Neff 34).

As The Living Theatre became more established, there was a distinct shift from creating theatre that would arouse change in audiences to promoting political agendas by way of *aggressive* audience invasion. The less aggressive, didactic nature of work like *The Connection* quickly deteriorated and became something more violently interactive that “subverted both accepted forms and acceptable content” (Harding 36). While there may have been a choice presented with *The Connection* regarding audience interaction or detachment, that notion was quickly eradicated in favor of much more direct and forceful approach to political ideology. If Artaud wanted “a pervasive sense of urgency” that would make the spectator “move beyond merely seeing the event to actually experiencing it sensually and aurally, thereby feeling the immediate impact of the spectacle,” The Living Theatre took this to heart and pushed the idea to the limit with many of their European based productions (Chaim 41).

While the performance practices of The Living Theatre may have resonated strongly with audiences of the 1960s and 1970s, more recent audiences may deem these now defining characteristics as outdated and ineffective. In “Still Signaling

Through the Flames: The Living Theatre's Use of Audience Participation in the 1990s," David Callaghan explores the company's dependence on audience interaction in more recent years, claiming that "their zealous reliance on 'touchy feely' audience participation [is] no longer in touch with contemporary sensibilities" (33). Rather than re-evaluate and reformat the methods by which their performance practices might promote social and political change, those practices had become fleshed out and washed up when placed against an undeniably changing audience and culture.

As the company sought to commemorate the 50th anniversary of their production of *The Connection*, as well as what might be viewed as their cultural initiation, a return to the reception and applicability of their originally defining characteristics was also seen. While the fifty years that separated the two productions had been fraught with radical re-evaluations of the political intensity the group adopted, they essentially came back to where they had first been (most) effective. In an interview with *The Villager*, Malina said "when we decided to do this, I sat down and said: What do I want to change, 50 years later? And I didn't change anything. It's all still good, still relevant...it's the same thing now as then. Poverty is the same, drug addiction is the same" (Tallmer). Perhaps, after more than half a century, The Living Theatre has moved away from radical politics expressed through aesthetic form back to something more closely resembling Artaud's true theatre. This production, as in the original, offered a balance between social concern and political agenda.

Still, while Malina may have claimed that nothing changed between the two productions, fifty years did inevitably present differences, both in the productions themselves and in their receptions. In 1959, *The Connection* was staged not just by a visionary director or with the assistance of a pivotal designer, but rather by a trifecta of artists without which the resultant production would not have existed. Originally directed by The Living Theatre's co-founder Judith Malina, her talents were equally matched in design aspects by husband Julian Beck, who was also co-founder of the theatre. While Jack Gelber initially became involved with the project as the young man who had written the script, his contributions quickly exceeded that singular title. He attended every rehearsal and closely collaborated with Malina on the entire process.

In September of 1985, Julian Beck died after a two-year battle with stomach cancer. Jack Gelber, who had suffered from Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia, a cancer of the blood, passed away in May of 2003. For the play's revival in 2009, Malina was the only remaining member of the group, taking up her position as director of the production once again. Highlighting the unconventionality of the play, Malina also portrayed the character Sister Salvation in 2009. Gary Brackett took up the role of scenic designer and production director.

In the original staging of the play, the context presented was immediately relevant, if not artistically daring. It was because of the audacious nature of the play that *The Connection* helped to establish the revolutionary reputation and fortitude of The Living Theatre. While drug addiction may not have been a new phenomenon, discussing it--- and certainly highlighting it as brazenly as Gelber does in the script--

-was still relatively taboo. The obscene language of junkies, coupled with the graphic depiction of heroin use onstage, certainly hit a note with audiences who were not accustomed to viewing content of this nature; however, 21st century audiences are subjected to much more on a daily basis each time they explore any form of media, be it television, film, or the internet.

The play reaches a sharp climax as the character Leach, who has been waiting the entire time for his next fix, administers an overdose of heroin onstage. The shocking nature of such an occurrence established the controversial essentiality of the production for audiences in 1959. While critics of the original production initially invalidated the play, that negativity quickly halted when the likes of Harold Clurman and Kenneth Tynan offered their support. *The Connection* continued for over 700 performances in the early 1960s. The result may not have been as pivotal for modern audiences. Aside from the risqué nature of the play, the generational language and dated music may have established the play as more of a museum piece than a relevant revival.

With this in mind, does that mean that any efforts to apply Artaud's theories may categorize a work as dated and irrelevant? Ley and Milling, in *Modern Theories of Performance: From Stanislavski to Boal*, claim that, "for us, Antonin Artaud exists primarily in writing, and this fact of reception is no accident" (96). When approaching Artaud's theories as influential text, there are inevitably issues with interpretation and application. The primacy of Artaud's theoretical existence through writing is highly problematic in that "while the physical reality of theatrical performance provided a more visceral, more immediate, doorway to the expression

of violent truth,” the expression of that venue was difficult as “words [did] not suffice to express the intense truths of life” (Leach 153). Perhaps Artaud would have appreciated the efforts The Living Theatre made (and continues to make) to unleash itself upon an audience, for those efforts certainly contain the voracity with which he wishes to see in the theatrical event.

As Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty urges us to see ourselves for who we really are, equally pursued are those efforts by The Living Theatre. Artaud demanded that psychology be replaced by the physical and immediate. As The Living Theatre experimented with distance and immersion within the theatrical event, they undeniably changed how an audience would come to experience theatre. They worked to transform the position (and responsibility) of the audience from passive spectator to active participant, thereby intensifying the implications of the theatre experience.

In *Distance in the Theatre*, Daphna Ben Chaim argues for the constitutive effects of distance upon an audience. “Distance is the basis of a general aesthetic principle. [It] is fundamental to the aesthetic consciousness and is variable. The spectrum of psychological distance allows various degrees of personal relationship with the art object, on the one hand, and an awareness of unreality on the other” (78). She defines Artaud’s theatre as one that is “premised on a concept of distance.” While the audience/actor relationship relies on diminishing, or altering, the traditional concepts of distance, the still existent separation between the two allows the spectator “psychologi[cal] protection by his knowledge that his life is not in

danger in the theatre” (79). For Artaud, the theatre is a protected environment where one can permit himself to be vulnerable only because one knows he is safe.

That sense of safety is not a concept The Living Theatre has become preoccupied with. As it moved from a revolutionary theatre in the 1950s and 1960s grounded in spectator choice to political activism from the late 60’s on provoked by audience immersion, their approach fundamentally contradicted Artaud’s aforementioned ideas. His emphasis of cruelty in performance is a method by which he might cauterize the pains of daily life. For The Living Theatre, cruelty was a tool for transcending those difficulties, thereby reinstating the superiority of *actual* life to life represented as art.

If The Living Theatre aims to take up Artaud’s position on theatre, they disregard the singularly individual nature of his perspectives. Furthermore, “not only is Artaud’s position not tenable, it’s not a position at all” (Sontag 67). While it may be completely possible for anyone to find inspiration in Artaud’s writing, claiming his text as primary authority is a fallible venture. Perhaps Peter Brook was further ahead of the game than Malina and Beck when he claimed “we are not trying to recreate the theatre of Artaud...we’re just using him as a springboard into new eras” (Leach 187).

Chapter IV

Peter Brook's Theatre of Cruelty: The Transformative Nature of Theory and Artistic Production

With a career that continues to thrive after sixty years, Peter Brook has commanded the attention of the theatre community as a whole with over eighty pivotal productions all over the world. His works have questioned the common perceptions of the purpose of theatre in a greater effort to reconstitute the meaning of art. In his biography of Peter Brook, Michael Kustow calls him, "the greatest living theatre director...the radical spirit of contemporary theatre." He elaborates on the contributions Brook has made in theatre, claiming, "he has changed rituals, made it ask harder questions, [and] probed its links to language, culture, myth, and the brain" (1). Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage, in *In Contact With the Gods? Directors Talk Theatre*, comment on his career, stating:

Peter Brook has pursued an extraordinary, unprecedented, and ongoing investigation into the language and nature of theatre. His linking of the worlds of the private and the public, his exploration of the collaborative relationship between performers and spectators, and his interest in the training and preparation of actors have marked a prodigious theatrical journey (37).

While his work certainly places him in high regard among his own peers and contemporaries, it is not through a calculated and repeatable directorial approach

that Brook is met with such admiration. Furthermore, his implementation of Artaud's ideas concerning Theatre of Cruelty, an approach many claim Brook utilizes in productions, does not find success in an interpretation at all, but is simply employed as Brook's appreciation for those theories, and his use of them in an ever-evolving practice of theatre.

When others claim to directly apply Cruelty in performance as a singular and stagnant theory, this chapter will examine the malleability and transformative qualities of Artaud's work as applied to performance. Brook's extensive career history will be investigated in order to scrutinize the various ways Artaudian theory has been, and is still, used in theatrical performance.

Peter Brook was born in London on March 21, 1925. Around this same time in Paris, Antonin Artaud was marking the beginnings of a career in theatre and cinema as he began writing and studying with established artists in the city. As Artaud became more involved and interested in the possibilities theatre held, he quickly became frustrated with the traditional and bourgeois approaches that he was seeing in Paris. It was a shared dissatisfaction that would later prompt Brook to search for alternatives in his own pursuits.

As a young director, Brook "was looking for energy, vitality, dynamics. It was a response to middle-class ennui, the boredom of what [he] saw...the 'traditionalness', in the worst sense of the word, of everything [he] saw in theatre. So [he] searched for life, new life, surprise" (qtd. in Kustow 137). This search would lead him to the texts of Artaud, which were gaining popularity in the sixties. While

many other theatre artists, such as Joseph Chaikin, Judith Malina, and Julian Beck—all of The Living Theatre— were channeling Cruelty in their own works, it also marked a very significant separation for Brook, “the beginning of his break from the mainstream,” (Kustow 138).

This shift from the mainstream would invoke memories of Artaud’s desire to displace the popularity of what he often referred to as bourgeois theatre in favor of a more nihilistic approach. Meanwhile, as this began the evolutionary process of Brook’s captivation with Artaudian theory, The Living Theatre, discussed in Chapter III, never broke away from Theatre of Cruelty as a central authority. It would seem that at the initial point of this exposure Brook would be doomed to mere mimicry of style and form, a fate that many of his contemporaries were also falling subject to. At this point, Brook’s writing adopted many of the same characteristics already expressed by Artaud. “In tone, they [had] much in common with the convulsive, fractured language of Artaud’s writing” (139).

It was by way of a pivotal opportunity provided by Peter Hall that Brook was able to break away from mere imitation and found his own approach to a previously unrealized application of the theory. While this would stand as the first opportunity for Brook to apply those theories, Artaud’s career reflected a single production, *The Cenci*, which ultimately failed to implement any of his ideas. Artaud’s involvement in the production delivered some very damaging results. Rather than approach the play with the modesties of an inexperienced producer and director, he used the kitchen-sink method. New to directing, Artaud made the task more difficult for

himself by acting in the title role as well. Rather than focus on a few tactics that might clearly portray his theories, he seemed to overzealously incorporate harsh lighting and sound effects, physical use of violence, and a detrimental departure from written text that rendered the play confusing. The lack of clear vision, accentuated by the visceral and highly physical application of the term “cruelty” led to the show closing after only 14 days. While Artaud’s production took an exceedingly comprehensive approach to his own theories, Brook’s would feature a much more streamlined vision.

Hall asked Brook to host and direct a 12-week workshop that would culminate in a showing at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. This would mark one of many fundamental distinctions between the careers of Artaud and Brook. The initial intention of the workshop was not to create some showcase, but to stand as training for a group of very specifically selected actors. The experimental group was termed *Theatre of Cruelty*, a name that Brook comments on in his book *The Empty Space*:

The title was by way of homage to Artaud, but it did not mean that we were trying to reconstruct Artaud’s own theatre. Anyone who wishes to know what ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ means should refer directly to Artaud’s own writings. We used his striking title to cover our own experiments, many of which were directly stimulated by Artaud’s thought — although many exercises were very far from what he had proposed. We did not start at the blazing centre, we began very simply on the fringes (49).

The 1964 production of *Theatre of Cruelty* with the Royal Shakespeare Company sought to bypass the purely literary approach to theatre in favor of a new language. Through the weeks of the workshop, the actors experienced a shift in their dependence on language as they “began to use a sound and a movement to respond to a new situation” (Kustow 140).

The very specific utilization of Artaud’s theories was expressed in a series of sketches, short scenes, discussions delivered by Brook, and the production of Artaud’s own play *The Spurt of Blood. The Public Bath*, one of Brook’s own creations, reconfigured the performance space in order to present a heightened sense of immediacy within the audience. The “public” bathing of one of the actresses harkened an association with the immediate cultural present that infiltrated the headlines and newspapers that were so persistent and prevalent to audiences just outside the doors of the theatre. What has now been coined “The Profumo Affair,” the 1963 sex scandal between model Christine Keeler and British politician John Profumo, had made national headlines when newspapers quickly addressed rumors of the relationship. With Brook’s recognition of the affair came the possibility of creating a direct line between art and life.

Part of the success of Brook’s *Theatre of Cruelty* came from the ever-changing nature of the performances. Nothing was ever stagnant or repeatable as the delivery was always new and re-imagined. This shift from conventionality has remained a persistent factor in Brook’s work. In an interview with *American Theatre Magazine*, Brook emphasizes:

I've never been in the position of having to do lots of plays systematically. I think it's always destructive to have to do plays in this way. A fuller attitude begins to shape itself when we have not only a response to what we like and dislike, but when we respond to what we can discover through working in the play...so personal expression ceases to be an aim and we go toward shared discovery (68).

This sense of shared discovery was carried over in the RSC's next season with the production of *The Persecution and Murder of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*. The play by Peter Weiss, usually referred to simply as *Marat/Sade*, features a play-within-a-play structure and was performed by the already existing company of seventeen that had made up the *Theatre of Cruelty* season. Needing a translation from the original German script, Brook immediately adopted a collaborative approach that Artaud desired with the involvement of poet Adrian Mitchell. His ventures in adapting the play did not reside in mere translation, but a dependence upon understanding the physical and emotional language of the actors as navigated by Brook. It was in conjunction with these rehearsals that Mitchell created sections of the translation that were later pieced together to create a whole.

The physical and metaphysical depiction of madness that the company had worked so hard to discover during rehearsals was the overpowering and overwhelming attribute of the production. A minimalist approach to set and costume elements created space for sound, music, physicality, and character. After

weeks of experimenting with various approaches, Brook finally discarded the excess and carefully sculpted terrifyingly familiar characters pieced together through an exhausting process of trial and error. The theatricality of the performance was subverted as the play-within-a-play, and the boundaries between performance and audience, deteriorated in order to become immediately present.

Marat/Sade was not simply a representation of madness, but a presentation of the real that was unavoidably and culturally relevant. Even for Artaud, his physical and mental conditions were “treated” through the use of electroshock therapy. Focusing on societal perspectives and reactions with regard to mental illness may present a greater understanding of changes that had occurred, even between the time of Artaud’s incapacitation and 1964 when the play was produced. Brook explains the blurred lines between real and imagined, claiming, “the true theatrical relationship is like most human relationships between people: the degree of involvement is always varying. This is why theatre permits one to experience something in an incredibly powerful way and at the same time to retain a certain freedom” (qtd. in Kustow 142-143). His Brechtian approach to the curtain call established an unwillingness to subscribe completely to any one frame of thought. As audiences applauded, actors remained in character as they responded with staggered applause that refused to identify the performed nature of theatre and release the audience from the grips of the play. The result was an intentional confusion that integrated play, performance, and the real.

While Artaud emphasized the importance of the relationship *between* the performance and the audience, Brook's work has overwhelmingly articulated the *responsibility* of the audience. Brook cites the French term for audience, *l'assistance*, as the basis of the audience's function. And it is through this collaborative relationship between audience and actor—in the audience's nature of assisting with the success of the production—which Brook seeks to emphasize the importance and necessary function of theatre as an art form. The implications of such a position stem from his belief that “the theatrical status quo [isn't] healthy...[or] even promising.” He questions “how to make theatre absolutely *necessary* to people, as necessary as eating and sex...something that is a simple organic necessity— as theatre used to be and still is in certain societies.” Ultimately he feels that “make believe is a *necessity*...and it's this quality [he] is searching for” (Roose-Evans 84).

Just as the experimental nature and application of theory shifted between the *Theatre of Cruelty* season and *Marat/Sade*, so has the nature of Brook's work beyond those productions. While his approach always seems to be rooted in exploring relationships, emphasizing the physical over the literary, and dissatisfaction with perceived forms, Brook's work steps outside the confining boundaries of strictly applied theory in the pursuit of an always evolving approach to art. This evolution is articulated through an attitude of birth and rebirth. He explains, “in the theatre, every form once born is mortal; every form must be reconceived, and its new conception will bear the marks of all the influences that surround it” (Brook 16).

While Artaud was not able to articulate his theories through performance, Brook has succeeded in exploring the *possibilities* of Artaudian theory.

While Brook has established a career based on a progressive and innovative approach to existing ideologies, as well as his own developmental theory, Susan Sontag bluntly wraps up the achievements of Antonin Artaud when she wrote “both in his work and in his life, Artaud failed” (17). It is not, she believes, through his own implementation of his theories that Theatre of Cruelty has received any lasting fortitude. Her comment only places a heavier responsibility on those who have chosen to explore his ideas in their own productions. Beyond the implications of exploring theory, Brook acknowledges the implications of creating theatre. He answers this in the pivotal first sentences that are written in *The Empty Space*: “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (9).

Antonin Artaud’s influence has undoubtedly sustained decades of criticism, examination, interpretation, and misinterpretation. His ideas concerning staging, *mise-en-scène*, audience/performance relationships, literary implications of performance, and the responsibility of the theatre have found their way into the praxis of historians, directors, designers, actors, and dramaturgs (to name a few) since the first publication of his work in 1938. The multitudinous nature of his writing inevitably breeds various notions of interpretation and use. Leach emphasizes the imprecise nature of his writing, claiming that, “the essays [in *The*

Theatre and Its Double] do not develop anything like a logical thesis, but form what might be thought of as a series of variations on Artaud's major theme –the Theatre of Cruelty" (173).

Perhaps it is futile to define one application of Artaud as reasonable, just as it is equally problematic to claim that any other treatment of those theories is arguably inaccurate. Perhaps the issue arises only when claiming that any performance or practice is *authentically* Artaudian, as defining his intentions has remained the central problem for 70 years.

Peter Brook most clearly and succinctly articulates the conundrum while discussing the Holy Theatre in *The Empty Space*. "Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed: betrayed because it is always just a portion of his thought that is exploited, betrayed because it is easier to apply rules to the work of a handful of dedicated actors than to the lives of the unknown spectators who happened by chance to come through the theatre door" (54).

While any true application of his theories may never be seen or even known, the betrayals will carry on as Artaud continues to be firmly established in our understanding of theatre.

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