

Healing in Antonin Artaud's Theatre

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Abstract: Antonin Artaud was a distinguished French director, actor, theatre theorist and poet. Artaud's reputation in the theatre world is fundamentally due to his promotion of a series of "anti" theatre theories including, but not limited to, the "theatre of cruelty", which highlights the aesthetics of the therapeutic aspects of Artaud's theatre. The use of theatre as therapy for self-awareness and improvement of the individual's physical and mental condition is a value that has been in play since its emergence, and Artaud's influence on the development of theatre therapy is mentioned in the book *Drama Therapy*. It is conceivable that the healing presence of Artaud's theatre is obvious and essential. In this paper, we will take Artaud's theatre theory as the main body of discussion, and take three key words—"language, metaphysics, and cruelty" as the starting point to elaborate the healing properties of Artaud's theatre.

Keywords: Antonin Artaud; Brutal Theatre; Theatre Healing.

1. Introduction

Antonin Artaud ((Antonin Artaud, 1896-1948, hereinafter referred to as Artaud) was an outstanding French director, actor, theatre theorist and poet. For a long time, Artaud has been renowned in the theatre world, and his vision of art is like a lighthouse that illuminates thought and society, attracting a large number of dramatists from the East and the West, influencing their theatre practice and theoretical creations, and diverting them into a form of theatre that is still inherited and perpetuated. The reason why Artaud is regarded as one of the most influential originators and pioneers of postmodern theatre is due to his series of "anti" theatre theories, the most famous of which is his book, *Theatre of Cruelty - Theatre and its Repertoire*.

Among the numerous theories of theatre that Artaud elaborated, wrote and revered, including but not limited to the "cruel theatre", the aesthetic presence of theatrical elements such as the pioneering, avant-garde and unprecedented demands on the actor's body, the innovative use of scripts, and the redefinition of the language of the stage, which have made posterity stop and stare at the theatre, has been mostly ignored. The therapeutic nature of Artaud's theatre, from which it was derived, has been largely overlooked.

2. The Reasons for the Healing Nature of Antonin Artaud's Theatre

The use of theatre as therapy to help people relieve stress, regulate emotions, develop self-awareness, and improve the physical and mental condition of the individual is an application that has been in place since its emergence, and in Dolores Langley's book *Drama Therapy*, there are three directors and playwrights mentioned as having had a great influence on the development of theatre therapy: Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, and Antonin Artaud. In addition to this, Artaud, at the very beginning of his personal theatre theory, drew on St. Augustine's account in *The City of God* that "the theatre acts to cause the most mysterious qualitative changes, not only in the individual, but also in the spirit of the whole nation", thus arriving at his concept of theatre—to drive the spirit into delirium, to make the

individual see his original self, and to inspire the collective to deal heroically and proudly with its destiny. His influence on future generations of dramatists is also fully reflected in the fact that Cirque du Soleil, having "localized" Artaud's path of "brutal theatre" and extended it, has drawn its creations from the distant classical theatre. After "localizing" Artaud's "brutal theatre" and extending it, Cirque du Soleil shifted its choice of material from distant classical plays to real stories from the lives of ordinary people around them, and at the same time gave more prominence to the subject of the self, and the works created after this shift in style were also very brilliant, winning Cirque du Soleil an international reputation. Therefore, no matter whether it was his initial idea or the continuation of his spirit by his descendants, it is enough to show that Artaud's view of theatre, apart from the pursuit of artistic creation, was also aimed at improving personal thinking, changing social thinking and triggering the thinking of the times. Therefore, the healing presence of Artaud's theatre is obvious and essential.

3. The Aspects for the Healing Nature of Antonin Artaud's Theatre

3.1. Language

According to Hong Hong of Nanjing Normal University, Artaud's theory of "brutal theatre" can be highly summarized and condensed into three key words - language, metaphysics and brutality. Regarding "language", Artaud's theatre theory can be regarded as a complete rebellion and innovation to the language of traditional stage performance: he opposes the theatre language in our cognition, opposes the solidified and rigid script text, all the language that has been portrayed and shaped, and is only expressed in the form of language, text or narration, etc. In order not to "neglect the stage", Artaud's theory of "brutal theatre" can be highly summarized into three key words - language, metaphysics and brutality. In order not to "ignore the material necessity of the stage, not to contradict the possibilities of the stage", and in searching for a language that belongs to the theatre stage in addition to the traditional language, he found a material language that belongs to the stage - voice, movement, music, lighting, scenery, costumes, other small props and so on. Artaud called it the "language of

space". Artaud calls it the "language of space", in which the stage is used as the subject of expression more than the traditional language of expression - movement, physical training. At the same time, Artaud emphasized that the use of these materialized spatial languages was not just a matter of technique, but rather a matter of their vibratory effect and their special role in the human spirit. Artaud's vision and desire is to use the limited spatial expression for the infinite wandering of the spiritual world.

From the warm-up session before the beginning of the treatment to the interpretation session during the treatment, physical training is a highly valued part of theatre therapy. Physical training, movement, and body language expression are inseparable from drama therapy, and the degree of expression is closely related to the effectiveness of the therapy. In theatre therapy, the warm-up session in group therapy is primary and essential. From a first superficial point of view, the warm-up task is to activate the body's energy, to help the group prepare itself physically for any intense activity that may follow, and thus to allow the participants to focus on the inside of their bodies. While this is the external effect of the warm-up on the body, as it is commonly perceived, the warm-up in drama therapy involves more of a mental and spiritual warm-up - these warm-up activities focus the participants' attention on their bodies, and the demands of the warm-up activities help to awaken the latent imagination and creativity within the participants. In addition to this, warm-ups in Drama Therapy also involve more spiritual building and communication with the group, for example, through some warm-up interactions with the body to ease the tension of some of the participants, to help the individual participants to quickly accept and understand the integration into a new group, to achieve the effect of "ice-breaking", and to pave the way for the subsequent treatment. The "warm-up" session in drama therapy is like a burning incense in the environment, igniting the body and life of the individual from the inside out and bringing the participants into the same situation, so that the participants can relax physically and mentally, reduce stress, and remove their personal defenses, so that they can integrate into the group interactions, enjoy the group space, and join in the group therapy in a quicker and better way.

3.2. Metaphysics

One of the nine core aspects of drama therapy is "incarnation", in which more emphasis is placed on physical performance, not through language, but only through the body to show personal thoughts and express personal feelings, personal thoughts and personal experiences, which coincides with Artaud's emphasis on the importance of the stage language, physical training of the theatre, as a medium to make Artaud's drama have a therapeutic effect, which makes it possible for the participants to have a healing effect. Artaud's theatre has a healing presence through this medium. Artaud believed that after this stage of materialism, a second level of the theatre could be reached: metaphysics.

The concept of metaphysics is repeatedly highlighted in Artaud's theatre theories, where it is argued that the metaphysics Artaud aspires to is a poetic, active, and original state of being that transcends the order of the universe, and that it is intended to restore the experiential and ritualistic sense of the theatre, to unlock the shackles of the mind, and to bring the metaphysical into the spiritual through the physical. In this context, Artaud stresses the importance of "ritual", which is not any kind of theatre model existing in

Artaud's time, but a kind of primitive theatre ritual, with which there is a strong desire to return to the original spirit of human beings, and nostalgia for the ancient roots of theatre. As Yanli Liang wrote in "Brutal Theatre: Spiritual Rituals of Modern Man", it is a ritual that can arouse the empathy between the audience and the actors, so that the audience can face the real image of their own inner conflict, in order to physically, morally, and spiritually induce the changes brought by the theatre. The "metaphysics" that Artaud repeatedly discusses aims at highlighting the experience of the theatre process and strives to trace it back to the rituals of the theatre that evoke the symbiosis of the human soul, in order to achieve the sanctity of the stage and to achieve the effect of spiritual healing and removing pus from the human being and the society.

Rituals - This is an important element in drama therapy, and any action, sound, object, etc. that is recognized and accepted by all can be used as a way of completing a ritual. Rituals serve to help members define the scope of their activities during the therapy process, as well as provide a relatively safer environment in which to work. In real life there is always a patchwork of rituals, such as the transitional rituals of our lives, such as births, marriages, memorials, etc. Creating a ritual in the theatre helps members to express and control their emotions in order to soften the "aesthetic distance" between the similarities they encounter in real life. Similarly, dramatic rituals can be used to differentiate between real life and the therapeutic process: they can be used to enter therapy from life, or to turn around and withdraw from the intensity of the therapeutic process into real life. Rituals are a consensus of ways and paths to feel physically safe and spiritually healthy.

3.3. Brutality

Dramatic ritual is one of the five parts of drama therapy, and it seems from the metaphysics Artaud espouses that the symbolic elevation of the stage, the elevation of the sense of stage ritual, the solemnity of the ritual, can lead human beings to some kind of mystical realm in the spirit. This is not only Artaud's quest for art, but also the healing aesthetic presence on the goal contained in Artaud's theatre rituals. With the healing aspect of the body and the spirit, Artaud gives theatre a functional connotation - "cruelty".

As for the interpretation of cruelty, Artaud repeatedly talks about people's misunderstanding of the word "cruelty", which he refers to as not narrowly and literally referring to bloody violence and gore, not to mention that he is not systematically cultivating horror. He is not systematically cultivating horror. Rather, he means "cruelty" in a broader sense, a break with the usual meaning, a break with conventional confinement. "Whatever works is cruelty, and the theatre should renew itself according to this idea of extreme action". So, we can take his pursuit of "cruelty" as a direct reference to a modern applied theatre that is utilitarian and humane. Artaud believes that the real theatre should restore the dark mood of the ancient tragedy, cruelty is the reproduction of some inevitable scenes in life, through the special "distance" of the theatre to give people a spiritual exploration and try to deepen people's understanding of mankind and their own knowledge, this cruelty is like a plague, for people and society to clear up pus, to play a positive role in promoting, and to achieve the goal of a modern applied theatre, which is utilitarian and beneficial to human nature. This cruelty works like a plague, cleansing the pustules of man and society, and plays a positive role in

promoting the utility of catharsis, the healing of the soul through literature and art. Therefore, the "brutal theatre" advocated by Artaud can make people remove their external masks, lower their psychological defenses and see their true selves, which is also the essence of the healing nature of Artaud's theatre theory.

4. Conclusion

Over the centuries, Artaud has produced a large number of theatre theories, all of which are based on one of the characteristics of the theatre to study and follow. Théâtre masters, such as Grotowski's simple theatre, Peter Brook's space theatre, Schechner's environmental theatre, etc.; and there are also many theatre practices with Artaud as their spiritual ancestor. And the environmental theatre of Schechner, etc. There are also a few theatre practices with Artaud as their spiritual progenitor, including the Living Theatre Company led by Julian Baker Living Theatre Company headed by Julian Beck, Cirque du Soleil headed by Mnushkin, and Open Theatre Company headed by Joseph Chaikin. It is enough to show the expressive power and epoch-making influence of Artaud's theatre theory. In addition to the superficial entertainment, aesthetic and the aesthetics of theatre, Artaud himself had in mind the potential educational, functional and humane qualities of the theatre at the beginning of his creation. Artaud himself began his work with a vision of theatre potential educational, functional, and humane qualities, hoping that theatre could be useful, influential, and helpful to mankind.

Although Artaud and theatre healing are intrinsically linked, most researchers and scholars have focused only on the aesthetic elements of his theatre, and few have mentioned the healing nature of Artaud's theatre in other interdisciplinary studies. For example, Li Tingwen of Xiamen University points out in "Brutal Theatre, Sensual Revolution, and Psychoanalytic Discourse in the Cold War: Interpreting the Artaud-Style Theatre", Artaud's theatre has "the goal of

'healing' psychological reality" section, summarize what was described in your paper. Future directions may also be included in this section. Authors are strongly encouraged not to reference multiple figures or tables in the conclusion; these should be referenced in the body of the paper.

Artaud's theatre theory has always been a special and non-mainstream form from the early stage of theory implementation, to the creation of works, stage performances, and the inheritance of his descendants, only because Artaud himself has a noble, personal pursuit that does not stop at theatre art. Whether it is physical training, physical catharsis, or the application of scenarios and procedures to achieve medical effects, Artaud's theatre has demonstrated a different kind of healing effect that is to be explored by future generations.

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