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# Influential Practitioners Pack

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## Artaud's style of theatre: Surrealism

### WHAT IS SURREALISM?

This is a movement in literature, theatre and film which advocated that our minds should be freed and liberated, so that we free and liberate our self and society. Surrealists enjoy using imagination and tapping into audience's 'unconscious minds.'

Artaud was inspired by surrealism and wanted to use theatre to challenge and disturb his audiences, to unlock our everyday thoughts and make the surreal world of dreams a reality.

### CAN I CARRY OUT ANY FURTHER RESEARCH INTO SURREALISM?

Artaud was influenced and enjoyed watching the Marx brothers. These brothers were a comedy act, often referred to as surreal, because they go completely against logic. You could research into these people and try to understand what it was Artaud liked about them.

You could also carry some research into Andre Breton, a famous surrealist. He eventually rejected Artaud from the surrealist movement, because Artaud refused to join the Communist Party. However, Artaud still seemed to be influenced by surrealist ideas.

## Artaud's key principles: Theatre of Cruelty

Artaud is famous for putting forward the idea of Theatre of Cruelty. He was dissatisfied with the theatre of his day and so developed the Theatre of Cruelty. It is important to remember that cruelty referred to the physical impact of his work, it does not mean bloodshed. He did want theatre to shock and show society at its ugliness, he aimed to shatter any false realities people had of the world. In this sense, he had a very pessimistic view of life, however, he treated theatre as a form of 'social therapy.'

He wanted to create theatre which would show the fiercest experiences of life and he often did this through physical theatre, he wanted to create physical intensity, and achieve a type of purging-he believed that in the physicality of theatre, pain could be released.

His key research was into the relationship between the stage and the audience-he wanted to understand how actor and spectator could both experience harrowing sensations. He sought a theatre which would be like 'an open door leading the audience to where they never would have consented to go.' He wanted theatre to be fierce within its action and so would bring about personal metamorphosis or change.

Artaud liked placing audiences in the centre of the theatre, with seats which would turn, so that they could follow the action all around them. He wanted his spectators to be overwhelmed. He enjoyed using masks within his theatre, or even puppets (especially those greater than life size) as substitutes for people. Clowns and comedy were also often used within his theatre. If he could disorientate an audience, it would help them to confront themselves, and move away from their everyday lives.

Artaud liked engulfing his audiences with a massive accumulation of effects, so that their response would be sensual and involuntary rather than detached and intellectual. Sound was a vital element in his design, and loud speakers were often placed at the four corners of the auditorium, noises often bombarding the audience. He also used abrupt lighting to create the same effect.

### USEFUL DETAILS

Name: Antonin Artaud  
Born: 4<sup>th</sup> September 1896  
Place of birth: Marsailles

# Influential Practitioners

Artaud was strongly influenced by theatre from the East, in particular Balinese theatre. This type of theatre tended to be extremely stylised and physical, often using dance. It also attempted to shatter any 'false realities' of life within its messages.

Artaud was not a political thinker. He wanted to bring change about for individuals, rather than for a collective body or movement.

Many people think that Artaud was trying to rebel against insincerity in theatre and literature, hence why he liked to portray life in such an ugly, grotesque way.

Artaud viewed imagination as reality. He considered dreams to be as real as the world around us. This influenced much of his work and explains why he is often associated with surrealism.

Artaud viewed suffering as something all humans should experience. Therefore, his theatre often projected negative images, rather than positive ones.

Artaud felt that the theatre around him was not a 'true' theatre, it was more concerned with creating artistic enjoyment than truth.

## Artaud's Beliefs and Influences

He was strongly influenced by Van Gogh's paintings and wanted theatre to contain the same type of violence and frenzy these pictures demonstrated.

Artaud wanted to move away from nineteenth century theatre which so often started with a problem and solved it by the end. Within his plays, he did not want to necessarily resolve conflicts, because he felt that this was not a true depiction of life.

He believed that audiences should be both impressed and terrified—he wanted his audiences to lose control of their reason, so that they could understand a new set of truths.

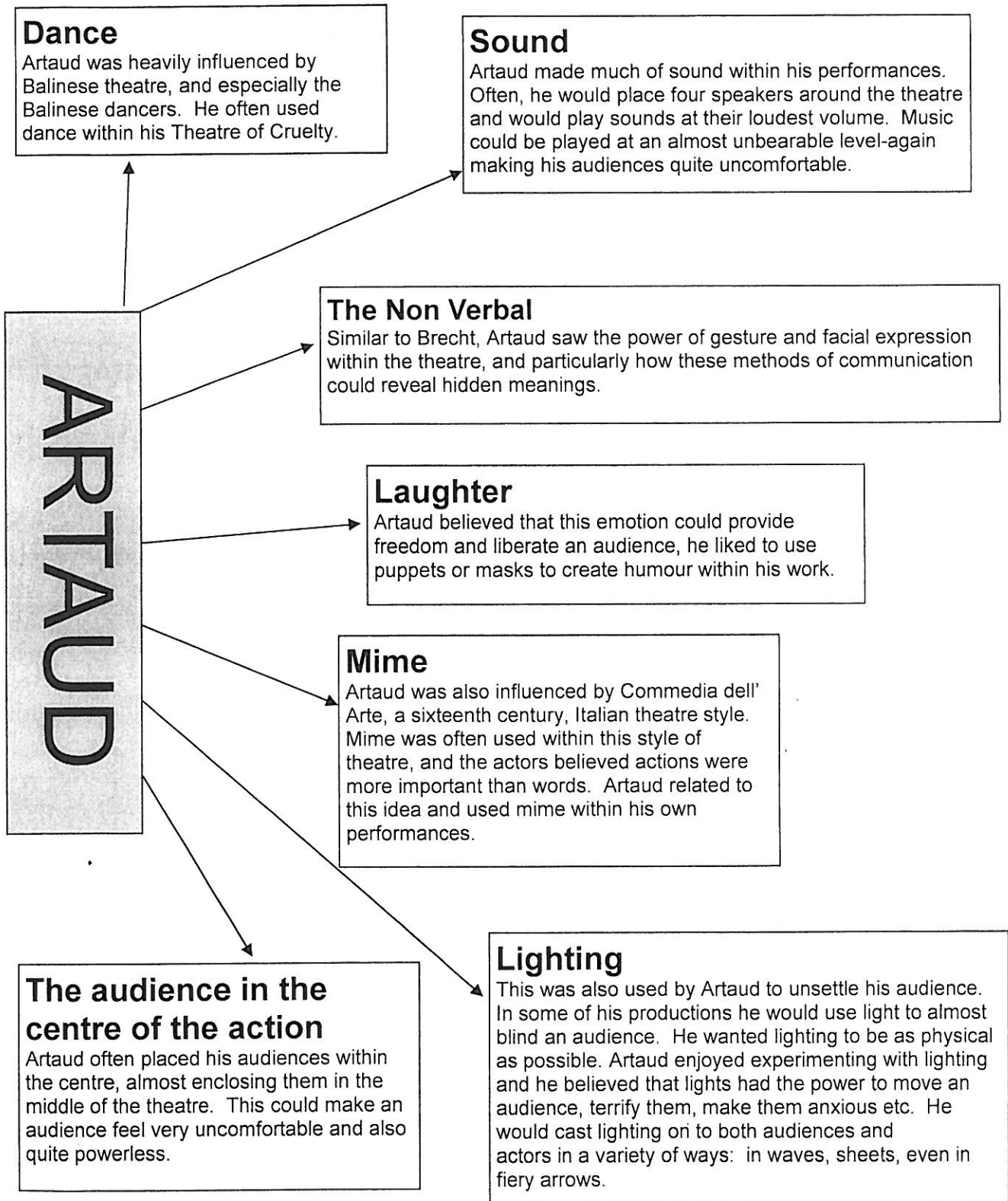
Artaud viewed theatre as something spiritual. He wanted his plays to work upon people's souls and mind, and free their subconscious.

Artaud wanted to develop a close relationship between actors and audience and so often used theatre in the round to do this.

Artaud wanted to use theatre to lead audiences back into the world of dreams and the imagination—places where Artaud thought humans could 'find themselves.'

Artaud admired Eastern theatre because it was heavily influenced by the physical, rather than the verbal.

## Typical Conventions Used By Artaud



## Artaud's work with actors

### THEIR LANGUAGE

Artaud wanted to make his language express things that language did not usually express. Artaud encouraged his actors to manipulate words from muscles within their chests and throats. He wanted to use words to help produce physical shock. He felt that words had the power to shatter. He also liked using language as a form of incantation, and would sometimes ask actors to almost sing words-so that his theatre became more spiritual.

### WORKING WITH MASKS AND PUPPETS

Artaud wanted actors to be able to work alongside masks and puppets on stage, and often the puppets could be extremely tall, dwarfing all the humans on stage. This was Artaud's attempt at creating a stylised, ritualised piece of drama.

### BREATHING

Artaud often referred to actors as being similar to athletes, in the sense that the performers should learn breathing techniques and learn how to control their breath. This influence came from Eastern theatre, where many actors would chant lines, and these long chants would require breathing exercises.

### BODILY LANGUAGE

Artaud's actors were required to use, what he called, 'bodily language' when on stage. This language was not made up of words, but instead signs. Similar to Brecht, Artaud used gestures, movement and facial expressions within his drama so actors had to be good at using this non-verbal language.



## A COMPARISON OF BRECHT AND ARTAUD

	Brecht	Artaud
Their style of theatre	Brecht was a famous opponent of naturalism-he wanted to distance the audience from his theatre, so that they could adopt a critical viewpoint of the drama.	Artaud wanted to both terrify and impress his audience. His theatre could be quite intimate, using theatre in the round, but it could be quite disturbing, with loud sounds, frenzy etc.
The relationship between actor and audience	Brecht wanted to avoid his audience empathising with the characters on stage. He often kept the house lights on throughout a performance, to distance the spectators away from the action.	Artaud wanted to almost 'attack' the audience, so that they would have to confront their own actions and selves. However, he tried to keep a close relationship between actor and audience to do this.
Messages conveyed	Brecht did not want a passive audience. He wanted his audience to adopt critical viewpoints about what they saw on the stage. He held strongly Marxist values.	Artaud worked hard to use grotesque and ugliness to confront an audience. He was not necessarily a political thinker, but wanted to bring about individual change.
Portrayal of reality	Using the A Effect, Brecht wanted his audience to review the reality in front of them, to adopt an attitude of inquiry. He would use placards and narrators to demonstrate the social message was more important than the characters.	Artaud wanted to shatter any 'false realities' people had of life, by portraying a very physical theatre. He tried to distance the audience from their everyday lives and use symbols to show meaning.
Purpose of drama	Brecht viewed theatre as a force for change. He wanted his audiences to watch plays and think about the subject matter. He also wanted theatre to politically educate the masses.	Artaud saw drama as a form of social therapy. He felt that theatre could induce a type of moral purity and could bring about change.
Working with actors	Brecht strongly encouraged his actors to maintain a distance between themselves and their characters. Brecht was not as interested in humans as individuals, he was more interested in humans as a society.	For Artaud, the actor, the audience and the director made a performance-they would have to all work together to produce a powerful piece of drama.