



What Brecht did for the theatre was to heighten the spectator's participation, but in an intellectual way, whereas Artaud had specifically rejected intellectual approaches in favour of theatre as 'a means of inducing trances.' Discuss.

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Brecht and Artaud shared a desire to create a style of theatre which altered the way in which an audience participated with a performance. However, their methods of eliciting this participation and the type of involvement they hoped to arouse were very different. In order to analyse the two very different approaches, it is important first to qualify what is implied by the use of the terms 'intellectual' and 'trances'. Brecht intended to heighten the spectator's participation, not by testing the audience's knowledge of a subject, but instead by inviting the audience to develop their own thoughts and criticisms about the events on the stage, with clarity of mind and, therefore, without being overwhelmed by a sensory experience. It is arguable that the principle way in which he achieved this was through using a range of 'alienation' techniques, which defined his style of Epic Theatre. In contrast, the 'trances' which Artaud advocated as the desired responses from his spectators were, in his opinion, a way of giving the public the opportunity to be deeply moved. His attitude was grounded in his belief in 'arousing the masses by energies, by pure force', advising his audiences not to 'count on reasonable calculations anymore'.¹ It was as a result of his confidence in the unconscious sensibility of human's responses that he chose to exhibit a style of performance that was designed to engulf an audience, using a barrage of effects and techniques that he hoped would heighten the spectator's involvement. By comparing and contrasting the techniques that were implemented by Brecht and Artaud in their respective plays *Man Equals Man* and *Les Cenci* and their theories for Epic Theatre and the Theatre of Cruelty, it will hopefully elucidate the ways in which these two important theatre practitioners went about provoking and involving their audiences.

For the purposes of this essay I will look to Patterson's account of Brecht's production of *Man Equals Man* at the Staatstheater in Berlin in February 1931.² It was in this particular production that Brecht tried to fully explore the techniques of alienation in his model of Epic Theatre which proved to be of major importance to the development of his theatre practice. Similarly, documents created around the time of the first production of *Les Cenci*, on May 6 1935 at the Folies-Wagram Theatre in Paris, will illustrate Artaud's methods for the Theatre of Cruelty. These documents include Artaud's own letters, notes and

¹ 'Antonin Artaud, to Louis Jouvet' (March 7, 1935). Cited in: Roger Blin, Antonin Artaud, Victoria Nes Kirby, Nancy E. Nes, Aileen Robbins, 'Antonin Artaud in "Les Cenci"', *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Directing Issue; The MIT Press (Jun., 1972), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1144719> Accessed: 30/11/2009 18:25. p.95

² Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900-1933*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (London;1981), pp.159-182

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annotated rehearsal book, as well as the contemporary critical reviews that the performance received.³

One key way in which Brecht tried to ensure that his audience members would be 'ushered into his own real world, with attentive faculties' was through the deliberate and carefully constructed set design and visual presentation of the performance.⁴ An essential starting point for Brecht in his aim of 'alienating' the audience was to emphasise the material surroundings of the theatre. Brecht employed the use of the half-curtain in this production which would become a defining feature of the Brechtian stage. It allowed for both set changes and costume changes to occur on the stage in a veiled manner which did not distract the audience from the main focus but at the same time acted as a reminder to the audience that the mechanics of set construction and actors adapting roles were concepts of a theatrical production which were not to be forgotten. This revelation of the mechanical aspects of the theatre was a deliberate way that Brecht distanced his audience, preventing them from becoming too caught up in the constructed world on stage. Indeed, Brecht's expressed his own attitude to the way in which the stage and set should be managed, writing 'let him [the spectator] be aware/That you are not magicians, but/ Workers'.⁵ Neher's canteen set design in the 1931 production demonstrated a crude and temporary structure, simple tables and chairs, a basic wooden structure and a sheet over a metal grid suspended from the ceiling to suggest a roof, and no attempt was made to reconstruct the railway carriage.⁶

The set of *Les Cenci* on the other hand, offers a stark contrast to this idea of 'What is on stage must play a part, and what does not play a part must not be on the stage'.⁷ Furthermore, it is clear to see from Lipnitzki-Violle's photographs of the 1935 production that the set and costumes were designed to be visually very powerful.⁸ Baltus' set design was commented on for its elaborateness and the set and costumes were described in great detail in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*;

'the scaffolding like a giant ladder and the round column reaching toward the sky raise the Cenci palace to a startling height but still carry their meaning: the red curtains hanging like "iron tatters" or clots of congealed blood; the arches broken and interrupted in the space. Against this great background the costumes, made of contrasting brilliant and vivid material, are astonishing. These "living" materials take precedence over the others-the dead materials of rocks, stairs, pediments, porticos, torture wheels and ropes. Antonin Artaud's mis-en-scene continually animates this space in a creative manner'.⁹

This grand and symbolic set was designed for the purpose of being as captivating and impressive as possible for an audience. Indeed, 'A theatre that merely depict[ed] life [was] not sufficient for this visionary artist.'¹⁰ However, Baltus' artistic design certainly divided

³ *The Drama Review*, (Jun., 1972). pp.91-145.

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, Carl Richard Mueller, (1939); 'On the Experimental Theatre' *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 The MIT Press (Sep., 1961), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1125000> Accessed: 08/12/2009 09:40. p. 13

⁵ *Gedichte 1934-1941* Suhrkamp Verlag, (Frankfurt;1961), Vol. IV. Cited in: Gay McAuly, (2008), 'Not Magic but Work: Rehearsal and the Production of Meaning'. *Theatre Research International*, 33, p.1 doi:10.1017/S0307883308003970 Accessed: 30/11/2009 18:27

⁶ Patterson, (1981), Central Plate Images

⁷ Bertolt Brecht, 'das Notigste ist genug' ; ST 3; 240. Cited in: Patterson, (1981), p.164

⁸ *The Drama Review*, (June, 1972). Plate Images

⁹ Pierre-lean Jouve, "Les Cenci by Antonin Artaud". *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, (June 1, 1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (Jun., 1972). p.141

¹⁰ Gautam Dasgupta, 'Remembering Artaud': *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2. The MIT Press, (May, 1997). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245858> Accessed: 30/11/2009 18:23. p.4

critical opinion. ‘The blasé liked its daring decor of inexplicable architecture’¹¹, but in contrast, *Action Française* expressed disdain for the production, commenting, ‘this play is staged in incongruously stupid and conventional sets’.¹²

Despite its mixed reception, Artaud’s intention for such an elaborate set was to produce a very visually evocative theatre ‘in which violent physical images pound and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator, who is caught in the theatre as if in a whirlwind of higher forces.’¹³ At the opposite end of the spectrum, however, Brecht’s specific demand for a basic set that consisted of only objects that were entirely necessary make his intentions for enforcing an objective distance between the spectator and the set very clear. In this 1931 display of Epic Theatre techniques, ‘the audience [was] no longer encouraged to view the stage as a separate world into which the spectator must be transported’.¹⁴

To enforce this idea, projections were an important device of Epic Theatre that Brecht employed in his 1931 staging of *Man Equals Man*. The projection used for the second scene simply read ‘4-1=3’. It is exactly this type of projection that strikes the audience on a simple factual basis. It refers to the death of Jeriah Jip in the raid, which is a fact that the audience are unaware of. This forces the audience to intellectually engage with the projection in their curiosity to ascertain a more comprehensive understanding of its meaning. Similarly the projection at the start of Scene 4, ‘3+1=4’ draws attention to Galy Gay’s reincarnation as Jip, and his becoming a member of the squad. This idea of numeric representation was again extended into Scene 8 where the projection read ‘1=1’ illustrating the title idea of man equalling man. In addition to these written projections, during his transformation two images of Galy Gay were projected onto flats on either side of the stage, one showing him as the porter, and the other showing his transformation into a soldier. In addition, throughout the scene a stream of images were projected every few minutes to indicate the stages of transformation and the passing of time, and importantly to interrupt the action on the stage preventing the audience from becoming too involved.

No such explanatory techniques were used in the production of *Les Cenci*. Instead, Artaud relied very heavily upon special effects, and in particular stereophonic sound and lighting, in order to enchant his spectators. The contemporary critic, Pierre Barlatier described many of the sound effects that were used; ‘The audience was surrounded and constantly bombarded by sound’; ‘The tolling bell resounded from the four corners of the auditorium’, ‘Desormiere underlined the actors’ movements with sound...the performers’ steps were echoed by recorded footsteps at full volume’, ‘Rhythmic stamping’, ‘different volumes’, ‘a metronome oscillating at various speeds’, ‘a tempest rages’ as well as ‘re- corded voices that shouted and whispered’.¹⁵ These effects in *Les Cenci* were employed in order ‘to exalt, to numb, to charm, to arrest the sensibility’ encouraging the dreamlike state Artaud hoped to arouse in his spectators.¹⁶

Artaud was also very interested in ‘the peculiar action of light on the mind’.¹⁷ Throughout the performance light was ‘diffused in waves’, it was strobed, and different coloured lights were used along with the introduction of ‘elements of thinness density, opacity’.¹⁸ Lighting was used to emphasise emotion, tone and the setting at any given time in order to contribute to his intoxicating theatrical production. Artaud advocated ‘Lighting

¹¹ ‘Les Cenci: A Theatrical Evening’: *Le Temps*, (May 8,1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (Jun., 1972). p.130

¹² ‘Les Cenci’: Interim, *Action Française*, (May 17,1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (Jun., 1972). p. 139

¹³ Antonin Artaud, (1933); ‘An end to Masterpieces’. Cited in: *Modern Theories of Drama*, (Ed.) George W. Brant; Clarendon Press (Oxford; 1998). p.199

¹⁴ Patterson, (1981), p.163

¹⁵ Pierre Barlatier, ‘Regarding Les Cenci, M. Artaud tells us why a Theatre of Cruelty’: *Comoedia*, (May 6,1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (June, 1972), p.108

¹⁶ Antonin Artaud (1932) ‘The Theatre of Cruelty : First Manifesto’. Cited in: Brandt (1998), p.190

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.192

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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which is not designed merely to colour or to illuminate, and which contributes its force, its influence, its suggestions' in order to produce a 'sensual effect on the organism'.¹⁹

One of the most striking aspects of *Man Equals Man* stands in direct contrast to Artaud's assertion that; "The function of the lights is not to illuminate... let's not talk about falsely naturalistic lighting!"²⁰ Brecht's decision to use full white light to illuminate everything happening on the stage was prominent because most of the action in the play takes place at night, and multiple references are made to the darkness such as 'Is that the moon?', and 'It's getting late'.²¹ In addition, the sources of lighting were made visible. This use of lighting was to subvert the hidden lighting in the theatre that had dominated the previous decades. By exposing the lamps and lighting methods the constructed mechanical nature of the performance was emphasised. Similarly, lighting would remain distinct from any events on stage, maintaining its purpose for illuminating events, rather than to use them for a particular emotional intention. Artaud chose to 'act directly and profoundly upon the sensibility through the sense organs'²² by using special effects, whereas Brecht's use of projections and lighting was to ensure that his epic theatre would appeal 'less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason'.²³

In addition to Brecht's material effects in the staging of the production, he was also keen to demonstrate a new style of acting which he advocated for Epic Theatre. Brecht wrote 'Don't read things into the role, read *out* of the role, until in your mind you are standing beside the character... so that people think about it'.²⁴ Brecht insisted that the audience should concern themselves with the events on stage, and not the emotions of the characters, and as such encouraged 'demonstration, emotional restraint, and a critical view of the character' hoping to influence the audience's involvement.²⁵ In stark contrast to Brecht, Artaud advocated an opposed approach to the way in which actor's should go about presenting their characters. He believed that it was 'on the effectiveness of his [the actor's] performance that the success of the spectacle depends'.²⁶ As such, the way in which Artaud performed, and encouraged his actors to perform, was to present characterisation which was highly stylised and emotionally wrought with the intention of infecting the spectator with the passion that exuded from the characters on stage. Artaud believed that this method of acting 'forces the actor to plunge in up to the roots of his being so completely that he leaves the stage exhausted'.²⁷ Moreover, he suggested that the actor had a further obligation to the spectator and 'must not permit him to leave the theatre intact, but he also must be exhausted, involved, transformed, perhaps!'.²⁸

However, as Patterson notes, 'It was precisely this intensity, this passion, this self-surrender to the moment that Brecht was so suspicious of in the theatre'.²⁹ Peter Lorre, playing Galy Gay in the 1931 production, delivered his lines flatly and in an explanatory way, which also aided in alienating the audience for the purposes of intellectual identification with the play. Brecht noted 'Instead of using conjuring tricks the actor must invite the audience to question what it sees taking place on stage'.³⁰ Indeed, the scene of Galy Gay's

¹⁹ Antonin Artaud, (1933) 'An end to Masterpieces'. Cited in: Brandt, (1998), p.198

²⁰ "The Theatre of Cruelty": *Le Petit Parisien*, (April 14,1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (June, 1972), p.97

²¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Man Equals Man* in *Collected Plays: Two*, Methuen Drama (London; 1998), p.53

²² Antonin Artaud, (1932) 'The Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto'. Cited in: Brandt, (1998), p.192

²³ John Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, Methuen (London;1964), p.23

²⁴ Patterson, (1981), p.170

²⁵ Patterson, (1981), p. 171

²⁶ Antonin Artaud, (1932) 'The Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto'. Cited in: Brandt, (1998), p.191

²⁷ Pierre Barlatier, 'Regarding Les Cenci, M. Artaud tells us why a Theatre of Cruelty': *Comoedia*, (May 6, 1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (June, 1972). p.107

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.107

²⁹ Patterson, (1981), p. 174

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178

mock execution is emotionally undermined by the farcical and disjointed way in which it is staged in Scene 9 Number iv. Lines such as ‘What are you doing Polly? That’s a live round you’re putting in. Take it out’, remove all sense of tension from the scene.³¹ This disengages the audience, and brings them back to a critical standpoint from where they are able to identify intellectually with the concepts of manipulation and the value of human life.

In contrast, Artaud actively encouraged the identification of the actors with their characters. When looking for actors to play in his first performance of *Les Cenci* he wrote ‘I look where I can to find actors who identify themselves with their roles’ and said ‘I do not think that it is wrong to adjust a role to an actor's temperament.’³² As such, the actress, Lya Abdy who played Beatrice in the 1935 production was seen to ‘live her own life in the role of Beatrice’.³³ Furthermore, evidence for Artaud’s highly stylised method of acting can be found in the directors notebook to the performance, and in the critical reviews the production received. The stage directions in the script dictate the emotionally involved way in which Artaud hoped his actors would deliver their lines; ‘CENCI: (In a humble and moved voice) Beatrice. BEATRICE: Father. (She speaks the following words in a deeply moved tone)’.³⁴ Furthermore, the notes to the Banquet Scene describe how Artaud encouraged the actors to perform in a stylized manner, hoping that each of the princes would move and behave in a manner which resembled an animal.³⁵ One critic explicitly commented upon the actors movements, noting ‘he makes them act like complete robots. In the same spirit, he resorts to the use of disciplined movement and slow-motion’.³⁶

Although opposed in technique, Artaud and Brecht both hoped that through the style of acting on the stage, it would encourage their audiences to engage intimately with what was being presented to them. Both men saw the ultimate goal of theatre as eliciting a direct audience response. Artaud believed, ‘we must allow audiences to identify with the show breath by breath and beat by beat’.³⁷ Similarly, although Brecht was opposed to such impassioned techniques, he too placed audience involvement as a high priority, demanding that ‘the actor has to abandon his traditional role of ‘hypnotist’ instead suggesting that ‘Instead of using conjuring tricks the actor must invite the audience to question what it sees taking place on stage’.³⁸

What becomes very clear when examining the two productions of these plays by Brecht and Artaud is their determination to arouse some type of reaction from their audiences, and to ‘re-situate theatre as an immediate experience for both performers and audience’.³⁹ Intellectual stimulation was clearly very important to Brecht who vehemently stated, ‘Whoever does not instruct entertainingly and entertain instructively should stay out of the theatre’.⁴⁰ As a result he considered his processes of alienation ‘necessary to all understanding’ in order to prevent an audience submitting to experience and viewing the play uncritically.⁴¹ In comparison, Artaud advocated a style of performance that would be so overwhelming and intoxicating in its effects and stylised acting that it would stir the audience’s sensibilities. Indeed, he illustrated this idea when he wrote ‘I propose that we treat

³¹ Brecht, (1998), p.53

³² Marcel Idzkowski, ‘Les Cenci by Artaud with Lady Abdy’: *Le Jour*, (April 15, 1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (Jun., 1972). p.100

³³ Antonin Artaud, ‘What the Tragedy of Les Cenci Will Be’: *Le Figaro*, (May 5, 1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (Jun., 1972). p.106

³⁴ Roger Blin, *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault* (November, 1965). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (June, 1972). p.124

³⁵ Charles Marowitz ‘An Interview with Roger Blin’. Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (June, 1972), p.110

³⁶ Fortunat Strowski, ‘A Four-Act Tragedy in Ten Tableaux’ *Paris-Midi*, (May 9, 1935). Cited in: *The Drama Review*, (June, 1972). p.132

³⁷ Antonin Artaud, (1981: 95). Cited in: Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*; Routledge (London; 1990), p.40

³⁸ Patterson, (1981), p.178

³⁹ Bennett, (1990), p.40

⁴⁰ Bertolt Brecht ‘Instructions for Actors’. Cited in: Patterson, (1981), p.170

⁴¹ *Brecht on Theatre*; (ed.) (trans.) John Willett; Methuen (London; 1964), p.71

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the spectators like snakes that are being charmed'.⁴² In light of this it is clear that Brecht and Artaud were diametrically opposed in their styles of theatrical productions. However, their desire to reawaken audiences, to stir a reaction whether sensational or intellectual was a desire that united them in purpose.

⁴² Antonin Artaud 'An end to Masterpieces' (1933). Cited in: Brandt, (1998), p.198

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