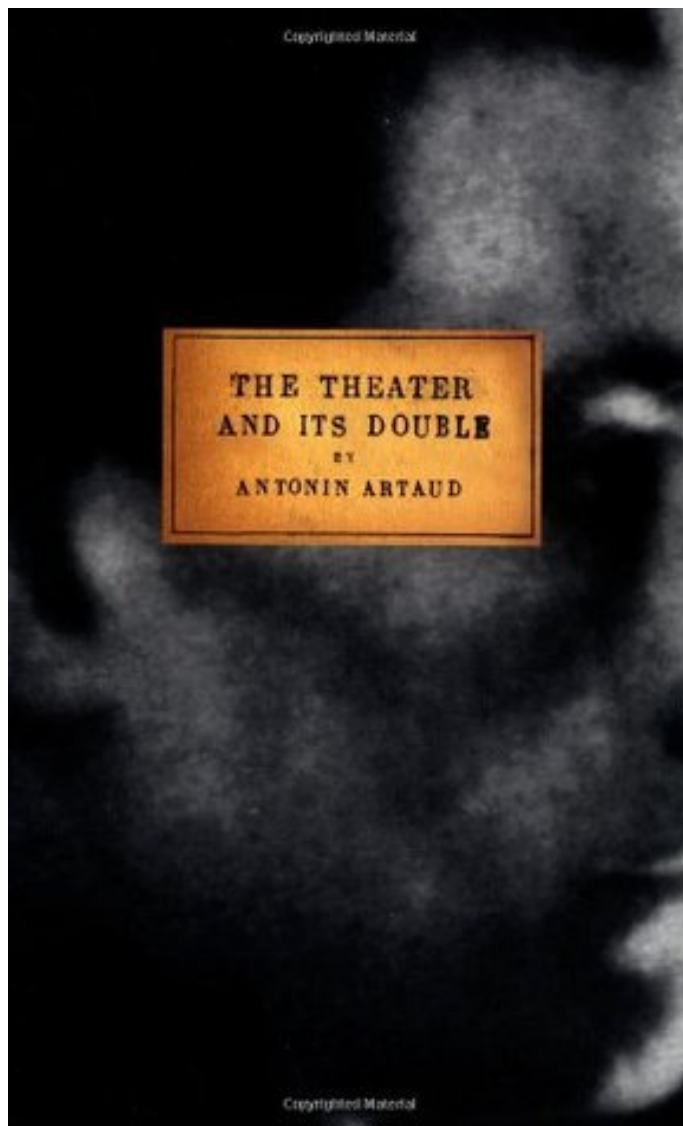

Antonin Artaud

The Theater and Its Double



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Author: Antonin Artaud

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Description

A collection of manifestos originally published in 1938, *The Theater and Its Double* is the fullest statement of the ideas of Antonin Artaud. "We cannot go on prostituting the idea of the theater, the only value of which is in its excruciating, magical relation to reality and danger," he wrote. He fought vigorously against an encroaching conventionalism he found anathema to the very concept of theater. He sought to use theater to transcend writing, "to break through the language in order to touch life."

Insightful reviews

Phillip: Newer Review: Apparently the first time I read this I rather enjoyed it, but this time I was really put off by the racism, especially in essays like "The Balinese Theatre." But I also disliked this essay because I simply have no idea what he's talking about. I mean, I have a sense of how Balinese performance works and what it generally looks like, but Artaud's explanation of it is so bizarre and dependent on generalizations about a shared communal response that his explanation simply doesn't make sense to me.

I think I have some sense of what his overall goal is--a theatre of expression almost without words, where other non-linguistic semiotic codes do the work of meaning making, but I simply don't see how that kind of theatre is meant to consider deep metaphysical issues as he says it does/will/should (though maybe I misunderstand what Artaud means by 'metaphysical,' which could significantly change my reading of his theory).

The other thing I don't fully understand with Artaud is why. I mean, Brecht lays out fairly clearly why he wants the Epic/Dialectic Theatre, but I don't really see much justification for Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Yes, he points out that there is some kind of problem with contemporary theatre (of the 1930s), which I think was a fairly well accepted idea, but apart from a general primitivist ethic in Modernism I don't see anyplace where he explains why the Theatre of Cruelty is THE way to redeem theatre.

Original Review: I was initially put off by several aspects of Artaud's theory--his notable racism (he has overly romantic of non-Western cultures), the vagueness of his terms (especially "life," just as in Nietzsche), and his general inability to clearly articulate what exactly he wants. By the end of the book, I still feel that these are problems, but they bother me much less than after the first two or three essays. The racism is very much a problem of its time, and for the 1930s a noble-savage mindset was somewhat tolerant. The vagueness never really goes away, but as he repeatedly tries to explain and develop his core idea, this vagueness becomes less and less problematic.

I think that Artaud's idea is interesting, and I can certainly see his influence in certain modern productions (notably a RSC production of *Julius Caesar*, which was very spectacle heavy). However, I suspect that the image of Western theatre he sets up may be a strawman--the idea that no one ever 'does' anything, only talks, doesn't seem to ring true. But I suppose I don't know for certain what the theatre culture of the 1920s and 30s was like, beyond Laurence Olivier films.

Patrick Gaughan: Following a lengthy discursive diatribe on plagues, Artaud gets to his metaphor: theater is like a plague. Both hit you in the lungs and mind. They each grab and twist, taking over, and whereas the plague will kill you, theater, if done to Artaud's specifications, captures the breath and liberates the mind. Liberate it from what? Who knows.

Artaud thinks of theater as a venue to play out "the perverse possibilities of the mind." To those who think that's dark and morbid, Artaud says that's life's fault, not theater's. If it's buried deep in his psyche, it's probably deep in your psyche too, so let's not lie to each other here. Let's make the stage a location where the "difficult" and "impossible" become "normal." If Artaud can stage extreme behavior, it will impel his audience "to see themselves as they are." It will cause "the mask to fall." It will "reveal the lie." What exactly is that lie, that mask? Nevermind. But once we're rid of them, we can all move forward and live out the remainder of our days with a "heroic attitude."

Chapter 2 - metaphysics and the mise en scène

Artaud uses a painting by Lucas van den Leyden, "The Daughters of Lot," to demonstrate his theories of metaphysics and mise en scène in art. He says, "it affects the mind with an almost thunderous visual harmony." He says the painting contains the following elements, and capitalizes them: Becoming (a transformation of some kind), Fatality (death, it's coming for all of us, so let's acknowledge it), Chaos (in the painting, fireballs shoot down from heaven), Marvelous (the non-representational), Equilibrium (what I interpret as balance in aesthetic composition), & Impotence of Speech (talk is cheap).

These words become the foundation for his Theatre of Cruelty. He advocates for a poetry of space, "a poetry of the senses," to leave the "poetry of language" for the page. He questions the notion that the script should be the number one priority of a stage production. Why? Literature is for an audience of one. The writer isn't present, so all a writer has are words. Conversely, theater is present, and when one is in the same room as the audience, what you control above all else is atmosphere, mise en scène. How to do that? Target multiple sensory registers and shoot. If you're going to use words at all, weird them, make them loud, soft, chant them, fragment them. Do anything but use words in actors' mouths to achieve some "modern humanistic and psychological meaning," some blah blah realistic domestic drama, a prestige play that tries to represent real life. Where is the danger in that? Artaud does not want his audience to quaintly empathize with a character, to see themselves. He wants to yank out their insides and hold the bleeding organs in front of their eyes.

Chapter 6 - No More Masterpieces

So why this "asphyxiating atmosphere" of the modern world? This "respect for art" that already happened, this allegiance, bowing down before the so-called classics? They're only masterpieces because an institution called them so. Artaud says that if "the public" doesn't respond to a new production of Oedipus Rex, it's the fault of Rex and those deciding to stage it. It's no longer "of our time." I've had this argument with many regarding restaging of classics, especially Shakespeare. If not for money, name recognition, asses in the seats, they why? Institutions have fed actors and directors these classics, and now that they have the means, they want to play Hamlet, direct Hamlet, etc, to regurgitate classics as a way of fulfilling childhood fantasy. Artaud advocates for death to "this closed, egoistic, and personal art." This seriousness, this cloying need for validation and prestige on loop, turns us into "snobs, rushing en masse to hear such and such singer, to see such and such an admirable performance." But while Artaud wants to rid the theater of this seriousness, while he wants to provide a "valid spectacle" for the average theater-goer, his work is not intended for "grad students" or

“esthetes,” he knows he can’t win them over. All this sounds like a theater that relaxes, considers the audience over the need for prestige of those performing it, but Artaud says The Theater of Cruelty’s goal is to change the minds of its audience by force, Sontag calls it a theatrical version of shock therapy. For all his intent, what Artaud mounts on the stage is seemingly nothing more than a violent morality play, which seems like a sidestep, not the leap forward he envisions. I admire his purity of vision, the boiling passion, but I’m longing for a mode of practical application. Artaud sets out the possibilities of theater, a set of impossible standards. Why is the concept of the Theater of Cruelty ultimately a failure?

Thomas: Het theater in het Westen van deze tijd (jaren dertig van de vorige eeuw) legt te veel de nadruk op het geschreven woord (en dit om meestal thema's van psychologische aard te behandelen), waarbij de regisseur van het toneelstuk onderdanig is aan de tekst van de auteur. Het theater moet echter een Gesamtkunstwerk (màr géén spektakeltheater; zie hieronder) zijn; een aanval van op alle vlakken en dit op alle zintuigen van de toeschouwers met inbegrip van het onderbewuste en de ziel. De toneelacteur zijn acteerspel, zijn elke beweging, zijn elk al dan niet geuit woord, moet worden gedichteerd door zijn of Dé Ziel ('le double' zoals Artaud het bedoelde in zijn oorspronkelijk in het Frans geschreven "Le théâtre et son double", in 1938 voor de eerste maal verschenen bij Gallimard.)! Men moet hiervoor gebruik maken van de Oude Mythologieën, de gebruiken en ideeën van de Azteken en meerbepaald Montezuma de illustere koning, en nog meerbepaald moet men de mosterd halen bij het Balinese Theater, dat vooral geaccentueerd wordt niet zozeer door de taal van het woord, màr door de taal van de beweging, de klank, de muziek en het licht... Zo ook moet ons toneel zijn, zegt de in zijn leven vaak door psychische problemen en daardoor in de instellingen van zijn tijd verblijvende toneelschrijver, regisseur, poëet, acteur, tekenaar en essayist Antonin Artaud het in dit werk. Dat werk werd door mij maandenlang (met lange tussenpozen waarin het op mij lag te wachten op de koffietafel) met mondjesmaat opgenomen. De tekst is complex en moet dat voor anderstaligen in het Frans bijna onmogelijk te lezen maken. In het begin ontcijferde ik paragraaf na paragraaf, bijna echt werd door mij deze tekst waargenomen als voortgekomen uit de koker van een totaal geschifte mens, maar wat dus in realiteit een genie was. Na iet of wat vorderen wordt het boek veel en veel toegankelijker en vlotter leesbaar. Het is een tekst met een puur poëtische inslag. Het werd in zijn tijd zelf door verschillende tijdschriften geweigerd. Maar we mogen blij zijn, om een cliché te gebruiken, dat de in het algemeen gezien interessante Uitgeverij Ijzer (me voorheen volkomen onbekend) uit Utrecht, dit werk, in een let op, vertaling van de ook wel spiritueel ingestelde dichter en nog niet zo lang geleden overleden man Simon Vinkenoog, op de markt heeft gebracht.

Een van de vele treffende zinnen uit het boek is de volgende: "Een toneelacteur is een atleet van het hart."

Dat lees ik dan, die op zich niet zo veel met het theater van doen heeft maar eerder plastisch aangelegd is bv., als volgt: "De kunstenaar is een atleet van het hart." Ik denk dus dat het boek niet alleen verplichte lectuur is voor de acteerstudenten van het gerenommeerde instituut Herman Teirlinck, maar voor alle creatief ingestelde mensen. Niet verplicht, maar wel een aanrader. Ook gewoon als breinbrekertje te bekijken om de hersenen eens te laten kraken en fris te houden.

P.S.: Wie het boek of andere werken van de Uitgeverij Ijzer niet meteen in de boekhandel

vinden kan, wat ik me voorstellen kan (Al vond ik zelf het werk toevallig op een winterse dag in de Standaard Boekhandel van De Panne, wat toch niet dé gespecialiseerde boekenwinkel is, maar bon.), en toch geïnteresseerd is, kan een e-mail sturen naar: uitgeverij.ijzer@hetnet.nl - en zo rechtstreeks bij de Ijzermannen de boeken bestellen.
Thomas B.

Op de blog van Uitgeverij Ijzer wordt het zo gesteld:

.Het theater van de wreedheid is een verzameling lezingen, opstellen, manifesten en brieven, ontstaan vanaf 1931 en verscheen in 1938 onder de titel *Le théâtre et son double*. Hierin ontwerpt de regisseur, toneelspeler, toneeltheoreticus, dichter en tekenaar Artaud een provocerend, revolutionair theaterconcept; hij wijst het westerse, psychologiserende taaltheater af en verlangt, onder de indruk van het Oost-Aziatische toneel, een hele revisie van de westerse voorstelling over het leven en de zin ervan. Het theater krijgt daarbij een wezenlijke, magisch-religieuze rol toebedeeld: het moet de mythe van de moderne mens en het moderne leven, die in de ziel van het individu en het collectief latent aanwezig zijn, in een extreme, aangrijpende vorm op toneel brengen. In de plaats van de literaire taal komt de taal van beeld en beweging, die zich verbinden tot een nieuwe theatertaal die de toeschouwer verontrust en tot een identificatie met het toneelgebeuren dwingt.

Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) wordt beschouwd als de belangrijkste (theoretische) voorloper van veel moderne stromingen in toneel, schrijven, film en muziek die uit de huidige praktijk nauwelijks meer weg te denken zijn. Het door hem gepropageerde 'theater van de wreedheid' ligt op veler lippen, hoewel het herhaaldelijk verkeerd werd begrepen en voorgesteld als een soort spektakeltheater.

Daarnaast gaat er van Artauds fascinerende persoonlijkheid zo'n uitstraling uit dat de belangstelling voor deze gekwelde geest en zijn werk blijft groeien.

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Uit het Frans vertaald door Simon Vinkenoog

Met een inleiding van Éveline Grossman

Ryan: this e-book will be read, heavily read, re-read, and brought heavily through someone who ever takes theatre heavily as an artform, a method of communication, a fashion of life, or the single factor we now have ever performed along with procreating, defecating, and dying.it's written by way of a complete lunatic who is techniques and precision can't be brushed aside due to his insanity. to the contrary, his specific psychological disturbances so sharpen his thoughts, that, on the very least, they wish be considered, if now not pored over with nice care.as with lots of our madmen, artaud was once directionally crazy, and his path took him in the course of the center of theatre.the beauty of this book, for a person operating in theatre, is that it promises the reply to the question: what could i feel approximately what i am doing the following if i have been so batshit loopy that i may take into consideration not anything else?and, at a few level, in case you have no resolution for that question, you may have relatively fucked up to've ended up the place you are, my friend.

Michael David: it really is funny, simply because this was once the final ebook i stopped prior to achieving Manila. I had firstly inspiration that it was once going to be my final non-medical booklet learn prior to i began the review, yet I complemented analyzing this with interpreting a booklet on how you can increase one's notion tactics and decision-making skills. whereas the latter nonetheless is still slightly similar with medicine, nice decision-making is necessary in examinations, so i assumed that it used to be stable to open up my evaluate with that. whilst i found this ebook on a web bidding, I had no proposal who Antonin Artaud was once or what the publication was once all about. I easily proposal that the cover, other than the title, was once attractive. simply because I often complement those urges with research, however, i found that The Theatre and its Double used to be one in all Le Monde's maximum Books of the 20 th Century; and with that, I took the plunge. I would not name the publication a masterpiece of essay-writing: i do not even trust so much of its severe compliment in drama theory: i feel Artaud's writing is bombastic, and every now and then excessive. If i did not investigate the background at the back of his life, i would not have favored it. His phrases and expressions burn with violence and emotion, principles that for the main half I frequently go together with pedestrian literature. as well as that, i myself disagree along with his rules concerning the superiority of Balinese theatre over Occidental theatre. whereas i'm no dramaturge or playwright, i actually do imagine that Shakespeare's performs are necessary and important, and that Western theatre has provided loads of dynamic and clever performs over the process its existence. His ideas, however, are of significant merit: his essay, not more Masterpieces, was once to me, brilliant. it might also be the book's fee of admission. In one other essay, he argues play just isn't anything that's in basic terms according to a written text, because, insofar as i do know and comprehend from his colourful words, it truly is a wholly varied medium. The actions, emotions, or even enunciations make theatre various from its extra literary counterparts: there's no mounted text. phrases are destroyed whenever they're spoken, and he argues that not anything will be repeated in theatre. I in truth imagine that he made a few reliable points; but, i don't wholeheartedly adhere to his manifestos and thinking. The ebook however created a brand new interpretation of drama theory, and synthesized dynamic playwrights who checked out theatre in a different way - and that's why i love it, I guess.

Bookaholic: Într-o cultur? (occidental?) în care domina tirania cuvîntului în teatru, Antonin Artaud – poet, dramaturg, dar ?i actor – a adus o perspectiv? atît de revolu?ionar?, încît ?i în prezent se mai vorbe?te despre eseul Teatrul ?i dublul s?u, publicat în 1938, l. a. Gallimard, expresia revoltei sale fa?? de modul în care teatrul ajunsese s? fie abordat în Occident, într-o dependen?? tiranic? fa?? de limbajul verbal. Fa?? de acest limbaj verbal, neadecvat teatrului, Artaud propune o reîntoarcere violent? l. a. adev?ratul limbaj, alc?tuit din gesturi, atitudini, mimic?, pantomimic?, strig?te, onomatopee etc. Acest limbaj va duce l. a. descoperirea dublului teatrului – „metafizica, ciurma, rezervorul de energii pe care-l constituie Miturile” (iat? explica?ia pentru alegerea titlului, m?rturisit? într-o scrisoare c?tre Jean Paulhan, în ianuarie 1936). (cronic?: <http://bookaholic.ro/teatrul-si-reali...>)

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