

The Rape (Theatre Play) - Director's Comments

The direction and script of our performance are based on Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty". Artaud was a French playwright, director, actor, producer, and critic who criticized the theatre of his time (~1920) for being too entertaining. He wanted to revolutionize the theatre, as we know it, by inventing a new language for the theatre. According to Artaud, our conventional use of language lets the audience become to passive. Theatre should advance the plot through screaming, gestures, brilliant lighting, rare musical notes, surprise, dramatic moments, and facial expressions. By doing so, we can reach deep into the spectator's subconscious. Thus, the audience cannot hide behind the fourth wall anymore. They are drawn deeper and deeper into the play without their knowledge or consent – just as in life.

In addition, Artaud wanted the theatre to improve society by having the audience face their desires and fears. The emotions of love, lust, sex, death, conflict, and resolution are too valuable to be wasted for the sake of pure entertainment. Instead, theatre has the capability to show the cruel truth of our reality to the audience. By horrifying the audience, we can leave them with a deep desire to change the world for the better.

In preparation for our play, I've read Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*, as well as Susan Sontag's *Selected Writings of Antonin Artaud*. While both works served as great theoretic inspirations, they offered little practical methods that could be used to direct our play. Upon researching this topic further, I found out that this is indeed true for most of Artaud's work. He offers brilliant and intriguing theories, but gives little advice on how to implement them. This lack of "direction" is indeed a

problem, since his theories can be expanded in different ways. To follow Artaud's work as closely as possible, directors would need to immerse themselves in his world.

For our short 5-minutes play, I've highlighted Artaud's use of surprise, cruelty, dramatic moment, social injustice, and unconventional use of language. The dialogue of our play is kept sparse on purpose. Following Artaud's vision, I have replaced it by sounds, gestures, and screaming. Though the lighting system in our stage is limited, we've tried to set the mood as good as possible.

Our play pivots around an Italian court decision of 1999, which ended in the acquittal of the rapist. The judge concluded that a woman in jeans couldn't be raped since removing jeans is a fairly hard process that cannot succeed without cooperation from the victim. By using this highly controversial – and much criticized - court decision as the basis for our play, I wanted to inform and shake up our audience. It will be educational for any girl who will travel to Italy in the next years, but it also showcases contemporary injustice at its un-triumphant best.

I have decided not to enact the actual rape sequence since a playback from tape should fire up the imagination and horrors of the audience more than any enactment could. This decision is based firmly on Artaud's wish to use the audience's subconscious.

In addition, in several instances in the play, I'm counting on the audiences' 'aesthetic distance'. For example, I'm sure they will remain passive when the victim asks for their help. Furthermore, they are also asked to rise when the judge enters – a command they feel will not apply to them since they are the audience. I'm using this passiveness to criticize our society's overall increasing passivity. Psychologists are quite amazed at the 'bystander effect', and I'm afraid Artaud is right that modern theatre

rewards the audience for their passivity. While I don't think theatre is to blame as the root for this effect, but I do think theatre can wake up a dead spectator and turn him into a more-aware breathing human actor in real life.