

# *The Anonymous Actor*

*social theatre in action*



*Wales Actors' Company performs at Abergavenny Castle*

# a participatory theatre



This book seeks to set out its aims and document live the progress, as we go along. The book, associated channels and web site will be live updated. This is a living book of a social enterprise in action. This book is the sum of many years practical and conceptual work.

The following chapters layout corner stones of ethos of the work and continuous training.

Augustus Boal, imaged the actor as a 'Spectactor'. Both audience and performer. We see this more a community actor that engages in all aspects of the community as a service and as participatory 'Commactor' with cultural participation. It is vital in community performance that the acting and production values are clean and clear. Wales Actors' Company has always been as Peter Brook described it, 'Poor Theatre' or 'immediate theatre'. Theatre that runs on the barest minimum of artificiality, in set design and costume. Choosing rather to work in the wealth of natural surrounds, and to focus on performance and participation of audience imagination.

Imagining popular theatre as a catalyst for social cohesion and cultural celebration.

This is a proposed community theatre concept to be tentatively performing in Abergavenny Castle, seeks to redefine the role of theatre as a participatory, community-centered forum. Drawing inspiration from Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and the principles of participatory theatre, this festival approach aims to bridge the gap between professional and amateur artists, local businesses, and social organisations. By fostering collaboration, celebrating local Welsh culture, and addressing social issues without politicising them, Theatre Fenni aspires to create a space where art unites rather than divides. Most importantly of all the productions should be popular and not obscure. The aim after all is participation. We talk about 'instruction' but we mean learning from each other, just what a community can be. We learn how the arts can be a catalyst for collaboration and community wellbeing.

## Core principles

### 1. Participatory theatre can be a unifying force in community

If we embrace participatory theatre, inviting community members to engage not only as audience members but as co-creators, promoters, performers, facilitators and story tellers, we are half way to completion. This approach aligns with Joan Littlewood's vision of theatre as a democratic and inclusive space, where art is accessible to all and serves as a tool for social connection. We can avoid polarisation by focusing and enacting what unites us—shared stories, emotions, and aspirations. A pure theatre, without vast sets and technical overlay. This means working with professional and community actors. Where character and plot becomes before the actors status, the fame or status of the actor is secondary to the play, the actor is a mask -this is the anonymous actor. It is a style of ensemble playing, where we understand what theatres function is. This requires training and continues work on the part of the professional actor, to act as ensemble. Too many actors focus on their individual performance as a commercial venture and seek to outshine all around them. This has to be handle with greater subtly in social theatre and this takes work.

### 2. Celebrating Welsh Culture Alongside Global Classics

Theatr y Fenni as a tentative name, will showcase the richness of Welsh story telling, including performances inspired by the Mabinogion, a cycle of ancient Welsh myths and legends. Alongside these, will feature adaptations of Shakespeare and other global classics, creating a dialogue between local heritage and universal themes. This dual focus will not only celebrate Welsh identity but also attract a diverse audience, including tourists and locals.

### 3. Local businesses as stakeholders and collaborators

Local businesses and social enterprises will play a vital role in the festival's success, providing sponsorship, in-kind support, and collaborative opportunities. Restaurants, cafés, and hotels will benefit from increased tourism, while also contributing to the festival's sustainability. This partnership will foster a sense of shared ownership and pride, ensuring the festival's long-term impact on the local economy.

### 4. Up Skilling

The company will offer training programmes to up-skill traditional amateur and professional actors, designers, and directors, focusing them into "social or community actors." These individuals will work alongside professionals, gaining valuable experience while contributing to the festival's creative process. This initiative will empower locals, creating a legacy of talent and engagement that extends beyond the festival itself.

### 5. A Holistic Social Activity

This will entail a series of performances; it will be a celebration of local social activity.

Workshops, community performances, and partnerships with social organisations, like food banks ,help centres etc, Social prescribing may be a part of this process. There will be tangible impact on the community.

Profits from the festival will be channeled into supporting existing social initiatives, Such as the food bank, shelter and furniture banks and establishing new ones, creating a cycle of giving and empowerment. Money raised may also be used to support neighboring areas.

### 6. Addressing Social Issues Without Politics.

One of the key challenges of participatory theatre is addressing social issues in a way that fosters dialogue rather than division. We will approach this challenge by:

Observing and listening, not preaching: The performance may present social issues as themes for exploration and reflection, rather than as platforms for political messaging. Finding Common Ground. By focusing on universal human experiences—love, loss, hope, and resilience—the festival will emphasize what unites us rather than what divides us. 'Trauma Informed' awareness will be embedded in our work.

Creating Safe Spaces: Workshops and post-performance discussions will encourage open dialogue, allowing audiences to engage with complex issues in a supportive environment.



## Welsh Culture and Global Classics

The inclusion of Welsh culture, particularly the \*Mabinogion\*, alongside Shakespeare and other global classics, will create a rich tapestry of storytelling that resonates with diverse audiences. The Mabinogion, offers a unique opportunity to explore themes of myth, identity, and community, while Shakespeare's timeless works provide a bridge to universal human experiences. Together, these narratives will celebrate local heritage while inviting broader participation and understanding. Theatr y Fenni represents a bold imagining of theatre as a force for social cohesion, cultural celebration, and community empowerment. By embracing participatory theatre, involving local businesses, and celebrating Welsh culture alongside global classics, the festival will create a space where art unites rather than divides. Inspired by Joan Littlewood's vision and grounded in the needs and aspirations of the Abergavenny community, Theatr y Fenni has the potential to become a model for community-centred theatre festivals worldwide.

## Key Points for Implementation

**Community Consultation:** Engage locals in the planning process to ensure the festival reflects their needs and interests. *8g`k eupport the Welsh language Tgf`af L baeWfz*

**Partnerships:** Build strong collaborations with local businesses, charities, and social enterprises.

**Training Programmes:** Develop workshops to upskill community actors, designers, and directors

**Programming:** Balance Welsh cultural content (e.g., \*Mabinogion\*) with global classics (e.g., Shakespeare) to appeal to diverse audiences.

**Social Impact:** Channel festival profits into supporting local social organizations and initiatives. (Food Bank, Shelter ect)

By focusing on what unites us and celebrating the power of storytelling, Theatr y Fenni will not only entertain but also inspire, educate, and uplift the community it is part of.



# Community Theatre

Toward regenerative theatre

Paul Garnault



*We will start  
by  
storytelling .*

Perhaps Britain's most influential theatre director, Peter Brooke, clearly laid out in his seminal book *The Empty Space* the four states that characterise modern theatre. It is well to remind ourselves of his observations. As they provide a useful framework with in which to work.

- Deadly Theatre
- Rough Theatre
- Immediate Theatre
- Holy Theatre

He defines Holy Theatre as “the Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible.” Holy Theatre is generally concerned with making things that are invisible to us (e.g. human consciousness, human will, states of being, dreams, spirits and the forces around us) visible through the language and physical metaphors of theatre performance. This is the platform on which to build community theatre and the community performer.

Many if not all of the great pioneering practitioners, such as Joan Littlewood, Brooke, Boal, Grotowski and Brecht, were trying to point out the failings of contemporary modern theatre to engage community and to rescue it from its state of decline. They attempted to push its function to the maximum, but the arts infrastructure wanted none of it. In an age where theatre is underfunded and poorly understood and dominated by its cousins television and film, it has of necessity become more concerned with the commercial and funding targets and requirements imposed on it. It is a servant of many masters.

## Getting Started..

In order to become funded, theatre organisations must perform a complicated dance to incorporate administrative agendas. They become more concerned with an image of theatre as seen by the “administrators of the political will”, thus becoming more focused on fitting government categorisation than being creative or exploitative. Torn between the audience and the needs of the state, this form of theatre becomes schizophrenic in its being, unsure of its function or focus: to serve the Arts Council or the critics, the audience, or private speculators or one’s own creative impulses? Should we teach performance in these distortions of function, in a clichéd theatre unsure of its meaning? We must not be forced into this and the only way is to define ourselves outside of this system. We need to re imagine that function for the 21st century, through a regenerative community theatre experience?

Before we, as an audience, go to the theatre, we perhaps already know or have expectations of what we will see. Even if it is an experimental company, we already know the politics, the bits of swearing, some hard truths about society and actors pushing emotional range to the limit. We are rarely shocked or moved. Or in musical theatre with its set formula of sentimental emotional stock. We know the songs before they are sung. In fact all theatre is very formulaic and specific to its genre. It has to state its position to get funding. Funding is categorised and homogenised. It therefore must, of necessity become more garish on the one hand and more elite on the other.

Theatre however does have a clear function and genesis. It was always of the 'community' and 'spiritual' in function, as implicit in classical Greek theatre, medieval Mystery Plays and Shakespeare's theatre. Shakespeare speaks to the whole audience not just the sponsors.

Unfortunately the flags of the 'spectacle', 'cult of fame', “culture wars” and 'celebrity worship', and the constant need for selected groups to feel “more cultured than others”, the original social functions of theatre have been largely forgotten by the public. It has become the “Deadly Theatre” of Brook’s nightmare. Deadly Theatre fails to modernise, instruct or sometimes even entertain. This style of theatre concentrates on the act of imitation. Mimicking successes from the past and relying on old cultural tropes, instead of exploring the deeper meaning from the “invisible” or the true function of theatre, to reveal the social 'will’ of a text in catharsis.

Often when one asks how a performance was, the first things people mention is the set and costume, the spectacle and the celebrity of the actors taking part (and gossip about their private lives), as if this forms any part of the theatrical function. The function of theatre is not entertainment alone; as Brecht points out it has a deeper function. But as well as a Deadly Theatre there is also unfortunately the Deadly Audience that does not want a deeper function or even a real experience. They want the artificial. They are attracted to the black box of tricks that is the modern stage.

## In the Beginning.

Theatre's origins are deeply primal, from mankind's Mesolithic past, the community sitting around a fire, in the depth of night, performing the hunt and engaging in the mythic or performing possession by ancestors and worship of gods. This is theatre's roots, that led to the sacred mysteries of classical Greek theatre. The west however has a double genesis of theatrical origination. It first arose in the sacred rites of the pagan priesthood as classical Greek theatre but also again, much later in Christianity's Easter liturgy, in the medieval Catholic Mass, the resurrection performed again by priests. Banned eventually by the Church, it was taken on by the great medieval craft and trade guilds, and the community to become the Mystery and Passion plays. It was not until many hundreds of years later in the Renaissance that we see the two originations (classical Greek and liturgical Mystery plays) meeting in the form of the commercial Elizabethan theatre, the master of which was Shakespeare. Macbeth as a play is a perfect example of this meeting, at once high classical tragedy and also lowly Miracle play. It could be performed on a medieval cart or in a grand theatre.

"Theatre is its own reality" Artaud

*Theatre* means to "watch or behold" – the ancestor or gods, or to watch the resurrection. Its function was to produce a "catharsis" in an audience so powerful that "metanoia" would take place, a religious rapture that changed the "soul" and changed "karma". (Karma and drama both derive from words meaning action). This is not the experience or expectation in theatre today. But William Shakespeare, Konstantin Stanislavski and in his way Bertolt Brecht did expect it and actively worked to this end. This is the important message: if we are to envisage a new theatre that works with and is a serious part of *community*, we need to envisage a new "regenerative" and "spiritual theatre" training whose function is to help the community actor imagine potential. As Shakespeare states, "let us on your imaginary forces work".

At opposite ends of Europe, theatre practitioners tirelessly worked to give theatre and theatre training back its full function. They were undoubtedly aware of each other's work. Stanislavsky, Michael Chekov, Bertolt Brecht, JW Goethe, Augustus Boal, Jerzy Grotowski, Joan Littlewood, to mention a few, all spent a lifetime searching for a 'new' theatre. They all cited Shakespeare as their inspiration and Shakespeare sited life and the community.

## Towards a Community Actor

So how are we to teach rehearse and perform, in this day and age? How do we do this in a community setting? How are we to look at this other vision of what drama training, rehearsal and performance could be? Art should never be the mirror. It is the thing itself, according to Antonin Artaud. In *The Theatre and Its Double* he states it is its "own reality". So theatre needs to grow with the audience. Theatre he stated no longer has the DNA of classical Greek theatre, the karmic disinfectant of the soul or the Elizabethan universal exploration of power, humanity and karmic destiny. What we see today is more Molière than Shakespeare, filled with the angst and tittle-tattle of the elite, set in the face of a nihilistic culture and the fawning of celebrity. We see now that the 1660 Restoration was not restorative for theatre. Shakespeare's theatre did not survive the Civil War; today's theatre is descended from Molière. It is now all part of the great Disneyfication of the human experience.

It has become, as Grotowski called it, “Courtesan Theatre”, obsessed with the cult of sentimental individualistic ego, the “small” experience of being human, rather than the universal experience.

We need a new kind of performer and new kind of theatre. I suggest this lies in the community performer and a peoples theatre. This does not mean the end of professional actors but the addition of Community theatre and community actors. Who like amateur actors have other functions but are trained in community theatre. This is the Joan Littlewood paradigm re animated and re cast in a politically confused age.

When it comes to drama or theatre as part of the community, there are many outstanding theatre practitioners and teachers whose methods and systems have inspired regenerative theatre. However I don't think there is a single one (excepting Shakespeare of course) that does not credit Stanislavski as their progenitor. Some may point to Boal or Chekov, but Stanislavski was mentor and a father/teacher to both of them. In Stanislavski's long life he went through many tribulations (not least working under Soviet censorship). His work explored every area of theatre for over six decades. There is nothing in his late period that is not in Chekov and nothing in Chekov that cannot be found in Stanislavski. These two practitioners can work side by side. Not to collaborate leads to stagnation and the formation of elites and closed-shop exclusion. We are heading for a world in which one must be licensed to teach Chekov, even when Chekov himself taught Stanislavski's System in his acting classes at Darlington.<sup>1</sup> In short, to exclude the masters and exalt the prodigy, is to misunderstand the holistic circular evolution of conceptual ideas and methodology in theatre training.

Today the System is taught to varying degrees in most UK drama schools. British theatre however remains deeply suspicious of Stanislavski and as with Steiner, he is often derided in Britain, particularly because of his Goethe-like “physical action research”, his use of “soul” and “spiritual” and the realm of “what if” in the manifestation of the Imagination. Theatre as a higher spiritual plane of essential forms, acting through the soul of will and feeling are not British! They don't like that kind of talk at all.

In Stanislavski's book *An Actor Prepares* (the Russian title would be better translated “The Actor's Work, Work on Oneself in the Creative Process of Incarnation”), he describes the movement of the actor in terms that reflected eurhythmy's aim in creating the physical embodiment of spiritual movement. This art of “visible speech and music” requires the performers to: 'develop an inner, essential sense of rhythm and sound that shapes and motivates movement in order to find spiritual truth.

you must always remember the inner connection of things. You must know that , external activity permeated with purpose, is a spiritualising of bodily activity. You have to establish a completely invisible internal movement of energy as the foundation for physical exercises, not a visible external one... We call this “the internal sense of the passage of energy through the body with the sense of movement. Stanislavski presented the same assertion of the need for truth in movement and an internal sense of rhythm, as did Steiner, as did Shakespeare. This correlation is not a coincidence.

Stanislavski wrote, “when an actor speaks a word onstage, we need to imbue it with the essential divine essence of the word. Even though the vocalisation of the word might come out in diverse ways, depending on the ‘given circumstances,’ it must have this essence – the actor must feel the letters, syllables and sense their souls.” Stanislavski.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Carriere, *Stanislavski*





Wales Actor's Company in performance. Tretower and Abergavenny....



Stanislavski's System is nothing if it is not the embodiment of "active physical research," and Stanislavski's work on physical action, simplifies the technique of acting. Stanislavski was greatly involved in research on the medium of the theatre as a safe means to express deep (researched) spiritual realities, a way to collectively look deeply into the sensory-driven heart of humanity and find the motivational forces, the objectives and the "will forces" of the human soul, those active "soul forces" driven by purpose, will and imagination. It is a Science of theatre. It is this "activity permeated with purpose" that is the very essence of a regenerative theatre that I propose as a basis of drama pedagogy. It has the roots of catharsis and metanoia but now it is mediated through the "imagination journey" of the "soul forces" undertaken on the stage. All else in theatre without this "active movement" and purpose is a pale shadow. As Shakespeare states (in what could be a critique of today's Deadly Theatre), *it is:*

*'a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage.  
And then is heard no more.  
It is a tale Told by an idiot,  
full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.'*

*Macbeth Shakespeare.*



### **Stanislavsky: Truthful Action and "Will with Purpose"**

Stanislavsky's system is grounded in the pursuit of psychological realism and emotional authenticity. Central to his approach is the concept of "will with purpose," where every action on stage is driven by a clear intention or objective. This aligns with the idea of giving purpose to action as a restorative force, countering the detachment often found in post-industrial systems. Stanislavsky believed that truthful action emerges from an actor's deep engagement with their character's motivations, filling the "nothing" of the stage with meaning. Stanislavsky also introduced the "magic if," encouraging actors to ask, "What would I do if I were in this situation?" This imaginative exercise allows actors to inhabit their roles fully while maintaining a connection to their own humanity. His emphasis on physical action as a pathway to emotional truth laid the groundwork for modern acting techniques.

### **Brecht: Alienation and Critical Distance**

Brecht's approach, in contrast, sought to disrupt the illusion of realism and emotional immersion. His concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) aimed to create a critical distance between the audience and the performance, encouraging them to think rather than feel. Brecht wanted audiences to engage with the social and political messages of his plays, not to lose themselves in the emotional lives of the characters. This is reflected in the idea of "standing beside a character" — Brecht's actors often demonstrated their roles rather than fully embodying them, commenting on their actions and motivations. However, Brecht understood that immersion is a necessary precursor to detachment. Actors needed to fully grasp the emotional and psychological reality of their roles before they could effectively alienate the audience. This duality — immersion and detachment — highlights the complexity of his approach and its potential to reveal something extraordinary in theatre, something that moves people profoundly by challenging them to see the world differently.

### **Joan Littlewood: Collective Creation and Social Purpose**

Joan Littlewood, influenced by both Stanislavsky and Brecht, synthesised their methods in her work with Theatre Workshop. She was committed to creating socially relevant and accessible theatre, particularly for community audiences. Littlewood's approach emphasised collective creation, improvisation, and physicality, aligning with the idea of physical action and the communal journey across the "Empty Space."

Littlewood's productions often blended the emotional depth of Stanislavsky's realism with Brecht's political critique, creating a dynamic and engaging style of theatre. She believed in the transformative power of performance, not just for the audience but for the actors as well. Her work was rooted in a sense of community and shared purpose, reflecting the idea of giving permission to cross the sacred stage — both as an individual and as part of a collective.

### **Synthesis: Filling the "Empty Space"**

Stanislavsky, Brecht, and Littlewood each approached this space differently, but all sought to fill it with purposeful action. Stanislavsky focused on the inner truth of the actor, Brecht on the critical engagement of the audience, and Littlewood on the collective energy of the ensemble. The restorative power of purpose in action lies at the heart of their methods. In a world often dominated by nihilism and disconnection, theatre offers a space where action can be imbued with meaning, where individuals and communities can come together to explore what it means to be human. Whether through the emotional immersion of Stanislavsky, the critical distance of Brecht, or the collective creativity of Littlewood, the stage remains a sacred space for transformation and discovery.

## Practical Regenerative Community Theatre

In “acting” we find the same drive to objective or will force, as, say, in building a stool or painting a picture. The same resistance of the materials can be found in “counter objectives” and opposing forces. They are both to be worked with on the lathe, on the canvas or on the stage. What stops or holds back the artist is the resistance of material. How to overcome or work with this is the ~~playing~~ character and of making a stool or painting. In woodwork there must be a lathe and in theatre there must be a stage. In weaving, a loom, in theatre, a structured circle performance, a working area. The lathe, the loom, the painting and the stage are all one.

The wooden stool or a painting and a theatrical character are both held in the imagination until executed by the will through action. The obstacle produces the effort of “will”. Stanislavski also stated that sometimes one should move first and that then the will shall follow. This is true of both crafts. For example if a student is to play a part, they must first meet the material and find the movement in the objectives of the character. For instance if Juliet’s overriding objective is to “be free”, we can break that down into the movement of say “yellow”, warm, open and expressive. Like yellow light, wanting to dispel the darkness, Juliet seeks freedom and moves forward.

We can help the actor to move through “yellow” imagination and physically explore the “open” and “shining” qualities of the character, which like the sun move into a physical incarnation – whilst they move toward an immediate real world objective, say, to perhaps look for a ring or find a letter. This imagination of inner movements and objectives combine to bring the student into the moment, the incarnation of now. This simple System is in both Stanislavski and many of the great practitioners. It is also the essence of theatre, what is “invisible made visible”. In a tree is a stool, in the marble the face which the creative will makes visible.

And then we share this creation with others in the “lawfulness” of performing the action in front of community. This is an ancient rite of passage. Performance is analogous to giving back to community, in offering not the craft work but one’s own performance to the community, sharing a collaborative “soul journey” or being the “imaginator” with the community. But this creation must be original and “one’s own”, not a pastiche or a copy of performance.







## To walk across the stage

The simple act of crossing over the boundary and onto a stage in front of people to perform is an essential act of humanity, and it should be a pure act of will, a pure objective. It comes up against the wall of fear, focusing on the objective, stepping forward into the light, grasping the community and communicating. Focus and move forward. In many ways I am asking the actor not to “act” but to move to an “imaginary objective”. This is fundamental. Stanislavski asked the actor to move into the four kingdoms: as an animal, a mineral, a plant, all in a human context. Move like a cat, light as pumice stone, thorns like a rose: these domains make up the character as do the elements of fire, earth, water and air. These are also the atmospheres. Shakespeare would often embed these qualities in his character’s names, e.g. Ariel for air. To walk on stage is a spiritual act of making the invisible visible and the inside outside.

We need to avoid the personal “emotional memory” and biography of the actor and simply asking them to play the “universal objective”, not a pastiche of naturalism.



Macbeth Swansea. WAC  
ltd

By creating a new original “given circumstance” and a “circle of attention” on stage, the student can explore the will of an objective, in resistance to the given circumstance. This is not the realm of drama therapy. It is the therapeutic effect of theatre.

As the student steps forward, grasping the rehearsed objective of the will of the character, to cross an empty space (the stage) and to cross it as if it were a forest or an Italian garden (imagining movements of the character), they perform a text as “other” to “others”, purely and simply playing the will force and the imagination.

This is an act of cathartic restoration and the *raison d'être* for theatre and drama education.

## Template of a rehearsal

- a) The 'Objectives' of System Acting:

Actors should find their own 'neutral'.

(The use of "neutral" deserves more space than this but introducing inclusivity in a drama session must take first place over any system<sup>5</sup>.)

Neutral is a settled position between relaxation and action. This should be done in a circle (the Circle of Attention) with a group. It is the quiet starting point for a session and its end. A position in which to start with energy and focus and to clear the day's work. (Neutral is part of many systems, including Goethe, Stanislavski, Tai Chi). From this neutral we can progress to playing with imaginary objects, passing them around the circle and expanding into the giving of imaginary gifts to each other, thus waking the imaginary forces.

- b) SAActors should then be guided to study the movements of animals and plants that pertain to the characters and the play, demonstrating and teaching each other, for example teaching each other physically how a cat moves.
- c) They should undertake the "work" the character does, from imaginary weaving to pretend forge, following the movements of that activity Juliet for instance may weave and Romeo work in the Friar's Garden. The group demonstrates the physical movement of this to each other. Now in the famous balcony scene, Juliet weaves whilst Romeo gardens!

We would also examine the quality of minerals and plants that pertain to the characters and explore their sense of environment.

Then we would work with text, always up on our feet moving, never sitting down. Working out the inner flow of the character and the text and discovering the Objectives. Working the inner colour of the person. This can then be worked into a movement session. Always working in a circle breaking out and returning to the circle of the intention and into neutral. Always coming back to a neutral stance and a letting go of the character work. We take off the 'mask of character' and lay it before us, ready for the next session.

Thus in our session template we have worked with:

The Objective: the 'Will focus' and the 'effort' of movement.

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<sup>5</sup> *Towards an Inclusive Acting Pedagogy*. Christie Honoré, University of Hawai'i.



We begin to ask “What does the character want right now?”, “What if?” and The four W’s: Why?, What?, Where?, When?

As we explore characters physically, we may even look at the elements. The Actor is being asked to explore, not to be ‘directed’ but encouraged to explore. Thus creative freedom is being fostered in our actors. The creative forces are engaged through improvisation of the objectives.

### **The Objective**

The Will focus and the Labon directions. What does the character want right now? Engaging the four elements and the four kingdoms.

Example 1: Macbeth wants to be loved by his wife. So his objective is to do things that make her happy. The four W’s: Why, What, Where, When.

Example 2: To get from one side of the room to the other. Example 3: To become king. Be physically tall.

### **The Obstacle**

(The resistance of material). What stands in the way or stops the character’s will?

Example 1: Lady Macbeth is not pleased with anything Macbeth does.

Example 2: The floor is sticky (increase the stickiness as you go).

Example 3: There is a piece of string tied between you; keep it tight as you act the scene. Then do it without the string.

Example 4: She is water, you are fire. When she speaks, she puts the fire out.

### **The Sub-Objective**

Example 1: To become king.

Example 2: Cross the sticky floor whilst trying to look cool. Example

3: Circle each other whilst keeping the string taught, whilst vocalising some words from the text.

Example 4: Use elemental non-contact eurythmic movements to push each other out of the circle.

### **The Super Objective**

- 1) To be loved.
- 2) To be tall and take up space.
- 3) To be “fire”: movements, spirals and swirls.



These objectives work on the physical imagination and the “given circumstance” to engage the “active imagination.”

The actors do not have to “act” or use their own emotions, they only need to play the objective. They will experience a control of will and a great joy in meeting the other. They will find resistance a playful thing.

Actors should always work from a recognised text. Improvisation that is not based around a trusted text asks the actor to fall back on their own experiences and emotions, which is drama therapy, rather than the therapeutic nature inherent in performing theatre.

The actor must always be working toward some sort of focused performance. For our actors today the simple tasks of will, objective and counter-will obstacle (resistance of the material) provide a safe framework in which to explore action, imagination and develop character. This simplified approach leads away from commercial acting, ego and vanity to pure performance.

In woodwork for instance, we see the leg of the chair we wish to make, we even might see the whole chair in imagination, an “imaginary object”. We take it into the will of doing and we feel the resistance of the material. We overcome the resistance, or we succumb to the tragedy of a broken piece of wood. The action of the “will” leads to the chair and the catharsis of gifting the chair to another human being. The recovery from the loss of a failed chair, or a tragic scene in theatre, played in front of the community, produces the “catharsis of loss” in regenerative theatre. Communal sense of loss is the healer of individual sense of loss. This is the tragic function and ironically the comic function.

The fusion of active imagination and will forces produces the world we live in as it produces the power of theatre. If these intentions and image are not given the correct intention and will force, the world is corrupted at its source image. The chair is never completed or worse still collapses in the imagination and in reality. It is therefore vital that the text of the play or script is universal in its emotional scope. Steiner thought this vital in drama education: the characters in Shakespeare’s plays come “not from human intellect but from a power kindled and fired in the human being. It is this power that we must seek again if we would develop the true ideal of humanity”.

Finally, should we be teaching our actors Stanislavski? Absolutely not. The methodologies are for us to employ to help the actor's progression.





The main factor in any form of creativeness is the life of a human spirit, that of the actor and their part, their joint feelings and subconscious and conscious creation.

STANISLAVSKI

Artistic creativity, in bringing soul and spirit forms into manifestation on the stage, heralds a new dramatic art for the future.

STEINER

Unless the theatre can ennoble you, make you a better person, you should flee from it.

STANISLAVSKI



# Making Shakespeare

*Playing Shakespeare in the community*

“let us... / On your imaginary forces work.”  
William Shakespeare

“Speech and drama must have a systematic training.”

Iambic pentameter is the underlining meter or rhythm structure that forms the pulse in which Shakespeare’s work lives. When we listen to it and work with it, we see that iambic pentameter is the rhythm of the human heart: ‘da DUM, da DUM, da DUM, da DUM, da DUM’. A perfect example is Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day.

Shall I | compARE | thee TO| a SUM | mer's DAY  
da DUM | da DUM | da DUM | da DUM | da DUM

This is the first foundational pure image of Shakespeare, the geometry and beating of the human heart from which stems the 'god-like reason' to imagine. If we are made in God's image, it is surely in the imagination that we are most like an infinite creator.

Shakespeare creates all his work with this heart pulse and its variations. It is from this human rhythm that Shakespeare's words flow and characters incarnate. They lead us into worlds, peopled with a living presence, that have thrilled audiences and actors for over 400 years and still transform the space today. That space is the 'sacred stage'. These creations are not of the past, they are created now, afresh, in this moment.

Shakespeare's characters continue to stand before the soul as living figures... This, I believe, reveals how deeply Shakespeare's characters are rooted in the spiritual world, which is what Goethe experiences unconsciously in his devotion to the Shakespeare dramas.

Rudolf Steiner (1922b, p. 36)

... a power lies in his dramatic work that not only always gives us fresh enthusiasm but also kindles within us - in our imaginations, in our spiritual natures - our own creative powers. Shakespeare has a wonderfully timeless power and, in this power, he is modern, as modern as can be.

Rudolf Steiner (1922c, p. 218)

Jan Kott states:

Shakespeare belongs to the renaissance and at the same time is most modern indeed. He is violent and cruel and brutal: earthly and hellish; evokes terrors well as dreams and poetry; is the most true and improbable, dramatic and passionate, rational and mad, eschatological and realistic.

*Shakespeare our Contemporary* (1965, p. 286)

Shakespeare's works have a karmic energy that affects all who take part in a performance. By karmic I mean the will of volitional action. His characters have such will force in them that as actors and as an audience we fully engage in the drama. It is as if our own personal karmic forces are entangled in the action. This, we can say, is a form of catharsis of heart, through the imagination.







Rehearsals of Joan  
Littlewood's *'Oh what  
a Lovely War*

### A gentle revolutionary

Shakespeare was a gentle revolutionary. Described as 'sweet and gentle' and 'humble' by his contemporaries, he nonetheless challenged the balance of society. His plays were deeply controversial in a way we today do not fully see. Shakespeare examined the misuse of power and rule, the oppression of the young by the old and vice versa, and the intricacies of human love and relationships. The balance of humanity is in each line. He examined the use and misuse of the supersensible in human affairs in a truly revolutionary depth. He was a Renaissance man, ever enquiring and gentle. His plays for his time are not overly judgemental or vindictive. The hero admits his follies. His villains find dignity and their own judgement. His plays breathe humanity, and the heartbeat of humanity is the conveyor of the play. The plays are crucibles of this humanity and a reflection of the Renaissance's existential concerns.

In contrast, the Puritan city fathers of the London Council had other concerns. They tried to hold the Renaissance back. Deeply conservative and believing in the total subjection of youth to age and obedience to authority, the explosion of the 'Theatre of Imagination' was a particular target of their fear. It was felt to be unsuitable to the 'Christian Commonwealth'. Universities also banned all their students from theatrical performances. This is the



toxic environment in which Shakespeare worked, and hence the idea that he worked consistently at the Globe Theatre is misleading; the Globe and indeed all theatres were regularly closed by the city fathers. It seems they took every opportunity for this. The Puritanical attack on the imagination found its traction in the Renaissance as a reaction to it. The theatre was seen a place of corruption and the devil.

Furthermore, it is dangerous because Satan, retaining his angelic incorporeality, can insert images into it without any agency of the senses, thus tempting the will with imaginations of such vices as could never have been conceived merely from experience.

Miller, *The New England Mind: the Seventeenth Century*, p. 257

More succinctly the Puritans believed that, “Because the imagination is not bound by objects immediately before the senses it is the freest of all the faculties. Its constructions need not correspond to the real world. Therein lies its danger.” For a puritan, the world has one single reality and the imagination must be censored, never mind the horrors taking place in everyday reality. Fundamentally, this was about control.

Francis Bacon saw the ‘idols’ found in the imagination a block to true science. The only rational reality was to be seen by science: test and dissect and experiment, to find the whole from the parts. The ability of the imagination to perceive and grasp on a deeper level seemed against reason and rationality; it was a corrupt idol.

### The heartbeat of the imagination

Einstein contradicts this methodology; his preferred method was deploying his imagination by using mental models which he called thought experiments. Thus he saw relativity visually.

We are still trapped in the puritan hostility to the imagination and cornered by Bacon’s ideology of an ultimately knowable reality. Imagination and Shakespeare show us that reality is infinite in its variety. This is the sticking point of world views to this day.

What piece of work is a man, how noble in reason,  
how infinite in faculties, in form and moving,  
how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in  
apprehension, how like a god!

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II Scene 2

Our infinite faculties are still trapped under a puritanical ideology of the world. We live with a deprivation and depreciation of the infinite imagination.

However the heartbeat lives on and this beat is an ideal place from which to work on the human imagination. Shakespeare's most controversial exposition is his Theatre of Imagination, the 'Muse of Fire that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention'. This is the great blasphemy that a Man is like a god in faculty and can create infinite realities.

### Teaching Shakespeare

I would like to set out the case for teaching this faculty that is so indicative for Shakespeare, to young and mature people alike, through physical performance, 'action', and imagination, 'heart' can be encouraged. Thus heart/imagination, will/mind, action/physicality. We should teach, not as a desk-based approach to theatre, nor as an academic exercise of analysis, nor marionettes to be moved around a stage, nor as a pantomime of costume drama of swords and daggers, but rather as a physical experience of text, rhythm, will and active imagination.

It is not good enough to do a classical performance without teaching the building blocks that lead to authentic performance and the understanding of performance techniques, nor is it acceptable to do the reverse and teach the techniques without performance. This is then offered to the community.

Shakespeare is increasingly, if not completely, being removed from the school curriculum. He is seen as old-fashioned, reactionary and too difficult. This is perhaps a reaction to and a result of deadly theatre performances. Shakespeare's work is so mistrusted in contemporary education because of the connotations of these reactionary performances. Theatre often treats Shakespeare as an historical museum piece, to be preserved in the concrete of a false 19th-century Victorian image, not as a living artwork that must breathe and pulse. Whatever the cause, this is the same impulse that originally opposed theatre in the Elizabethan age, the fear of the human imagination.

A Shakespeare production must be held 'open', as immediate theatre, and that is the hardest thing to do in an age of the opinionated. We must explore rather than dictate, examine not desiccate, allow to flow and not impose. It is not a theatre of cruelty but a theatre of human possibility and potential, despite the fragilities. The director must explore, not impose.

### Shakespeare our contemporary

Marchette Chute states in Shakespeare of London that "the 19th Century scholars had done a great disservice to Shakespeare and Elizabethan theatre".





They had not understood that the groundlings were in fact young apprentices and not uneducated louts. Shakespeare was expanding their horizons, opening them to a free thinking future. The Victorians ignored this and attempted to change the plays themselves, to over-produce them and remove vulgarity.

They could not grasp that the pre-puritan British character was a million miles from the reserved Victorian puritan. Elizabethan audiences would weep as one during a cathartic scene, with great howls, and in the comedies laugh until they could not breathe, falling to the floor; a far cry from Stratford's theatre of today. The great universities of today that study Shakespeare are the very same universities who banned their students from seeing his work during his lifetime. We are the descendants of the puritans not the Elizabethans. Shakespeare reminds us of that narrowing of mind and language when we enter his work.

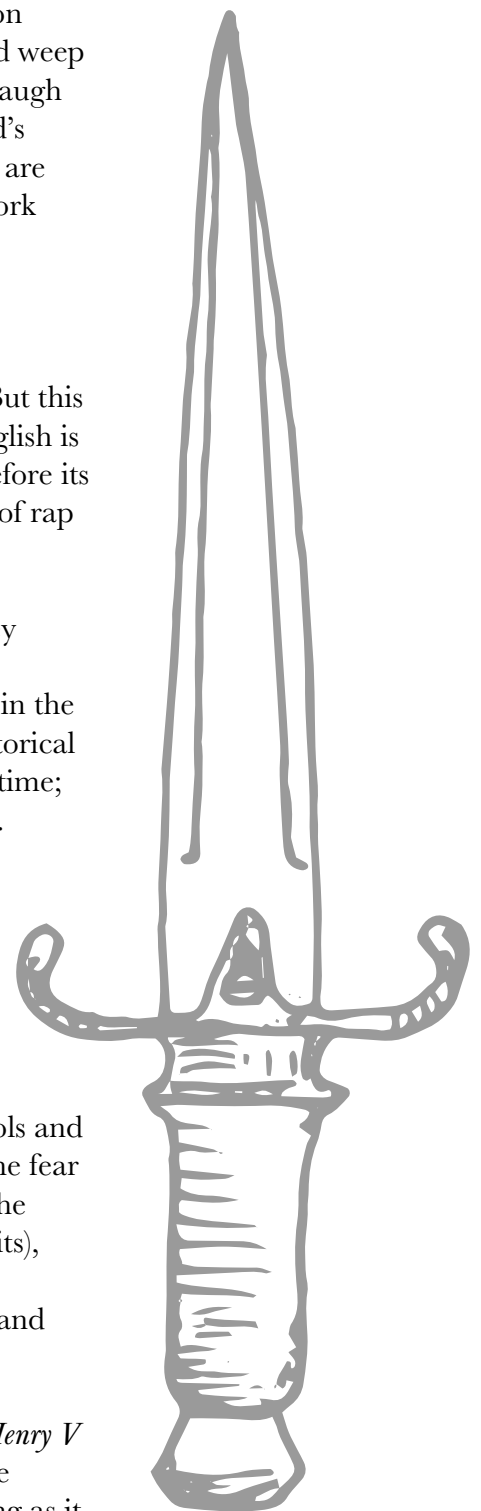
Some cite the language as a barrier and suggest modernising the text. But this is to ignore English at its most robust and expressive. Shakespeare's English is muscular and vibrant as befits a language at the height of its powers, before its puritanical neutering. After all, students can comprehend the intricacy of rap and hip hop, so why not iambic pentameter and verse?

Shakespeare's plays can seem reactionary, imperialist propaganda. They do reflect a time when Britain was not democratic but a cruel dynastic dictatorship, at war with its puritanical self and the world, (soon to end in the 1643 closure of theatres and civil war). But Shakespeare escapes his historical straitjacket despite and because of the harsh censorial conditions of his time; he transcends the confines of narrow and oppressive thought structures. He liberates himself and the audience through a supreme act of human imagination, and this is the gold that needs to be mined for the student: the ability to inspire the imaginative forces of the human soul.

### The dagger of the mind

It is these very imaginative forces that are still under attack in our schools and universities today and often in the workplace too. This has to do with the fear of corruption of the image in the human psyche. Shakespeare exhorts the actor to drop his fancy props, swords, leather boots (and fashionable suits), 'lendings' borrowed from the rich merchants and aristocracy for the performance. He also asks us to imagine the wars, the lovers, the kings and queens and see them in the mind.

Extolling the imagination as the supreme stage, Shakespeare states in *Henry V* that his theatre company only has five rusty foils/swords and suggests we leave that lack behind and instead look at the marvel of the human being as it undergoes its many trials, failures and triumphs through the imagination. We must make our Shakespeare 'as modern, modern as can be', and stop this false





Indoor Performance:  
Twelfth Night, Shakespeare.  
WAC Ltd

idealisation of representation of the past through the falsification of Disney-like costume dramas, in which the imagining is done for you, in film-like 'reality'. This is to politicise history and weaponise its image, and weaponise our children into believing the hero must have a metal sword and suit of armour or a gun - rather than a mental sword and a suit of courage. Leaving 'nothing to the imagination' is the call of the modern 4k media. To imagine is to be human!

In Shakespeare's performances the actors wore contemporary clothes on stage with one or two added symbolic 'historical' additions. Fight scenes were kept to a minimum and killings often took place off stage with Aristotelean decorum. It is simply a fact that Elizabethan audiences did not witness costume dramas as we do today. Violence on stage was heavily practised by his contemporaries but Shakespeare was revolutionary and exceptional in not pandering to this taste for gore, for the most part anyway. If we think of his plays as bloody, I suggest that this is from modern interpretations that elongate and fill productions with fight scenes and theatrical blood.

Shakespeare teaches us that the dagger is of the mind. Let us not put blood and swords into the hands of people as a solution to violence. This image is all too often in film and television. When Macbeth comes from



Macbeth. Tretower  
Wac Ltd

the tomb, his hands should have no blood on them, until the imagination is used. His first battle is described, not shown. Nor is he beheaded on stage. Shakespeare leaves these things to the mind. When Macbeth hears the bell strike, we do not need a stagehand banging a gong (often just after the line!), lest we miss the sound of the bell in the words that follow.

‘I go and it is **done**; the **bell** invites me. Hear it not, **Duncan**, for it is a **knell**. That summons thee to heaven or to **hell**.’

We hear its tone in ‘done’ and ‘Duncan’ and ending vibration mutating ‘bell’, ‘knell’ and its after-rhyme in ‘heaven or to hell’. We are left with the bell’s murdering sound ringing in our minds: pure onomatopoeia, the engaging of the senses.

We do not need painted flats of castle walls. Nor should we update with door bells, guns and modern clothes and set the production in a coffee bar; this again is an overlay. The effect we want is for costume to be neutral and not to be the focus like a fashion show. Costume should only aim to emphasise the performer. Character costume should be at a minimum; one jacket or a hat will do. The actor will invest imagination in these character props. The performance will be all the richer for less distraction:

And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
On your imaginary forces work.  
Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,  
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder:  
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;  
Into a thousand parts divide on man,  
And make imaginary puissance;

Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act I, Prologue

### We are all actors

Shakespeare's theatre is a theatre of the senses, a laboratory of imaginary forces. Here we also see clearly that the cast are doubling up and playing 'many parts'. We are not looking at the actor as one person but as many characters. We 'piece out' imperfections with our thoughts.

This doubling up was a common practice among touring companies and again it gives the audience a much deeper experience to join the actor in numerous portrayals. In a way it frees the ego of the actor from one particular part and focuses them on a contribution to the whole. But it also frees the audience to understand that we are all actors playing our part in the world. And the heart beats on.

We need to be aware of what is really being said to us by Shakespeare, not what we think is being said. Shakespeare is at great pains to remove his own ego from the work and so should teachers, directors, actors and audiences.

Shakespeare's great achievement is to hold back the exigencies of his personal biography and allow something universally human to inspire his artistic skills poetically and dramatically.

The spiritual content is undisguised in Shakespeare. It is an open invitation and an urgent expectation that we become active participants.

Shakespeare's work is the celebration of the individual in the quest to become free, conscious and co-responsible in the creation of a world where human dignity, courage for the truth and love are sovereign.

Rudolf Steiner and Andrew Wolpert, *Shakespeare - Becoming Human*



We know Shakespeare's anonymity is his commitment to the universal. William Shakespeare, is the actor from Stratford, as versed in the stage techniques of his time as he is in the knowledge of the human soul. You do not need to be a highborn aristocrat or highly educated academic or even a priest to have those qualities. We do not need to know his biography; his work is the biography.

As stated earlier, Shakespeare's work was vilified by the academics of his time. They called him 'shake-scene', 'shag bag' and 'upstart crow', often citing his lowly origins and his appeal to 'common' people. This appeal came from his ability to transport and transform the audience through imagery and dramatic appeal to the imagination. He knows how to allow the audience to experience catharsis; this points to total theatrical mastery. Only an actor would have that in-depth understanding. It was noted by his contemporary Ben Jonson that Shakespeare had 'small Latin and less Greek'. That would not have been the case if he were educated at a university of the time. The relevance of this is that Shakespeare can be accessed by all, not just the highly educated.

## Playing Shakespeare

There are notably few stage directions in a Shakespeare play because the verse serves that purpose. The dramatic action of the lines is related to the physical action required. Nor are there any lighting or set changes; Shakespeare is continuous action. Steiner reports his extreme annoyance at English theatre's habit of deploying a Molière-like "episodic staging and curtains, black out and set changes after every scene".

If as an actor you play a Shakespearean role consecutively over a number of weeks you can feel a process take place as described above: the rhythms, the sounds, the highs, the lows, as the play progresses. An actor can pinpoint the moments when the audience will become 'transported'. The actor himself is transformed and feels the character come to life. It is here where the 'supersensible influence' takes control. The training for this is in Stanislavski's study of 'given circumstance' and active imagination. The teacher needs to instigate this by letting the play and the actor breathe. This breathing comes from taking a natural approach to text and its awakening on stage by systematic holistic work.

Shakespeare did not oversee the printing of his works and much of the scenic divisions are later impositions. These plays were not meant to be read or studied. Attempting to find patterns must come from playing the texts. It is also noted that these plays were designed to be cut and adapted according to circumstance. Attempting to find patterns in a modern text is to misunderstand the circumstances in which they were forged. The patterns, if there are patterns, are in the thoughts and feelings the plays convey. It is hard for scholars to imagine patterns in thought and geometry in feeling.

## Sample rehearsal exercises in classical performance

The purpose is to enable young people to engage naturally in this process.

Every drama department should have a copy of *Impro* by Keith Johnston. This sixties' classic contains the building blocks of theatre games that work directly on the imagination. Departments should build up their own tool kit of theatre games based on this work and their own experimentation.

Games should always be linked to a production or performance, or a scene or character. Not to do so will very soon alienate students and humiliate them. Explain to the student what each game means and how it enhances their performance. The teacher's hand is open.

The training of an Elizabethan actor started in childhood and was exacting and comprehensive; it did not stop but continued throughout an actor's life. It would have included by necessity:

- Voice and speech
- Verse and poetry
- Dancing and movement
- Acrobatics and circus skills
- Singing
- Stunt fighting
- Character acting – mask and Commedia dell'Arte
- Improvisation
- Metaphysics
- Memory and imagination

These still apply today in a stage school training but we can perhaps narrow them and teach in a more integrated way for community actors.

Voice and speech: including singing and breathing

Imagination: including focus, circle of attention, visualisation and improvisation

Movement: including , ballet, Laban movement, Transformative

Movement, contemporary, rhythmic massage

Metaphysics: concepts including being, knowing, identity, time and space

We should also use these categories in regular measure in rehearsal, not as a one-off workshop or abstract training but in production. They are part of a practice of the community and professional actor.



Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air:  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, THE TEMPEST, ACT 4 SCENE 1





# ‘Tvorchestvo’: the creative process

*Moving in Colour*

Paul Garnault

**T**his chapter presents three exercises from a set of twelve practices designed to allow the development of performance senses and build a concept of what acting and theatre could be – in turn laying out a framework for teaching. They are designed to develop what Stanislavski calls ‘tvorchestvo’, the creative process, and to build an empirical knowledge of the origins of acting and performance as a ‘threshold’ to the imagination. It is imperative that theatre stands, as Stanislavski states, at this ‘threshold of the Subconscious’; it operates at the creative threshold to, ‘higher creativity’.

Theatre's function has no less of an objective than to change us and the community and our perception of the world at a deep level. This was the founding Greek idea. Theatre exists at the threshold between conscious and unconscious states of existence. The higher states and lower states of humanity are opened by the soul forces and held open in a collective understanding and thus bring purpose to the 'sacred circle' of the stage, through catharsis and a metanoia of the human being. Here we clearly see the connection between the Indo-European words drama and karma, which reveals one of drama's true functions, to change our karma. Drama is always a collective art that facilitates collective awakening in the social community and in the individual.

All actors work with the fundamental awareness of the duality of acting and the threshold on which they stand: between two worlds, between stage and onlooker, between reality and imagination, between self and other, between Ego and soul. Not all actors will have understood its significance, but it is not necessary that they do. The doing is all.

It is too simple to say 'I put on a character' and it is 'not me', because that simply is not true. It is either an aspect of you, a mask of you, a variation of you, a memory of you, an incarnation of the shamanic 'other higher you' or a reimagination of yourself. What is certain is that all these positions reveal 'you' very publicly and more importantly they reveal yourself to you. The higher states that theatre affords us are a gift. They do not separate us from humanity; they are humanity perfected through our imperfections. Humanity is able to see its highest and lowest states of being and through catharsis change karma. So uniquely theatre can hold both states safely, it can change the will of the karmic action of humanity, and it can do it collectively, celebrating our failings as well as our heroic ventures.

Shakespeare's 'infinite faculty' of imagination, incarnating through the actor and onto the stage, changes the karma of volitional action. This process starts by saying 'What if?', 'Let us play!' 'Let's be!' That is the healthy way forward to deal with these powerful effects of true drama. It is also the most human way to perform. We allow the imagination to 'play' and 'be'. Drama incarnates in collective human imagination and initiates people into the mysteries of humanity and the universe, immersing them in mythic and symbolic theatrical forms of reality.

This 'living nature' of the word is a portal to other states. Steiner describes a mental picture as an intuition or thought related to an individual percept or word, defined as an individualised concept. To understand this 'living nature' of the creative state, we need to remember that the word 'tree' is not a tree. We need to find the essence of tree beyond the word. We need to find the reality behind the original image in order to create original material.

## On the threshold of the sacred

There is one main reason for all of these exercises to be undertaken and that is to achieve the state of inspiration, of ‘subconscious intervention’. In Hindu culture it is prajna, or transcendental insight. In native Brythonic culture it is the Awen, the spirit of inspiration. Stanislavski teaches that creative success is to reach the state where the subconscious mind functions without interference or transcends the conscious mind allowing inner inspiration to flow. When we achieve this state of flow we need to be relaxed, we need to have no fear of failure, and we need to transcend our conditioning. We just ‘play’ or let the character flow. This is at the threshold of the inner and outer states as described in the following exercises and workshops.

There is no theatre without the audience’s imagination on which to work. The following exercises are designed to build creative responses, build resilience and openness of heart, all of which leads to these creative states. All these exercises should be taught with correct theatre workshop disciplines in place.

“We achieve inner freedom as well as physical relaxation.” (Stanislavski)  
“Thinking lies beyond subject and object.” (Steiner)

## Being alone: not acting but being

This exercise is sometime called ‘removing the first mask’. Grotowski talked of the layers of masks that make up a performer. This exercise can be performed without feedback very simply for students, just instructing a student to cross the stage and ask them not to act. This is a first jump into what acting is and is not. However, this exercise is primarily for teachers, advanced practitioners, and directors. It is a good re-set of their approaches to teaching acting. No matter how experienced, all tutors should undertake this from time to time, just to blow the cobwebs away. The tutor must know their actors and the exercises must be done with humour, good fun and differentiation.

First establish the space, the ‘stage’: this is a circle of chairs, with a chair or a stool in the middle. The participants sit on the chairs.

Ask a group member to stand and walk to the centre. There they will sit in front of the group. They must walk to the chair in front of the others and imagine they are alone and that no one is watching them. This is extremely hard because the mind is aware of the watchers.

Note that the muscles stiffen, the heart rate goes up, as does the breathing rate. Sweating and shaking may occur in extreme cases. This fight or flight state is good to observe in each person, as it reveals what happens to people





when asked to act or to speak publicly. The effect is very individual and diverse. There is no right or wrong response.

An image to help the actor is to ask them to imagine they are alone in their own room. They can *drop* the 'mask' and truly show us who they are when alone in their room. They are not to move until they can walk to the chair without 'acting'. If they feel that they are acting, they should start again. Physically miming removing mask after mask can help, like wiping a smile off one's face.

They need keep trying to show the group how they are when they are alone. Of course, this is such a difficult, if not impossible exercise *because* we cannot help but 'act' in front of others. This is the point of the exercise: to show how much of our day is acting. People will prevaricate, argue, and refuse to do it. They will even claim it is in fact impossible – or worse, that they are not acting, when clearly they are. The group can see the 'mask' but the actor cannot. All this must be non-judgmental. This is the modern human state.

This is the actor's duality, the state of inner and outer. Actors will also often not pick an imperative or objective or reason for being there on the chair in the middle, so they will wander on to the stage with no aim, no being. Layer by layer the actor must lower the shields of self to a neutral position. This is



The Tempest.  
Abergavenny  
WAC Ltd

being oneself. The director should be able to talk the actor through this and the group should be able to clearly see the actor struggle in their attempt. The bigger the struggle, the more honest the actor. The struggle or resistance is very important. It clearly shows the forces on the 'threshold' between being and the stage. Watching a person divesting themselves of their mask as they struggle not to act is the heart of theatre itself. It is the fundamental state of acting. It is beautiful to behold the human mind in resistance, struggling to express the truth of itself; it is the drama itself. The actor must be honest.

Now 'act' the same scenario. Move to the chair, deliberately over-'acting'. Have fun with it. This too is very hard as the 'acting' is clearly seen by the onlookers.

Next do the same exercise with a clear objective with a strong imperative – 'I must sit down! The floor is melting!' – and just do it and *do not act it*. Practising the imperative will strengthen the will and draw the imagination with it. And then as we know the obstacle becomes the drama. This is physical method; it is the opposite of acting and yet it is also true acting. Imagine taking a mask off whenever you feel fake acting. Feel the masks arise, then strip down to the impulse only. Move with and in the breath. The understanding of 'neutral', then, is to strip back to the place that precedes action and ends action. It is the place you come home to.

The group should gather at the end and ‘clear’ the day’s work in the designated neutral position. And breath in and out slowly through the nose until breathing five/six breaths a minute. This will clear the body to ask, “Who am I?” The answer, “This is me.”

### The seed: incarnating colour

- 1) Place a small seed in your hand. Study this insignificant object, its form and potential. Intensely focus on the seed. Allow impressions to form thoughts, and through these thoughts note any developing feelings. Use your body to explore what it is to be this seed, closed up tight in a ball, and feel the impulse and potential for growth.
- 2) Clearly grasp what you really see with your eyes and feel with your senses. Describe the shape, colour and all other qualities of the seed. Feel what it is to be full of potential, to need to grow. Write down these impulses and thoughts as a list. Allow the mind to dwell upon the following train of thought: ‘Out of the seed, if planted in the soil, a plant of complex structure will grow’. Build up this plant in your imagination.
- 4) Reflect as follows: ‘What I am now picturing to myself in my imagination will later be enticed from the seed by the forces of Earth and light. If I had before me an artificial object which imitated the seed to such a deceptive degree that my eyes could not distinguish it from a real seed, no forces of Earth or light could avail to produce from it a plant.’
- 5) Focus on this thought so that it becomes an inward experience. You will also be able to form the following thought: ‘All that will ultimately grow out of the seed is now secretly enfolded within it as the force of the whole plant. In the artificial imitation of the seed there is no such force present. And yet both appear alike. The real seed, therefore, contains something invisible which is not present in the plastic imitation.’
- 6) It is on this *invisible something* that thought and feeling are to be concentrated, for here is the essence of acting and theatre. The intention is not to investigate the physical nature of the object, but to use it for the development of understanding the will forces. We need to see or intuit the essence of the seed. The will forces drive the body to move; it is the essence of the character we need to play. We can reach this essence from inward will and also from outward performance. Acting is not mimicry, but a playing of the truthful essence.
- 7) Thus we fully realise that this *invisible something* is the objective, the will force will transmute itself later into a visible plant, which will have shape and colour. Your body, full of will force, grows into a plant or rather, in a



theatrical sense, into a character, only if you understand the essence. What is this essence of the seed? We are to play that essence of the seed and therefore attain the character of the plant. Not the outward plant, not the seed, but its very essence.

When we take on a role, we are looking for the essence and then playing that essence. This is what makes great art. The Mona Lisa is not the best representation of a female face we have ever seen but its essence is phenomenal. Therein lies the secret of creativity: seeking the truthful essence.

8) The invisible will become visible. Stress must be laid on the following point: what you think, you must also feel with intensity. As you focus deeply on the essence of something, your full response will seem to intuit a luminosity. It will be felt as a kind of flame. The centre of this flame evokes the same feeling that one has when under the impression say of the colour lilac, and the edges as when under the impression of a bluish tone. This is to see the essence as colour and to assign feelings to that colour. We often say we feel blue, or green with envy, or yellow in fear or seeing red with anger. Playing colour can help move away from one-dimensional emotion. This is the point where we can work with students.

9) What was formerly invisible now becomes visible, for it is created by the power of the thoughts and feelings we have stirred to life within ourselves. The plant itself will not become visible until later, so that the physically invisible now reveals itself as a spiritual truth. These specific colours can then inspire character and movement. If we see the colour around people and in people, we can play with that to create the essence; the youngest child can play with colour.

## **Colour movement: becoming colour**

Allow actors to choose a colour for their character. For instance, breaking it down and playing how the colour red moves and feels. The intensity of that observational process must use differentiation and decrement when working with actors. But otherwise, the exercise is simple: to move like a colour, or to move as if you were a colour. It's that simple.

For example: playing red. Red is often associated with danger and fire, but it is also the slowest wavelength. So it is a fire that consumes slowly and grows slowly, becoming more fiery as it spreads. The student can move across the space, warm and slow, consuming all around them.

What is physically red slowly grows and spreads itself. Red is anger but it smoulders. In nature, yellow is often a warning, not red. Red is also warm blood and fresh meat and berry foods. It has a consuming warmth. If we see a character as red, we should move slowly and with warmth, consuming

the space before us; our feeling is almost to seethe. Green in contrast has a meandering wave line moving forward.

If we want more danger in our red, we need to add yellow.

Playing yellow: Yellow shines and radiates, and is quicker and livelier than red. It is like the sunshine. The movement is expansive and quicker than the reds, radiating but also able to poison with its yellow venom. Nature often uses yellow to warn, like a wasp. Yellow sparks quicker emotions of joy and love. Mixing with red, that joy can ignite red into orange. The yellow flame is quicker. It has a straight line with open arms moving forward. Yellow and red blending make orange, passionate and warm.

We can move with all these colours. We can use eurythmy or movement studies to facilitate this. We can allow the students to move and interact with the colours to make emotional connections with colour and temperature and build on the character's true inner will force.

Exploring the character this way allows us to perform the essences of character in a sophisticated and complex way, whilst delivering with great simplicity. It does not involve psychology or personal emotional memory but allows the actor to 'paint' characters and the stage with incarnated performance colour.

Steiner takes the same thought experiment into the human realm with profound results.

## The mind temple

Probably the simplest and yet most powerful and far-reaching entry into effective imagination is the following series of exercises, developed over thirty years of teaching acting.

The basic function of this exercise is to reach into the active imagination and bring or incarnate into the material world concepts and objects that arise in the imagination. This quite controversial but highly effective technique has many variants, but actually we all do this every day and are not aware of it.

Younger students are used to doing this in play, but as always you need to know the biography of the students well. It is not hypnosis, or any kind of mind control; it is the opposite – guided play. Students are encouraged to be aware all the time of how the mind is imagining whilst being fully awake. They are being encouraged to play with images. One person, who should be experienced in guided imagination, takes on the role of guide.

## To walk across the stage and over the threshold

The guide should talk at a steady pace, not giving the mind a chance to wander or become distracted by the process. The guide should enter the visualisation giving detailed descriptions of the ‘flight’ sections (this prepares the visual imagination to run fast) but being more obscure and less descriptive and prescriptive in the ‘city visualisation’ and when meeting the imagined people. If they see anyone in distress a pre-arranged exit strategy should be arranged. A tap on the shoulder means sit up and move to the side. This distress is usually caused by outside influences rather than the visualisation, but just relaxing can trigger some people.

Diaphragmatic breathing (tummy breathing) – focus and concentration. Lying comfortably on the floor, knees raised, hands to the side or on the belly. Focus on diaphragm breathing. The guide leads the students on a body check, listening to the heart, the pulse, the breath, gurgling tummy, then moving the focus to the nearest sound and the room sounds, outside the room and the furthest sounds they can hear. This already has the student in an aware state. Place a hand on the heart and feel the warmth radiating from it. Pass that warmth through the body.

## Visualisation

Bring them to an imaginary warm beach. Ask them to imagine that they are lying on white sand in sunlight, relaxed and free of worries and care. (There are variations on this beach visualisation, such as lying in a meadow or by a stream, but I find the beach the best as it has fewer variables; it is also a known therapeutic visualisation.) As the actor relaxes, the clear blue water of the sea very slowly rises and very slowly lifts the body off the beach. Above is an endless clear blue sky. Allow the warm water to rise. The student floats slowly up. They are lifted off the beach and into the air.

Turning, they see the beach recede below and beyond the beach a forest. In the distant are blue-hazed mountains. The student is now flying fast over the trees toward the forest. Detail this flight: below are flashes of rivers and small villages and towns. Near the mountains is a city. Detail the city if period is important to your production. This section should let visual images arising in the mind to flow freely.

Floating above the city or landscape, they see the roads and houses below, people walking and rushing. The time period of the city does not matter, but if you are doing a period specific play, focus in on that. Notice the shift in grammar. ‘One of the figures walking below takes your interest. You fly lower; they are walking in the crowd, you descend to the pavement and follow them, from behind as you follow, observe what they are wearing, how they move, how they wear their hair.’ At this point you can suggest to the actor that this

is the character in the play or they can allow the visualisation to run free. If you go with the character, allow the visualisation to change as they see fit.

Ask them to remember what they observe. If they are experienced, later you can again ask them to stand and demonstrate the physical walk and stance they saw. 'Follow the character. The character speeds up, aware you are following; they turn to confront you. Study the face. Look into their eyes. What are they saying to you? Now very quickly step into the person and turn around, look through their eyes, what colour are they, what is the emotion you feel from them?' Do this quickly so that the mind does not have time to reject the absurdity of the idea.

'It's raining; you are now running down the street toward a house, taking keys (see the keys in detail) you open a door and enter. It is their/your home. You enter a room that is theirs but now yours. What do you see? Look around the room.' Question quickly. 'Find a place in the room to sit or lie down, what do you feel? Who are you? Where are you? Take out a notebook and write in it a message. The message is to you. Put it in your pocket. There is a picture in a frame. Remember it. Go to the window and look out.'

'There is an old wooden box on a table. It contains a very important object. It is the most important object of this character. Open the box and take out the object. What is the emotional feeling? Look at it in detail and place it gently in your pocket or a bag if it is too big. Take one last look around the room. What does it feel like? Is it warm or cold?' Make it very detailed: 'look up; look down. Leave the person and face them, they talk to you and walk away. What did they say?'

We then reverse the visualisation, stepping out of the person's life, saying goodbye, walking the city street, lifting into the sky and then zooming across the forest to the sea. Gently landing on the beach, warm water receding, listen to distant sounds, near sounds, your own breath and cup your hand back over the heart and feel the warmth. Now the student is back fully in the room. Sitting up.

The exit from the visualisation is a point of sharing and demonstration, questioning what they saw and felt.

Showing the object they found in the box, reading the message they had in their pocket. Demonstrating how the character looked and walked. It is important to now get students to physicalise what they saw and felt, to walk around the space. Expressing what they felt about the person and what was essential to the person. Was this someone they have ever met? Most often they have not. Asking 'what did you feel meeting this person? What was their essence?'



It is important also to stress how important this ability to imagine is, just how full and detailed it can be and that it is not hypnosis but a natural ability of the mind that we are often unaware of.

As a demonstration of this, ask the student to stand up and to show us their own house with a walk through. Point out where the furniture is, the doors and the windows. We see that we have in us a fully working virtual model of all the spaces we have ever been. Ask the actors to change the colour of the walls and floor. See how natural it is to walk in one's imagination.

If actors are amazed at their own capacity to imagine and feel, then a great deal of the job of acting is done. They now know they can have access to creativity and can incarnate it into the world. At any given point, months after the exercise, they can return to the object or character and add more detail. The mind is the augmentation. It is after all, according to quantum physics, a participatory universe. These exercises have many variants and uses. The guide's ability to lead the collective imagination is a central skill. As the ability to do this grows, groups can do this standing up, walking on to the stage and creating directly from the imagination into the atmosphere and into the performance.

## Theatre un-caged- Open Air Theatre

Doing this exercise in nature produces more powerful focus and inspiration than, say, in a breeze block rehearsal room in London. Stand the characters up and allow them to come alive in the elements and interact with both the atmosphere and others in the circle. This is theatre un-caged, stripped of its paraphernalia, taken out of its container and allowed to be its own sense, to explore in the world of form, shape and intention. The audience too can come on this journey and allow the actors to make the elements and landscapes conscious. There is no stage but the symbiosis of actor and audience. The honest actor conveys this to the community.

**This is the beginnings of the dialogue of community theatre and its audience. Community theatre cannot exist in a vacuum, its training must be more that of a commercial drama school or drama department in a university, it must have actors who know the community, are part of that community and can convey storytelling and acting at its purist and 'stripped back' highest form. A naked theatre.**