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| **Theatre of Cruelty** |

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| **Dictionary Definition:** |
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| **drama emphasizing cruelty of human existence:**a form of surrealist drama emphasizing that human beings live in a threatening world with precarious moral values |

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Practitioners- Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Sarah Kane, Pina Bausch, Caryl Churchill

Key is to communicate in a language beyond speech; using groans, chants, grotesque movements, non-traditional theatre spaces, bright flashing lights, involving the audience in the action, shocking them with content.

Cruelty is to the actor- the commitment you have to give to the performance in order to get the desired effect on an audience is cruel to you, the performer. Even your breathing needs to be directed.

Plays to search on youtube- Marat/ Sade, Spurt of Blood, 4.48 Psychosis, Balinese Arja Theatre, Pina Bausch

Books- Theatre and its Double (Artaud), Empty Space (Peter Brook), Blows and Bombs- Artaud’s Theatre (Barber), In-yer-face Theatre- British Drama Today

**Notes from a Theatre of Cruelty**
**by** [**ANTONIN ARTAUD**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonin_Artaud)

 I employ the word "cruelty" in the sense of an appetite for life, a cosmic rigor, an implacable necessity, in the gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness; it is the consequence of an act. Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theatre must be rebuilt.

 Gifted actors find by instinct how to tap and radiate certain powers; but they would be astonished if it were revealed that these powers, which have their material trajectory by and in the organs, actually exist, for they never realized that these sources of energy actually exist in their own bodies, in their organs.

 Psychology, which works relentlessly to reduce the unknown to the known, to the quotidian and the ordinary, is the cause of the theater's abasement and its fearful loss of energy, which has finally reached its lowest point.

 The belief in a fluid materiality of the soul is indispensable to the actor's craft. To know that a passion is material, that it is subject to the plastic fluctuations of the material, makes accessible an empire of passions that extend our sovereignty.

 Furthermore, when we speak the word "life", it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from the surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating center which forms never reach. And if there is one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, when instead we should become as victims burning at the stake, signaling each other through the flames.

 And what is infinity ? We do not know exactly. It is a word we use to indicate WIDENING of our consciousness towards an inordinate, inexhaustible feasibility.

 To make metaphysics out of a spoken language is to make the language express what it does not ordinarily express. It is to make use of it in a new, exceptional and unaccustomed fashion; to reveal its possibilities for producing physical shock; to deal with intonations in an absolutely concrete manner, restoring their power to shatter as well as to really manifest something and finally, to consider language as Incantation.

 The true purpose of the theatre is to create Myths, to express life in its immense universal aspect, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves.

 If our life lacks a constant magic, it is because we choose to observe our acts and lose ourselves in consideration of their imagined form instead of being impelled by their force. No matter how loudly we clamor for magic in our lives, we are really afraid of pursuing an existence entirely under its influence and sign.

**The Holy Theatre**
**By Peter Brook**

I am calling it the Holy Theatre for short, but it could be called The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible: the notion that the stage is a place where the invisible can appear has a deep hold on our thoughts. We are all aware that most of life escapes our senses: a most powerful explanation of the various arts is that they talk of patterns which we can only begin to recognize when they manifest themselves as rhythms or shapes. We observe that the behaviour of people, of crowds, of history, obeys such recurrent patterns. We hear that trumpets destroyed the walls of Jericho , we recognize that a magical thing called music can come from men in white ties and tails, blowing, waving, thumping and scraping away. Despite the absurd means that produce it, through the con­crete in music we recognize the abstract, we understand that ordinary men and their clumsy instruments are transformed by an art of possession. We may make a personality cult of the conductor, but we are aware that he is not really making the music, it is making him—if he is relaxed, open and attuned, then the invisible will take possession of him; through him, it will reach us.

This is the notion, the true dream behind the debased ideals of the Deadly Theatre. This is what is meant and remembered by those who with feeling and seriousness use big hazy words like nobility, beauty, poetry, which I would like to re-examine for the particular quality they suggest. The theatre is the last forum where idealism is still an open question: many audiences all over the world will answer positively from their own experience that they have seen the face of the invisible through an experience on the stage that transcended their experience in life. They will maintain that Oedipus or Berenice or Hamlet or The Three Sisters performed with beauty and with love fires the spirit and gives them a reminder that daily drabness is not necessarily all. When they reproach the contemporary theatre for its kitchen sinks and cruelties, this, honourably, is what they are trying to say. They remember how during the war the romantic theatre, the theatre of colours and sounds, of music and movement, came like water to the thirst of dry lives. At that time, it was called escape and yet the word was only partially accurate. It was an escape, but also a reminder: a sparrow in a prison cell. When the war was over, the theatre again strove even more vigorously to find the same values.

Certainly, we still wish to capture in our arts the invisible currents that rule our lives, but our vision is now locked to the dark end of the spectrum. Today the theatre of doubting, of unease, of trouble, of alarm, seems truer than the theatre with a noble aim. Even if the theatre had in its origins rituals that made the invisible incarnate, we must not forget that apart from certain Oriental theatres these rituals have been either lost or remain in seedy decay. Bach's vision has been scrupulously preserved by the accuracy of his notations: in Fra Angelico we witness true incarnation: but for us to attempt such processes today, where do we find the source? Of course, today as at all times, we need to stage true rituals, but for rituals that could make theatre-going an experience that feeds our lives, true forms are needed. These are not at our disposal, and conferences and resolutions will not bring them our way.

As with all prophets, we must separate the man from his followers. Artaud never attained his own theatre, maybe the power of his vision is that it is the carrot in front of our nose, never to be reached. Certainly, he himself was always speak­ing of a complete way of life, of a theatre in which the activity of the actor and the activity of the spectator are driven by the same desperate need.

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.

None the less, from the arresting words ‘Theatre of Cruelty' comes a groping towards a theatre, more violent, less rational, more extreme, less verbal, more dangerous. There is a joy in violent shocks: the only trouble with violent shocks is that they wear off. What follows a shock? Here's the snag. I fire a pistol at the spectator—I did so once—and for a second I have a possibility to reach him in a different way. I must relate this possibility to a purpose, otherwise a moment later he is back where he was: inertia is the greatest force we know. I show a sheet of blue—nothing but the colour blue — blueness is a direct statement that arouses an emotion, the next second that impression fades: I hold up a brilliant flash of scarlet—a different impression is made, but unless someone can grab this moment, knowing why and how and what for—it too begins to wane. The trouble is that one can easily find oneself firing the first shots without any sense of where the battle could lead. One look at the average audience gives us an irresistible urge to assault it—to shoot first and ask questions later. This is the road to the Happening.

Theatre of Cruelty is about the senses, not just freaking out the audience. How can we overwhelm the senses? What makes theatre special as an art form?

"It is in order to attack the spectator's sensibility on all sides that we advocate a revolving spectacle which, instead of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds, without possible communication, spreads its visual and sonorous outbursts over the entire mass of the spectators." (The Theater and Cruelty)

Notice 2 things about this quote

1. The audience receive not images or representations of actions, but "outbursts".
2. Aim of activity is to attack the audience, specifically their "sensibility".

So the abandonment of a separation between stage and auditorium involved a refocusing towards attacking the spectator's sensibility.

What does he want to do?

not to entertain, nor to instruct – ***to affect***

How can we attack the senses?

"The notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought."

(The Theatre and Cruelty)

What does this mean?

Communicate with the audience on a level that is more than just words. Creating an image, sound or movement communicates a great deal more than dialogue; these can create more of an emotional and personal response. This is not clouded by the brain’s inherent need to rationalize the theatre it sees.

‘Theatre and its double’

Artaud’s essay ‘Theater and its double is primarily concerned with things he feels Theatre should be comparable too, the main focus of this is ‘The Plague’

“Above all we must agree that stage acting is a delirium (a state of temporary madness, or excitement) like the plague, and is communicable.

“…conditions must be found to give birth to a spectacle that can fascinate the mind. It is not just art.

“The plague takes dormant (still or non-functioning) images, latent (visual or apparent) disorder and suddenly carries them to the point of the most extreme gestures. Theatre also takes gestures and develops them to the limit. Just like the plague, it reforges the links between what does and does not exist in material nature.

*“For theatre can only happen the moment the inconceivable really begins, where poetry is taking place on stage, nourishes and superheats created symbols.*

“Like the plague, theatre is a crisis resolved either by death or cure. The plague is a superior disease because it is an absolute crisis after which there is nothing left except death or drastic putrification (decomposing). In the same way, theatre is a disease because it is the final balance that cannot be obtained without destruction. It urges the mind to delirium which intensifies its energy.

Brook

“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”

“Everything is possible but you must find your own way. So, if you look at my work and think, 'Ah there is an example, I will start by what he's done', you are bound to go wrong. Because the work that I do today is the result of all the work that I've done through trial and error, in changing times.”