

Artaud Research - Summarised Quotes

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Use different coloured highlighters to categorise the 'Pearls of Wisdom' below into: **Personal Context; Cultural Context; Theoretical Context; Aspects/Conventions of Theory**

From Murray R, 2017, Interview Transcript, Accessed at

<http://essentialdrama.com/2017/01/24/artauds-kaka-action-text-and-sound-become-one/>)

- “He is quite well known for his glossolalia, which are these made up words...One word that really interested Artaud is ‘kaka’ which is a childish word for ‘poo’ in French. The syllable ‘ka’ comes up quite a lot in his glossolalia. It is also related to the Ancient Egyptian figure of the Kha which is sometimes ‘ka’ but that is the Ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for the Kha which is ‘the double’. So when he keeps using this word ‘kaka’ or ‘ka’ he is referring to this bodily process of [defecating], which he loves talking about and comes up again and again in his later texts, but he is also referring to this Ancient Egyptian idea of ‘the double’ which informed his theatre writings – The Theatre and the Double – “if theatre doubles life, life doubles true theatre.” Everything has this double for him. The ‘ka’ sound is a really interesting instance of his use of language which is both meaningful and symbolic. Alan Weiss writes about this, he takes it to quite a ridiculous extent, but he says that when you say the word ‘ka’, the letter K... you’re putting pressure on your diaphragm which also facilitates your digestive system.”
- “He has these returning themes of knives, holes, banging nails which crop up as images drawn in his notebooks but also as words, that when read out loud sound the same and rhyme: trou, coup, clou.”
- “In the early texts he is grappling with the problem of how to express himself in words which aren’t adequate.”
- “The theatre was one of the things that caused him to fall out with the Surrealists. He got involved with the Surrealists in 1924. André Breton was the mastermind behind Surrealism; he was quite an authoritative figure; he was always kicking people out of the movement. Breton started getting much more interested in Communism and Marxism. Artaud was not into politics at all... He didn’t think Surrealism should be politicised in terms of aligning itself with political movements or ideas.”
- “There is an interview with Breton where he talks, in retrospect, about Artaud where he talks about language “glistening”, but he says with Artaud it was glistening like a weapon. Breton contrasts Artaud’s vision to Aragon’s, who was a Surrealist poet, who wrote about a “wave of dreams”, whereas Artaud was talking about something much more violent.”
- “[Artaud’s definition of cruelty is that] Life is a threshold between reality and the dark forces behind it. The real essence of life is the energy that exists at this threshold.”
- “In French there are two words: there is ‘jouer’ which is act, what you would normally use to say ‘act a role’; then there is another one, which is ‘agir’ – it means a kind of

physical act, an act in its very basic sense. He always uses the word 'agir' rather than 'jouer'. He talks about cruelty as something that acts (agir) not in the sense that it performs a role (jouer) but that it actually physically acts."

From Artaud, A, 1958, trans. Corti, V, *The Theatre and Its Double* Paris: Association Calder

- "The theatre is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, can never be made in the same way twice."
- "Theatre of Cruelty means a theatre difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And, on the level of performance, it is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other's bodies, carving up our personal anatomies, or, like Assyrian emperors, sending parcels of human ears, noses, or neatly detached nostrils through the mail, but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all."
- "Artaud... likens the theatre to a plague, to the great plagues of history... causing men and women to behave in a purely irrational manner."
- "...we have come to credit art with nothing more than a pleasurable relaxing value... But the mental weakness of the West, where man has especially confused art and aesthetics, is to believe one can have painting used only as painting... as if one wanted to cut art off from everything..." (p.51)
- "In Western Theatre [in the early 20th Century, particularly in France], words are solely used to express psychological conflicts." (P.52)
- "...there is no need to stoop as low as disgusting modern French theatre. Plots dealing with money, money troubles, social climbing, the pangs of love unspoiled by altruism, sexuality sugar-coated with eroticism yet shorn of mystery, are not theatre even if they are psychology." (P.58)
- "In short, the Balinese produce the idea of pure theatre with the greatest exactness... They triumphantly demonstrate the absolute superiority of the producer whose creative ability *does away with words*." [written after seeing a Balinese theatre performance in Paris.]

From Artaud, A, 1976, ed. Sontag, S, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Los Angeles: University of California Press

- "All writing is garbage. People who come out of nowhere to try and put into words any part of what goes on in their minds are pigs. The whole literary scene is a pigpen, especially today." (P.85)
- "What I lack is words that correspond to each minute of my state of mind." (P.84)
- "To find oneself again in a state of extreme shock, clarified by unreality, with, in a corner of oneself, some fragments of the real world." (P. 81)
- "An actor is seen as if through crystals. Inspiration in stages. One mustn't let in too much literature." (P.80)

From other, mixed, sources.

- "In 1916, he was drafted into the French Army and was allegedly discharged due to sleepwalking. After he was discharged, he was admitted to a sanatorium for a while.

During this time, he read the works of Arthur Rimbaud and Edgar Allan Poe.” (Anon, n.d.

<https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/antoine-marie-joseph-artaud-749.php>)

- “Suddenly it becomes night on the stage. The earth trembles. Thunder rages, lightning zigzags in all directions and during the lightning flashes you see all the characters begin to run, get in each other’s way, fall down, pick themselves up, and run around like madmen. At a certain point an enormous hand seizes the Bawd’s hair, which catches fire and expands visibly... She bites God on the wrist. A huge spurt of blood slashes across the stage...” (Stage directions from *A Spurt of Blood* by Antonin Artaud.)
- “I, myself, spent 9 years in an insane asylum and never had any suicidal tendencies, but I know that every conversation I had with a psychiatrist during the morning visit made me long to hang myself because I was aware that I could not slit his throat.” (Artaud, A, ed. Hirschman, 1963, *Artaud Anthology*, San Francisco: City Lights Books)
- “Artaud... attempted to replace the ‘bourgeois’ classical theatre with his ‘theatre of cruelty.’” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017)
- Artaud studied acting in Paris, and performed in both theatre and film roles (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017)
- “[Theatre of Cruelty] calls for a communion between actor and audience in a magic exorcism; gestures, sounds, unusual scenery, and lighting combine to form a language, superior to words, that can be used to subvert thought and logic and to shock the spectator into seeing the baseness of his world.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017)
- “[Nietzsche's] definition of cruelty informs Artaud's own, declaring that all art embodies and intensifies the underlying brutalities of life to recreate the thrill of experience ... Although Artaud did not formally cite Nietzsche, [their writing] contains a familiar persuasive authority, a similar exuberant phraseology, and motifs in extremis.” (Jamieson, L, 2007, *Antonin Artaud: From Theory to Practice*, London: Greenwich Exchange)
- “Artaud sought to remove aesthetic distance, bringing the audience into direct contact with the dangers of life. By turning theatre into a place where the spectator is exposed rather than protected, Artaud was committing an act of cruelty upon them.” (Jamieson, L, 2007, *Antonin Artaud: From Theory to Practice*, London: Greenwich Exchange)
- “It was a piece of Balinese theatre that Artaud saw at the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931 that began to shape his ideas about gesture and performance. He was interested in the use of facial expressions and the relative unimportance of the spoken word. Gesture, he felt, could communicate an artist’s unconscious and conscious intentions in a way that words were incapable of expressing... Gesture could make these things visible on stage.” (Tripney, N, 2017, *Antonin Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty*, British Library article, <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/antonin-artaud-and-the-theatre-of-cruelty>)
- “You get the impression, listening to [his acting teacher, Charles] Dullin’s teaching, that you’re re-discovering ancient secrets and an entire mystics in the mise-en-scene

which has been forgotten.” (Artaud, A, 1921 *A letter to Max Jacob*, cited in Murray, R, *Antonin Artaud: The Scum of the Soul*.)

- “In 1922... Artaud witnessed a performance that was to have a profound effect on his creative vision: the Cambodian dance show at the Palais d’Indochine in the colonial exposition. This was to mark the beginning of a lifelong interest in, and sometimes misguided appropriation of, non-European cultures... In these performances he saw, similar to some of the ideas he had learned from Dullin, the importance of gesture, the abandonment of the text, and the mobilisation of a new theatrical language foreign to every *spoken tongue*, a language in which an overwhelming stage experience seems to be communicated.” (Murray, R, 2014, *Antonin Artaud: The Scum of the Soul*, London: Springer)
- “Artaud sought to inflict a kind of shock therapy on theater-goers, creating, for example, a negative theater-in-the-round by disconcertingly placing the audience in the center (‘trapped and powerless’) and having actors perform around them.” (Friedman, A, 2017, *Surreal Beckett*, New York: Routledge)
- “Artaud takes the archetypal conception of the relationship between drama and ritual literally: that it is necessary to *re-ritualise* drama.” (Redmond, J., 2008, *Drama and Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

From **Antonin Artaud**, Wikipedia, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonin_Artaud

- “During Artaud's "rest cures" at the sanatorium, he read Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, and Edgar Allan Poe.
- In May 1919, the director of the sanatorium prescribed laudanum for Artaud, precipitating a lifelong addiction to that and other opiates.
- “He considered formal theatres with their proscenium arches and playwrights with their scripts "a hindrance to the magic of genuine ritual." (Anon., 2017, *Antonin Artaud*, Wikipedia, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonin_Artaud citing Botting, G, 1972, *The Theatre of Protest in America*, Edmonton: Harden House)
- “The doctor believed that Artaud's habits of crafting magic spells, creating astrology charts, and drawing disturbing images were symptoms of mental illness. The electroshock treatments created much controversy, although it was during these treatments—in conjunction with Ferdière's art therapy—that Artaud began writing and drawing again, after a long dormant period.”
- “Artaud was taken on as an apprentice by [Charles] Dullin in 1921, under whom he arduously trained for eighteen months, ten to twelve hours a day, with particular emphasis on mime, gymnastics, improvisation, voice production, and various exercises intended to heighten one’s sensory perception.”