

# Review: Antonin Artaud – Practical Approaches to a Theatre of Cruelty (2-disc DVD)

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Justin Cash 31/03/2017  
UK's [Pumpkin Interactive](#) have developed *Antonin Artaud: Practical Approaches to a Theatre of Cruelty*, an excellent 2-disc educational DVD-set about the life and work of one of the world's most important theatre practitioners. This resource should prove very useful for high school drama/theatre teachers and their students.

While there are some of examples of work inspired by Artaud littered across YouTube, what is missing is context. This DVD resource provides a theoretical, historical and practical context for Artaud's work and the works of others influenced by his Theatre of Cruelty style.

Disc 1 contains a very informative 23-minute documentary on the life and work of Artaud, reflecting his personal and professional activity. While this biographical documentary is relatively short, it does however tie everything together through narration, with ample video footage provided as illustrative examples. Without this cohesiveness, research on Artaud is often disjointed and fragmented, akin to putting together the pieces of a very complex jigsaw puzzle.

The documentary discusses Artaud's influence on 20th century theatre and beyond, surrealism, Balinese dance, Butoh, his influence on others practitioners such as Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski, the differing interpretations of Artaud across the world, ritual, asylums, and more.

Pumpkin Interactive connect with Norway's experimental Grusomhetens Teater (English translation: "Theatre of Cruelty"), an Oslo-based avant-garde theatre company specialising in performances in Artaud's style. Video of Grusomhetens Teater's past productions forms a large part of this resource's performance footage. We are also provided with examples of top-band UK student ensemble work in Theatre of Cruelty style.

Excellent interview excerpts are provided throughout by Alan Read, Professor of Theatre, Kings College, London, and Professor Stephen Barber, Kingston University, London (author of a published Artaud biography). We also hear from Grusomhetens Theatre artistic director Lars Øyno. The commentary from these Artaud scholars and experts enriches our understanding of the man and his theatre.

## [CHECK THIS OUT: 2015 Short Solo Performance Characters](#)

Disc 2 is an interactive DVD for PC or Mac and includes a resource bank of over 100 short video clips of performance extracts from works influenced by Artaud. Many of these are from Grusomhetens Theatre productions. Critically, these short performance excerpts are categorised by topic such as movement/stillness, voice/breath/sound, gestures, assault on the senses, staging etc., which enables students of theatre to view each clip with a narrow focus. The videos are also categorised by performance title. There is also footage of Lars Øyno taking a student workshop where he combines Artaud's ideas with Grotowski's techniques.

Disc 2 also contains a 'performance generator'. This simple PowerPoint contains over a hundred statements, each a quote from Artaud or principle of his Theatre of Cruelty, such as "blind the audience with light/periods of darkness", "never depend on dialogue", "put the audience in swivel chairs", and "groans, screams and cries". Students can readily create appropriate Theatre of Cruelty work using these slides as stimulus. This performance generator also effectively becomes a list of Theatre of Cruelty conventions, relevant for classroom teaching or student written work analysing this style.

There are few educational resources available to drama/theatre teachers and their students on Antonin Artaud and his Theatre of Cruelty, particularly with performance examples illustrating ideas and concepts. *Antonin Artaud: Practical Approaches to a Theatre of Cruelty* is a wonderful resource for both drama teachers and students studying one of the world's most influential 20th century theatre practitioners. Highly recommended.

Note: adult themes and partial nudity in sections of this resource.  
Requirements: PC or Mac. Disc 2 requires Adobe Flash.

Pumpkin Interactive

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