

This Play is Cruel

A Visceral Theatre Of Cruelty Play

To embody Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, each scene should encapsulate an intense visceral and sensory experience that transcends traditional narrative structures and character development. In this environment, dialogue should be replaced by screams, chants, or physical expressions of primal emotions. Design elements should work in harmony to create a chaotic yet deeply immersive atmosphere, invoking discomfort and intrigue in the audience.

Act 1: The Awakening

Scene 1: The Dream

The scene opens in a desolate and foreboding environment. The stage is saturated with jarring, dissonant sounds that instil unease and tension. The lighting is harsh, casting grotesque and exaggerated shadows. The boundaries between the real and the unreal blur as fragmented narratives unfold in a dreamscape.

In a space devoid of the constraints of time and reality, the characters navigate through fragmented memories and surreal visions. They are caught in a loop of disjointed memories and surreal occurrences, marked by their exaggerated and distorted physicality.

Through grotesque movements and vocal distortions, they communicate a language of anguish and confusion, reflecting humanity's inner chaos. The broken mirror becomes a portal, absorbing and distorting their reflections, an ever-present reminder of the fragmented self.

CHARACTERS

THE SHATTERED: A representation of broken dreams and fragmented reality, communicating only through agonised movements and fractured, nonsensical phrases.

THE DISFIGURED: A living, breathing canvas of anguish and suffering, their appearance constantly shifting in a grotesque display of humanity's worst fears.

THE VOID: An embodiment of existential emptiness, moving through the stage as a dark, devouring force, swallowing light and sound.

DESIGN

Lighting: Ethereal and fluctuating, oscillating between sharp, intense beams and shadows to create a disjointed and surreal atmosphere. Strobe lights can be used sparingly to accentuate moments of heightened unreality, fragmenting the visuals and creating a palpable sense of unease.

Set: A surreal, dreamlike landscape blurs reality and illusion boundaries. Incorporate distorted perspectives, such as slanting floors and walls, to create a sense of instability. An array of broken mirrors could be used to fragment the space further, creating an illusion of infinite, shattered realities.

Props: A wilting flower, a ticking clock with erratic movements, and fragmented pieces of mirror that characters interact with, symbolising themes of decay and fragmentation.

Sound: Layered ambient sounds comprising surreal and ethereal echoes, faint whispers, and disjointed melodic fragments create a dream-like auditory canvas. Utilise sound effects such as time distortion (e.g., slow motion or reverberating effects) to augment the non-linear narrative structure.

Costume: Flowing garments with fragmented patterns, resembling pieces of a shattered mirror, reflect the fragmentation of the human psyche. Layers of fabric that move fluidly, allowing for exaggerated movements and expressions.

(The SHATTERED enters, dragging themselves across the stage, leaving a trail of broken mirror shards in their wake. They interact with the shards, their movements conveying a desperate attempt to piece together fragments of a lost identity.)

THE SHATTERED: *(With a voice oscillating between a whisper and a scream)* I... broken... reflection... shards... scream... see...

(The DISFIGURED enters, their body a canvas of shifting, nightmarish imagery. They move with an unsettling, disjointed grace, their voice a cacophony of agonised and discordant sounds that resonate with the audience on a visceral level.)

THE DISFIGURED: *(An amalgam of voices, creating an unbearable symphony)*
Pain... fear... HELP!

(The VOID makes its presence known, a force of darkness that consumes light and sound, leaving an oppressive silence in its wake. It moves across the stage, interacting with the other characters in a predatory dance that leaves them even more broken and disfigured.)

THE VOID: *(A deep, echoing voice reverberating through the audience, shaking them to their core)* Consume... Devour... Nothingness...

(Throughout the scene, the characters engage in a violent, chaotic dance, their movements a grotesque ballet that portrays the darkest aspects of the human psyche. The stage becomes a living nightmare, where the boundaries between the real and the surreal blur, leaving the audience trapped in a labyrinthine journey through the darkest corners of their subconscious.)

(The scene ends with a crescendo of shrieking noises and flashing lights, leaving an afterimage of the horrific tableau, a stark reminder of the cruelty and nihilism at the heart of human existence.)

Scene 2: The Ritual

The environment transforms into a sacred ground, embodying a nightmarish ritual site where ancient rituals converge with contemporary narratives. The boundaries between the characters and their surroundings are indistinct, as they, now resembling primal beings, engage in a fervent dance that draws from many cultural myths and traditions.

This visceral dance serves as both a purging of societal masks and a cathartic transition into a profound consciousness. Within this space, primal sounds and rhythmic movements reign supreme, transcending the confines of language and linear time, unveiling humanity's raw essence, deepest fears, and desires.

CHARACTERS

THE MASTERS OF CEREMONIES: Grotesque, almost demonic figures who orchestrate a horrifying ritual of human degradation.

THE SACRIFICED: Individuals who have lost all semblance of humanity, caught in an endless cycle of pain and humiliation.

THE WATCHERS: Shadowy figures who observe the ritual with perverse satisfaction, embodying society's darkest voyeuristic tendencies.

DESIGN

Lighting: Lighting is primal and fiery, with hues of red and orange dominating the scene to evoke the raw energy of the ritual. Shadows play a significant role here, with characters sometimes illuminated from below to create grotesque and exaggerated silhouettes, embodying the raw, untamed forces being invoked during the ritual.

Set: A primal setting with an imposing, ancient altar at the centre, surrounded by flickering flames and enigmatic symbols drawn on the ground. The environment should evoke the raw energy of ancient rituals, possibly with towering totemic structures or sculptures that cast eerie shadows.

Props: Ritualistic objects such as masks, staffs adorned with feathers and bones, and primitive musical instruments which are utilised during the ritualistic dance.

Sound: Intense, rhythmic drumming patterns to drive the ritualistic dance, potentially incorporating elements from various cultural traditions.

Costume: Primal and earthy garments, resembling tribal attire but with a modern, avant-garde twist. Fabrics with organic textures and warm, earth tones.

(The MASTERS OF CEREMONIES take centre stage, their bodies contorting into unnatural shapes as they move in a hypnotic, yet repulsive dance. They chant incomprehensible phrases, their voices merging into a sinister harmony.)

THE MASTERS OF CEREMONIES: *(With deep, resonating voices that create an unsettling soundscape)* Bleed... Suffer... Rejoice...

(The SACRIFICED are led onto the stage, their bodies battered and broken, yet still forced to partake in the horrific ritual. They move with a grotesque grace, their pain transformed into a perverse form of art.)

THE SACRIFICED: *(Screaming, crying, their voices creating a harsh mixture of human suffering)* No more... Please...

(THE WATCHERS stand at the fringes of the stage, their features hidden in the shadows. They represent the dark, voyeuristic tendencies of society, finding pleasure in the suffering of others.)

THE WATCHERS: *(With cold, emotionless voices that echo through the theatre)* More... More...

(As the ritual reaches its climax, the lines between perpetrators and victims blur, creating a horrifying tableau of human cruelty and degradation. The audience is confronted with the rawest elements of human nature, forced to bear witness to the darkest aspects of existence.)

(The scene ends with a sickening thud, a sound that reverberates through the theatre, leaving a chilling, unforgettable mark on the audience's psyche.)

Act 2: The Descent

Scene 3: The Labyrinth

The theatre transforms into an all-encompassing labyrinth, a hellspace that extends beyond the stage, engulfing the audience in a sensory experience marked by intense lighting, sounds, and scents. The characters and audience navigate through this world, lost yet seeking, in a journey that blurs the line between the spectator and the participant, disorienting the audience. Sounds are magnified to an unbearable intensity, and the scent of decay pervades the theatre, creating a sensory overload that leaves no room for escape.

CHARACTERS

THE FORSAKEN: Individuals trapped in the labyrinth, their bodies and minds warped by the relentless assault on their senses.

THE BEASTS: Grotesque creatures that stalk the labyrinth, embodying the primal fears and desires that lurk within the human psyche.

THE SHADOWS: Omnipresent entities that manipulate the environment, ensuring no escape from the labyrinthine nightmare.

DESIGN

Lighting: Lighting in this scene needs to be erratic and disorienting, with sudden shifts in intensity and color to create a sense of being lost. Spotlights can follow characters in a frantic, unpredictable manner, while areas of darkness engulf others, creating an environment where both actors and audience feel a loss of direction and control.

Set: A maze-like structure with shifting walls and narrow passages, creating a disorienting, claustrophobic environment. Incorporate elements that appeal to the senses, such as textured walls and a soundscape that echoes the whispers and footsteps, intensifying the feeling of being lost.

Props: Hand-held lanterns or torches that characters use to navigate through the labyrinth, casting erratic shadows that heighten the sense of unease.

Sound: Employ a spatial sound design with echoing footsteps and distant murmurs, creating a sensory labyrinthine experience. Sounds should appear to move and shift around the audience, enhancing the feeling of disorientation.

Costume: Disjointed and asymmetrical pieces that create a sense of chaos and confusion, with fabrics that distort the body's shape, creating an unsettling, almost monstrous appearance.

(THE FORSAKEN navigate the labyrinth, their movements erratic and desperate. They communicate through guttural sounds, their language reduced to primal screams of fear and agony.)

THE FORSAKEN: *(With cries that resonate with pure, unadulterated fear)* No escape... No hope...

(THE BEASTS emerge from the shadows, their bodies a horrifying amalgamation of human and animal features. They move with a predatory grace, a constant, looming threat that embodies the audience's deepest fears.)

THE BEASTS: *(Growling, snarling, their sounds creating a primal symphony of danger and desire)* Hunger... Lust...

(THE SHADOWS manipulate the environment, their presence felt but never fully seen. They embody the oppressive force that controls the labyrinth, a representation of the dark, manipulative forces that govern human existence.)

THE SHADOWS: *(With voices that echo throughout the theatre, a constant reminder of the omnipresent darkness)* Control... Dominate...

(The scene descends into chaos, a sensory assault that seeks to break down the boundaries between actor and audience, reality and nightmare. The labyrinth becomes a living entity, a place where the darkest aspects of the human psyche are laid bare for all to witness.)

(The scene ends with a crescendo of sounds, lights, and scents that overwhelm the senses, leaving the audience in a state of shock and disorientation, forcing them to confront the dark, hidden corners of their own minds.)

Scene 4: The Confrontation

A raw, unfiltered confrontation takes place where characters defy societal norms and taboos. This scene is an explosion of violent physicality, where boundaries are challenged, and the audience is subjected to a raw, visceral experience that aims to shock and unsettle, questioning the very foundations of society and human nature.

CHARACTERS

THE AGGRESSORS: Figures who embody the darkest desires and impulses of humanity, their actions a shocking display of cruelty.

THE VICTIMS: Individuals who bear the brunt of the violence, their suffering a testimony to the depths of human depravity.

THE OBSERVERS: Characters who watch the confrontation with detached amusement, representing the apathetic and voyeuristic tendencies of society.

DESIGN

Lighting: Lighting is harsh and unflattering, exposing every detail of the violent confrontation. Flashes of red and white lights punctuate moments of physical clashes, while sudden blackouts can be used to elevate the shock factor, leaving the aftermath to the audience's imagination.

Set: A stark, dystopian setting that amplifies the chaos and violence of the confrontation. Incorporate broken structures and debris to create a sense of destruction and desolation. The space should allow for intense physical confrontations, possibly with multi-level platforms to add dynamics to the clashes.

Props: Objects that symbolise power and violence, such as chains, whips, or broken shards of glass that are used during the confrontations.

Sound: Integrate harsh, discordant sounds that amplify the violence and chaos, including sounds of metal clashing, screams, and crashing objects.

Costume: Tattered and distressed garments that reflect the violence and chaos of the scene. Pieces that allow for intense physical performance, displaying a sense of vulnerability and rawness.

(The AGGRESSORS take centre stage, their bodies contorted into grotesque parodies of human forms. They move with a brutal grace, their actions a horrific dance of violence and cruelty.)

THE AGGRESSORS: *(With voices that resonate with pure, malevolent power)*
Destroy... Devour... Defile...

(The VICTIMS are dragged onto the stage, their bodies bearing the marks of extreme violence. Their movements are pitiful and desperate, a futile attempt to escape the relentless assault.)

THE VICTIMS: *(Screaming, pleading, their voices creating a symphony of human agony)* Mercy... Please...

(The OBSERVERS stand at the edges of the stage, their bodies flickering in and out of existence. Their laughter is a chilling accompaniment to the violence, a cruel reminder of society's indifference to suffering.)

THE OBSERVERS: *(With cold, mocking voices that echo through the theatre)*
More... More...

(As the confrontation reaches its climax, the violence escalates to an unbearable intensity. The boundaries between aggressors and victims blur, creating a vortex of cruelty that threatens to engulf everything in its path.)

Act 3: The Revelation

Scene 5: The Mirror Room

In this minimalist setting, the focus shifts to the internal landscapes of the characters. It is a surreal room filled with mirrors, each reflecting not only the physical, but also the deeply buried aspects of each character's psyche, while the characters confront their deepest fears and desires. The dialogues are introspective, psychological, as the characters navigate the complex terrains of the human mind. The audience is drawn into this introspective space in a visceral, unsettling manner.

CHARACTERS

THE REFLECTIONS: Ethereal entities that mirror the darkest, most suppressed aspects of the other characters, revealing secrets, fears, and desires in a raw, unfiltered manner.

THE SELF-ACCUSED: Characters confronting their inner selves, a traumatic yet necessary journey into the depths of their own minds.

THE JUDGES: Shadowy figures that emerge from the mirrors, embodying societal expectations and norms, exerting an oppressive force on the individuals undergoing introspection.

DESIGN

Lighting: Lighting here is minimal yet sharp, creating an endless array of reflections within the mirrors. The use of focused beams to create illusions and distortions, exposing the characters to their inner turmoil, becomes vital. The lighting should work with the mirrors to create an immersive, kaleidoscopic effect that traps both characters and audience in a hypnotic trance.

Set: A minimalist set dominated by a multitude of mirrors arranged at varying angles, creating an immersive, kaleidoscopic space where reflections multiply infinitely. The floor should be reflective as well, enhancing the sense of depth and introspection.

Props: Minimal use of props, focusing instead on the reflections and movements of the actors, possibly incorporating simple, reflective objects that manipulate light and shadow in complex ways.

Sound: Design reflective soundscapes with fragmented dialogues and whispers that seem to emanate from the mirrors, encouraging introspection and the exploration of the unconscious.

Costume: Minimalist, with reflective elements that interact intriguingly with the mirror setup, creating a sense of duplication and infinity.

(THE REFLECTIONS materialise, emanating from the mirrors, their forms fluid and constantly changing. They communicate through a series of distorted, echoing sounds, creating a soundscape that is both beautiful and horrifying.)

THE REFLECTIONS: *(In haunting, resonant tones that reverberate throughout the theatre) See... Feel... Remember...*

(THE SELF-ACCUSED stand at the centre of the stage, their bodies racked with the torment of self-confrontation. They communicate through fragmented dialogue, their words echoing the distorted sounds produced by the reflections.)

THE SELF-ACCUSED: *(In broken, desperate voices that convey the agony of introspection) I am... I was... I will...*

(THE JUDGES appear from within the mirrors, their figures imposing and cold. They bear down on the self-accused, their voices a cacophony of criticism and condemnation.)

THE JUDGES: *(In harsh, authoritative tones that create a soundscape of oppression and judgement) Guilty... Unworthy... Conform...*

(The scene evolves into a swirling vortex of sound and imagery, a psychedelic exploration of the human psyche. The characters move in a dance that is both chaotic and structured, a representation of the complex, often contradictory nature of the human mind.)

(The scene culminates in a climactic confrontation between the individuals and their reflections, a battle that leaves no room for escape or denial. The audience is left with a profound, unsettling sense of having witnessed something both deeply personal and universally human.)

Scene 6: The Transformation

The atmosphere transitions once more, the boundary between the real and the surreal becomes increasingly permeable. Art forms converge in a climax where dance, music, and visual arts create a holistic theatrical experience. Physicality dominates as the transformation is expressed through vigorous, frenzied movements, transcending the limitations of language and culminating in an intense, climactic dance sequence that signifies rebirth and evolution.

CHARACTERS

THE ASCENDANTS: The primary characters, now evolved into beings who communicate through exquisite, complex dances, their movements a language more profound and primordial than words.

THE ORCHESTRA: Ethereal musicians who produce a symphony that reverberates through the cosmos, reflecting the harmony and discord inherent in the process of transformation.

THE ARTIST: A figure embodying the visual arts, their canvases capturing the fluid, ephemeral nature of the transformation occurring on stage.

DESIGN

Lighting: A transformative lighting design is needed, shifting from stark, isolating spotlights that highlight individual torment, gradually transitioning to a harmonious blend of soft, glowing lights that signify unity and metamorphosis. This transition should be fluid, embodying the journey from chaos to harmony, darkness to light.

Set: A fluid, open space that allows for the integration of various art forms, such as dance and visual art. Incorporate movable structures that can be manipulated by the actors to continuously transform the space, reflecting the transformative journey unfolding onstage.

Props: Objects that symbolise transformation, such as butterflies or masks that can be shed or altered during the performance, illustrating the metamorphic process occurring during this scene.

Sound: Develop a rich musical tapestry that integrates live music, dance, and visual art, fostering a holistic theatrical experience.

Costume: Fluid, transformative garments that allow for a full range of movement, facilitating the integration of dance and other art forms. Possibly incorporating elements that can be shed or altered during the performance, visualising the transformation occurring onstage.

(The ASCENDANTS appear, their forms no longer bound by the physical limitations of the human body. Their dance is an intricate, mesmerising ballet that speaks of suffering, joy, death, and rebirth.)

THE ASCENDANTS: *(Moving in a fluid, intricate dance that speaks of unity and divergence)* We become... We transcend... We transform...

(THE ORCHESTRA takes position, their instruments not of this earth, but conjured from the elements. The music they produce is both harmonious and chaotic, a reflection of the universal forces at play.)

THE ORCHESTRA: *(Producing a symphony that resounds with the birth and death of stars, a melody that encompasses the cycles of nature and time)* Hear us... Feel us... Join us...

(THE ARTIST manifests, a figure of shifting colours and forms. Their canvas captures the dance of the Ascendants, a visual representation of the transformative journey undertaken by the characters.)

THE ARTIST: *(Creating vibrant, shifting tableaux that echo the movements and melodies occurring on stage)* See... Understand... Remember...

(The scene reaches its pinnacle in a climactic sequence where all forms of art merge into one, creating a multisensory spectacle that engulfs the audience in a whirlpool of sensations, evoking profound emotional responses and insights.)

(As the scene draws to a close, the audience is left with a vivid, pulsating tableau that encapsulates the ephemeral nature of transformation, a testament to the potential for renewal and evolution inherent in all beings.)

Act 4: The Resolution

Scene 7: The Return

The play culminates in a return to the dream-like quality of the initial scene, but now infused with a newfound understanding and resolution. The non-linear narrative and intense physicality continue, challenging the audience's perception of reality and encouraging a deeper, more complex interpretation of the human condition. A labyrinthine garden bathed in the soft luminescence of twilight sets the scene. The fragmented realities and time loops reflect the transformed psyche of the characters who now embody a deeper understanding and acceptance of the complex tapestry of human existence.

CHARACTERS

THE ENLIGHTENED: Characters who have journeyed through the labyrinth of desolation and emerged transformed, their beings reflecting a harmonious amalgamation of light and shadow, the yin and yang of human nature.

THE GUIDES: Ethereal beings who navigate the enlightened through the new reality, their actions reflecting a delicate dance of guidance and companionship.

THE WEAVER: A mystical entity who weaves the threads of fate and time, their presence a constant reminder of the cyclical nature of life and the interconnectedness of all things.

DESIGN

Lighting: Lighting returns to a dream-like state, but with a newfound clarity. The use of blues and silvers creates a tranquil, ethereal atmosphere, reflecting a sense of understanding and resolution. Lighting transitions are gentle and flowing, creating a visual poetry that echoes the cyclical nature of existence portrayed in the scene.

Set: A cyclical return to the dream-like state of Scene 1, but with a newfound clarity. The set should reflect a sense of harmony and resolution, possibly with a central, symbolic structure that embodies the newfound understanding.

Props: Revisited symbols from earlier in the play but with new meanings, such as a repaired mirror or a blossoming flower, illustrating the themes of renewal and understanding.

Sound: Create a harmonious soundscape that reflects resolution and understanding, with sounds that evoke nature and tranquillity, such as gentle streams or soft breezes.

Costume: Ethereal and flowing garments that resonate with the newfound tranquillity and understanding depicted in the scene. A harmonious blend of earlier elements, reflecting the cyclical journey undertaken during the play.

(The ENLIGHTENED take centre stage, their bodies bearing the marks of their journey – a complex dance of strength and vulnerability, wisdom and naiveté.)

THE ENLIGHTENED: *(Communicating through a language of nuanced expressions and movements)* We witness... We understand... We embrace...

(The GUIDES emerge, beings of light and sound who assist the enlightened in navigating the new, complex landscape of reality. Their movements are a poetic dance that echoes the rhythms of the universe.)

THE GUIDES: *(Communicating through a symphony of celestial sounds and lights)* We guide... We protect... We inspire...

(The WEAVER appears, a figure shrouded in the mysteries of time and space. With deliberate and graceful movements, they weave the intricate tapestry of life, intertwining the past, present, and future into a cohesive, ever-evolving narrative.)

THE WEAVER: *(With a voice that resonates with the wisdom of the ages)* I bind... I create... I transcend...

(As the scene unfolds, symbols from earlier scenes reappear, but now they hold new meanings and depths, reflecting the transformation and growth experienced by the characters. The broken mirror is now a mosaic of experiences, the wilting flower blooms anew, representing the cyclical nature of life and the potential for rebirth and renewal.)

(The scene culminates in a final tableau, a harmonious and serene reflection of the journey undertaken, a testament to the resilience and adaptability of the human spirit. The audience is left with a profound sense of completion, a journey through the labyrinth of desolation that leads to enlightenment and understanding.)