

## Malina on Artaud

JUDITH MALINA

### Introduction

*Judith is writing a play about aging and the knowledge it brings as we continue to grow, knowing more of the world and one's self at 50 than at 45. More at 85 than at 80. I gave a lot of thought to this, as that realization was a revelation I've come to recognize. Six months ago at Judith's 87<sup>th</sup> birthday party, I looked around and saw younger, middle-aged and older people who had been inspired by Judith and continue to be. I began to think of the people that had inspired her, setting her and Julian Beck on the path that shaped The Living Theatre. The French playwright, poet, actor and theatre director Antonin Artaud was one of those people. Judith shared her thoughts on Artaud with me last winter.*

*Her words add up to a short but powerful creation, like Judith herself.*

—Lois Kagan Mingus

Artaud was a great discoverer. He realized that we are all armored, as indeed we must be in order to live in the world and not be constantly hurt. And he realized that this armoring prevents us from opening out to the performers in the theatre, because our protective armor interferes with total openness. He asked himself...what can pierce this armor—what can open the spectator to the performers and the playwright's message?

What Artaud discovered was that if the performer can be in touch with and express his or her or their (I'm a "their-ist!") own personal

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pain and make themselves vulnerable by feeling and expressing what our whole social structure prohibits us from feeling and expressing in our lives—if the performer can reach this level of personal truth, it will communicate to the spectator. It will pierce the armor of the spectator and allow the spectator to open up to the feelings that society prevents us from experiencing.

In *The Plague*—in Artaud's description of *The Plague*—he speaks of the kind of suffering that is both personal and social and that can be performed and communicated to the audience. The Living Theatre has performed *The Plague* as Artaud described it, many times. We have tried to find the courage to be in touch with our own suffering—our fear of death—our knowledge of pain in our life and the lives around us, our terrible sense of helplessness in confronting the ultimate pain. If we can reach this point of terrible honesty, it will communicate, and it will break the armor of the audience. This point of honest confrontation with our own fears and suffering is not easy to reach and only too easy to simulate. Therefore, we struggle to overcome the simulation and dare to confront the real thing. If we can do this, we will have a unique effect on the spectator, opening them to unaccustomed feelings.

It is a difficult and painful process, but if our desire to reach the armor of the spectator is sincere, we can, with effort, arrive at this point. And the payoff is great, when we see the spectator respond to our pain, not simulated—acting pain—but our *real* pain and our *real* fear, and we see the spectator pierce through their armor to *their* real being. There is a great satisfaction in reaching this point of intercommunication.

It was Artaud who showed us how to do this.

This only means something to people who take it personally. It's about taking it personally.