



Theatre from the cracks in the psyche of culture

SCREAM February (updated in September) 2004
Video added in March 2010

Acting Artaud

director's notes on creating an exorcism for actors and audience
Have a look at the video above to see some of the imagery
from Acting Artaud



scene from **Acting Artaud** as presented at The Street Theatre in Canberra, April. 2004

also have a look at the Acting Artaud production article [here](#).

Acting Artaud is being prepared for its season at The Seymour Centre in Sydney in December 2004. In light of Artaud's theories, how does one go about creating an exorcism on stage? And why should one try?

We are attempting to evoke Artaud's core understanding and approach to theatre practice as constructed through the framework of a distinctive MESH (see [January SCREAM](#)). It is about releasing the powers of imagination and intuition from the constraints of socialization and physical limitation. Artaud's plays serve as the delirium provoking our rage and challenging our need for logical explanation of things which exist, which bind but don't always fall neatly into easily explained words.

THE SUBJECT and CONTENT

There is nothing in the history or human kind that has caused so much unrest, genocide, murder and sheer oppression of the human spirit than the implementation and institutionalization of belief systems, be they religious or secular. More people have died prematurely because of the direct intervention of agents of such systems than all the deaths caused by criminals with personal self interest or some notion of pure evil as the primary motivation. Whole generations of people have become co-opted into the armies of occupation of the human psyche. The seductive discipline offered as a reward bleeds the human function of the imagination and intuition in favour of acceptance and faith in the competing dogmas of the belief system.

More war and cultural suppression and looting of the human spirit and body has resulted from the practice of ideals than from even the most notorious banditry and despotic rulers. And it is also true that we are incapable of being belief neutral. All of us believe in something and practice life according to some mindset. Even if that is simply a form sloth!

Artaud is more valuable to us than Brecht if we are seeking a theatre of change. Brecht's reliance on equating theatre with historical / political agendas is at odds with Artaud's rejection of the political equation in favour of a more personal connection with underlying forces of nature: a world below the political with its deceptive agendas and manipulations.

So what does our production of **Acting Artaud** have to do with such things? Artaud proposed an art and life relationship that challenged the political will of the demigods of ideology and religion. He fell out with his friend and colleague, Breton because of the capture of the surrealist movement by the communists. In a totally different way, Artaud struggled with religion's capture over his own psyche in order to escape its irrational hold. And he knew rational action was not the means to defeat something as irrational as faith or its bi-product: guilt.

Our function is not to prop up the essentially anti-human manipulations that belief systems engender, or such potential systems resulting from this or that revolutionary group. The history of religion and nationalism bear testimony to such horrors. What we have to acknowledge goes wider than definitions of political left and right or conservative and radical. It is about entering the consciousness of the individual and wider society to effect ripples of changing impulses. The point of Artaud is to seek below the deceptions of vanities and belief systems in order to find the collective consciousness below the surface. And here, we find the world of dreams.

When I was a child I dreamt one night of eating soap. For the next few weeks I couldn't get the taste out of my mouth. I didn't like it. But I couldn't get rid of it. It certainly reinforced my own understanding of the power of suggestion. Here is an analogy for what we are doing. The taste of soap, like a virus in the system, remains after the initial infection or incursion.

The injection of such equivalents through a theatre which equates more with an exorcism than escapist entertainment, allows for the release of the unseen binds that have been planted by the incursion of cultural and inherited belief systems. Our production needs to jar the equilibrium of the cultural milieu existent outside the doors of the theatre and by so doing, reveal the skeletal mechanisms for individual and social action. What is being released is the totality of thoughts, emotions, attitudes and tensions that have become ingrained within civil and not so civil societies and individuals. Going below these are the experiences that become solidified into muscular memory, contorting the individual body and social body into brittle manifestations of human character.

Theatre can release such solid contortions through the use of ceremony, enactment, choice of imagery, selected speech and dialogue, story telling, contradictory juxtaposition of iconic objects and actions, exposing of the actor and artist, the inducing of altered states of mind within the audience. But to do this means inducing different states of mind through playing with the space and time continuum (more on this later though some discussion in the last [SCREAM](#)).

There needs to be a recognition of the yearning and ancestral connection to our creation and existence that goes back to the very forces of natural order that still exist but which are denied. Ironically, it is recognition of this primordial state that led to the institutionalizing and codifying of the belief systems and practices in the first place. What isn't recognized is the obvious fact that each system evolved from and out of the very limited features of one's own face or reflection, narcissistic impulses, and not from some divine intervention or revelation. God becomes defined by this narcissism rather than the reverse. This can be seen in the way different beliefs related very much to the experience of the communities from where they derived. The codifications and practices grew from real experiences and even from highly perceptive individuals. Examination of core areas of concern will illustrate common areas for all or most belief systems. Strange isn't then, that so much death and havoc has been caused by the codification and institutionalization of the variants!

THE SCENARIO

An Actor working with other actors is preparing to play a role in Antonin Artaud's *The Spurt Of Blood* and *To Have Done With The Judgement Of God*. In the process he becomes lost amongst the devices of the theatre and believes he has become nothing more than a puppet. This notion becomes reinforced as all around him seem to have lost their faces. They too are more like puppets with reality superimposed over their bodies. Their only reality is the stage, the lights, the FX, the text. They come to search for the reality of their existence only to find it elusive and at times terrifying. As they rehearse the play, some aspects of their hidden and elusive selves begin to emerge with more terrifying results. Is it then better to remain hidden as puppets or allow the dangers from within to escape?

The escape is enacted through Artaud's *The Spurt Of Blood* in which all that was sacred as a real human being is cast asunder.

In the end, the actor experiences a delirium (ie. Artaud's *To Have Done With The Judgement Of God* while lying on what seems like an operating table in the Theatre) in which his experience of the world and its history is injected back into his puppet-like frame. But only at the expense of his being annihilated and then re-assembled in the process.

acting artaud was presented at The Street Theatre in Canberra April 15 -24 2004

and

The Seymour Centre in Sydney, December 14 - 18



SHADOW HOUSE PITS presents

Acting Artaud

The Street Theatre
April 15 - 24 2004

A black and white close-up of a man's face, likely Jean-Paul Sartre, looking slightly to the right. The image is high contrast, with deep shadows and bright highlights.