

2022 David Harris Flaherty Undergraduate Library Scholarship Recipient

By Sophie Groves, Faculty of Fine Arts

Award-winning Essay

Theatre is an inherently ephemeral form of art. Each performance, an interaction between audience and performer, is a unique experience, one which cannot be recaptured. This makes the study of theatre rather complicated. Thus, as a Theatre major at the UVic, I have found the library's diverse resources to be invaluable to my studies.

Recently, one of my Theatre History courses (THEA-347) with Dr. Sasha Kovacs culminated in a creative project, which required me to create a performance-based work that operated within the legacy of modernist theatre practices. I created a performance script, titled *Legacy*, that attempts to rattle audiences out of their complacency towards climate change by immersing them in a horrifying, simulated experience of a climate crisis-induced dystopia. *Legacy* blends inspiration from the Italian Futurists' shocks to the senses, and from Antonin Artaud's overwhelming assault on the audience, to capitalize on theatre as an agent for change.

The research I conducted to support this project was extensive. Throughout the months leading up to the project, I borrowed countless playscripts from the library's collection, in order to inspire the style of my writing. I found groundbreaking playwrights, such as Judith Thompson, to be particularly thought-provoking. Additionally, I spent hours exploring the vast collection of materials on the Drama Online database. The archive provided me with playscripts, instructional resources, and video recordings of high caliber, professional performances (including recordings from the U.K.'s National Theatre). The robust background with which these resources provided me was invaluable. Instead of re-inventing the wheel to create a script that was innovative only when compared with popular plays, I was able to launch my creativity off of the mountain of works that I had researched, and use the tools forged by the artists before me to invent my own toolkit.

In order to inspire the political message of *Legacy*, I conducted searches through the library's online databases of newspaper articles: in particular, Canadian

Newsstream (ProQuest). Reading the articles related to climate change, especially those concerning Greta Thunberg and the recent climate strikes, fueled my passion and my urgency: both integral elements of Legacy.

When it came time to dive into more focussed work, I checked out stacks of books, anthologies, and articles about the theories of the Futurists and of Artaud. I was initially overwhelmed, but the library staff, as well as the navigation ‘help’ resources on the library’s website, helped me to hone my search, and discover the resources which were most relevant. The texts that I settled upon included: two books outlining the life of Artaud¹; a book discussing the Futurists’ contributions to theatre, including an anthology of the Futurist Manifestos and performance texts²; and a critical anthology, which included some of Artaud’s own works and manifestos³.

When working on my project, it was helpful to use the library computer workstations, where available, to take advantage of the double monitors. This allowed me to have multiple resources open at once, allowing me to keep my thoughts organized, and draw connections between the works I was studying.

Overall, the library resources provided me with a deep understanding of the theories upon which Legacy was building. It was especially invaluable to study the original texts and manifestos, written by the leaders of the avant garde movement themselves. Without all of this research and inspiration, I would not have been able to achieve, or even conceive of, the power and the innovation of Legacy.

¹ Greene, Naomi. Antonin Artaud: Poet Without Words. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1970.
Knapp, Bettina Liebowitz. Antonin Artaud, man of vision. New York, D. Lewis, 1969.

² Kirby, Michael, and Victoria Nes Kirby. Futurist Performance. New York, PAJ Publications, 1986.

³ Cardullo, Bert. “Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and The Spurt of Blood.” Theater of the avant-garde, 1890-1950 : A critical anthology, edited by Cardullo, B., and Knopf, R, Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 375-388.