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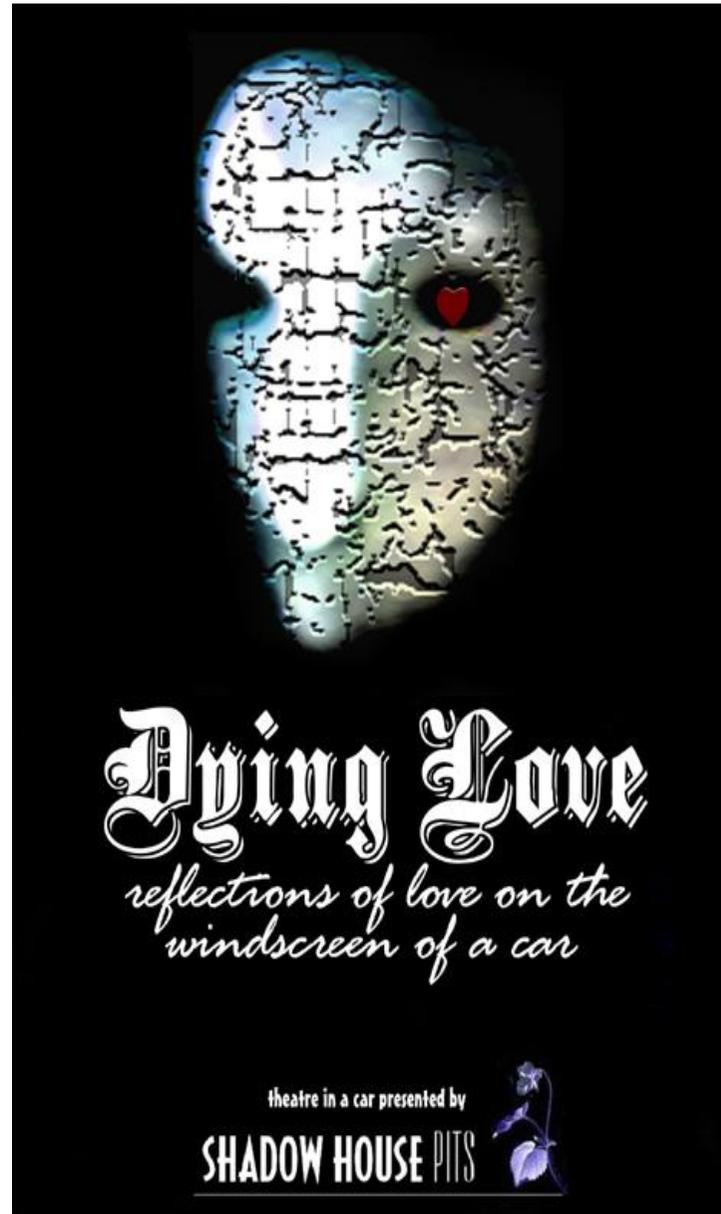
Would you get into a theatre in a car with complete strangers?

Some thoughts on Artaud's theatre of cruelty and coming face to face with the stranger as a ghost glaring directly into your eyes

So what's this "Dying Love"?

Ghosts, history, beliefs,
death!

Performing a theatre in a car provides opportunities for creating a particularly unique relationship; especially as the car has the outside world blotted out. And the eyes turn coldly from the actors on to the audience of three people sitting in an uncomfortable eroticism with ghosts from their own past. The actors are conduits for ghostly half formed memories or associations from the audience. Their love making and the ultimate tragedy create a very different impact when in this proximity.



Dying Love reflects the dilemmas of love and illusion. The chance for it to grow and come to realize it's own potential is cut short by tragic intervention of archaic belief.

The words and the stories told by the character of the young man open up questions of reality and belief. After a most intense twelve minutes, perhaps the audience will be moved to question their own basis for viewing their own lives in relation to the world around them. And perhaps it's only theatre, but would you really get into an enclosed vehicle with two ghosts?

Try it. Theatre In A Car:

Dying Love: Reflections of Love on the Windscreen Of A Car

Dying Love is the first in the ["To Believe Is To Kill"](#) series to be created over the coming two years by Joe Woodward and companions from Shadow House PITS. Last year we began developing [Myths and](#)

[Metaphors](#) workshops. Though still incomplete, as artists and people interested in exploring the invisible binds and ties that make culture, society and belief systems we are self consciously creating work that hopes to seep truths through our very self-consciousness and vanity and hopefully produce small ripples of sanity in our own psyche. Hopefully by working even as less than a molecule in the art world, let alone the universe, there can be some infection to counter the neurosis of belief systems and human kind's need for tunnel visioned certainty in a drab though vengeful universe.

The theatre is always metaphor. In Artaud's words, life's "double". It is one place where it is necessary to be aware of this deception when creating any work. In [Plato's terms](#) we only see reflections of life and can never fully see its true form, though we search for it through life, art, science and philosophy. So as an artist or creator of any kind, we need to be aware that everything we perceive is probably not as it seems. We can only approximate and be aware that our perception is limited and needs constant provocation to re-examine and review our understanding. The more dogmatic we are, the more likely we are to blunder.

[Antonin Artaud](#) spoke a lot about shocks and the necessity to jolt audiences out of complacency. Romantic Artaudians amongst teachers and idealistic students, like fundamentalist Christians and Muslims, still display the naive acceptance of flawed theatrical dogma and thinking whereby the theatre is supposed to try ever increasing layers of violence or disgusting levels of imagery in order to achieve some kind of change in the perception of those immediately infected with the particular creation. In this kind of paradigm, schlock like the "[Saw](#)" film series and [Tarentino's "Hostel"](#) films (Tarentino's name was associated with them) would qualify as Artaud influenced works. There was cruelty. There were shocks. But like in [Nero's circuses](#), they were to simply satisfy the blood lust of human swine.

Artaud had little interest in historical materialism or Brecht's epic theatre ideas. He was far more interested in the guilt and individual psyche of each spectator in a theatre event. So the traditional wisdom of Artaud's legacy is that the theatre of cruelty has little relevance in a political theatre.

This point should be respected, especially as so much political theatre invokes unproven and unsubstantiated beliefs about political and social organization. It is often used to blindly prop up the agenda of the political

ideology it serves. The attack on all dogmas and beliefs through surrealism and nightmarish absurdity is, however, a critical aspect of Artaud's invocation.

Artaud's anger at so much smugness that was in society and, particularly American influenced society, suggested his theatre might be like a pin prick that deflates the monolith and releases human energy long restrained by an over reliance on logic and civil restraint used as a tool of establishment agendas. In this sense, Artaud's thinking was not opposed to theatre as a change agent in opposition to dominant imperialism in cultural or political terms. It did however, challenge any concept or form whereby theatre could advocate one dominant over-riding political ideal over another. In Artaud's world, human beings were more base than that.

A synthesis of seemingly opposite theatre approaches from Antonin Artaud and [Bertolt Brecht](#) can be pivotal in creating theatre that goes right to the psyche of the audience while also challenging the views of culture and politics that may be prevalent. The best example I know was [Peter Brook](#)'s production of Marat Sade by Peter Weiss. (See samples [here](#) on You Tube). The performance of Ian Richardson as Marat should be studied by all male aspiring actors because of his stillness, focus and intensity.

Brook has been attacked by theatre fundamentalists for opening it up from its nineteenth century presentation formats. The fact he gave credence to Artaud, [Charles Marowitz](#), Brecht, [Jerzi Grotowski](#) and other fellow travellers meant he was at odds with establishments that fed the demands of the "deadly audiences" of stale productions that tried to outdo each other as imitations of some past mythical theatre necessity.

Brook is not about changing audiences. He suggested that "madness lies" in such attempts. Yet the work is not caged in a vacuum. All of it resounds with the nuances of the time. In this sense it is filled with the dynamics of [Brecht's and Piscator's "Epic" theatre](#). It is largely freed from old conventions while also adapted for historical relevance. The Marat Sade was a good example of this.

To create such a theatre requires more than trained actors and theatre practitioners. It needs an attitude of mind that can accept challenge and an openness to provocation and different viewpoints. From whatever tradition of cultural development one comes from; whether it be Christian, Muslim, Humanist/Atheist, Buddhist, Aboriginal or whatever, the artist and theatre practitioner must be able to accept contradictions, challenges and be prepared to turn both inwards and outwards.

The [Teachings of Traleg Rinpoche](#) concerning the truism of "belief" in life and its ultimate necessity especially in relation to delusion are an example of where the artist or seeker of truth needs at times to put aside one's belief system in order to accept the other person's system in order to progress one's knowledge and happiness. Rather than use MY belief to ATTACK your belief, I can put mine aside for a while at least in order to go beyond. In doing so, I might come to understand a new level of existence from which I can both look in and look out again.

If we move away from consideration of theatre practitioners and theorists, we might do worse than to study the work of [Joseph Campbell](#). Campbell illustrates the concept of god as being metaphor. Belief is shaped by metaphor. Unfortunately, it is more often taken or accepted as fact; as historical fact. And here we have a problem. Whether we have the Rainbow Serpent or a man becoming god or a burning bush speaking to a prophet, the elements of the story contain truths that are relevant for any age. The factual understanding is dependent upon the world view or belief system tied to a specific time and place. So a flood can be sent by god to wipe out the world. Even if the world consists only of a fairly narrow area of geography. The Angel Of Death sent to [slaughter first born children](#) must be an angel serving god's will and not a terrorist fulfilling the bloody agenda of some faction or other. If god needed to prove to the world that he was more powerful than the Egyptians, then this seemed a logical way of doing so!

Belief was enforced through violence and killing if we take the story as fact. And the problem is that many still do accept such stories and advice as historical fact. When metaphor becomes accepted as fact, then it makes sense to kill for the belief. With god on our side, it makes perfect sense. Our theatre today provides a vehicle for challenging such thought and practice. And while each theatre practitioner might challenge the belief of others, each person must spend time finding the time to challenge one's own embedded beliefs; many of which are accepted without even acknowledging their very existence.

Beliefs give rise to world views, cultural practices, political systems, codes of behaviour and the means of enforcement. A political theatre which only considers the systems and codes while neglecting the more deeply held beliefs and world views will be shallow and probably rank in the area of transparent "propaganda". This is where the theatre of Brecht may well benefit from a little of Artaud et al.

And still we have people teaching and accepting that theatre is simply entertainment providing an escape from the outside world and so can be judged solely by the number of bums on seats. From funding bodies to the hordes

of invitees to opening nights, we hear this mantra of "escape". The key theatrical practitioners of the last hundred years, and longer if we go back to the Greeks, saw theatre as more than escapism and vulgar entertainment. Theatre's relationship with culture and society is far more than a side-show freak show of performing animals doing tricks for amusement. Yet this is how many of our practitioners view it. It is surprising to know how many people ostensibly earning a living from involvement in theatre practice and who do not have the slightest interest or understanding of higher purpose or even of the world in which they operate.

So for many people the aspirations of Shadow House PITS theatre and other like-minded theatre must be like bedding down with a stranger. But if that is a bit much, then join us for Theatre In A Car where you jump into a car with strangers taking you on an intense ride though love and belief in *Dying Love: reflections of love on the windscreen of a car*.

[National Multicultural Festival Fringe \(check out the program here\)](#)

6 - 14 Feb 2009