Styletasters 1
(Stanislavski, Artaud, Grotowski)
NOTES

1. At risk of upsetting probably the largest percentage of drama students - the girls - I have consistently used ‘he’ and ‘him’ throughout, taking my precedent from the word ‘actor’ which is now applied to both genders. Any of the exercises can of course be sex-changed to suit your students’ requirements!

2. This study file is ringbound to allow you to photocopy whatever you need to for your students. Please note, however, that the material is copyrighted. None of the material in this folder may be reproduced to pass on to other teachers or educational establishments.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Jeni Whittaker has been a teacher, an examiner and a chief examiner of drama for many years. In fact, she pilot-taught on the very first ‘A’ level exam in drama back in the mid-1970s and has been at the forefront of drama as an exam subject in one capacity or other ever since. Her other experience includes directing and performing professionally as well as adjudicating drama festivals and running a very large and active youth theatre. Since 1996, Jeni has been completely freelance, taking her workshops around schools and colleges all over the country. Her experience as a teacher makes her an ideal person to write a handbook especially for other teachers: she knows the problems of time and resources that teachers experience and can guarantee that all the exercises in this study-file actually work!

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GROTOWSKI

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INTRODUCTION

With an awareness that some syllabuses require less detailed knowledge of practitioners but rather an understanding of different styles in more general terms, this series is designed to serve that purpose. The emphasis, as in all my work on practitioners, is on understanding the work through practice. Once again, theories are clearly explained in terms that any student can understand and each theory is then explored and tested through practical exercises. The practical work helps fix the understanding of the theory.

The work of Artaud and of Grotowski are in some ways very similar but you may find the grouping of these two with Stanislavski an odd choice. In my view, though, any practitioner can be bracketed with Stanislavski, even if their end-styles are completely dissimilar because, consciously or unconsciously, every twentieth century practitioner’s starting point is Stanislavski. No one before Stanislavski had investigated and identified the art and technique of acting in such a complete way so that no practitioner after him can be unaware of his findings and theories. He is thus a starting point for all the practitioners, who often use him as a platform either from which to spring out or against which to react.

The main link I see between the three practitioners introduced in this handbook is that all three are concerned with the inner state of the actor. The theatrical effect of the end-result springing from this central concern is very different in each case but nonetheless these three practitioners are interested in the actor’s personal journey whilst most other practitioners are more concerned with the medium of theatre and its role in society or of the theatrical result of which the actor is merely a part.
The format of the book is as follows:

1. Such biographical details as help with an understanding of the practitioner are given and followed by a clear exposition as to how those details help explain the theories.

2. The essential theories of each practitioner are clearly explained. These are easily photocopiable should you want students to have a copy in front of them.

3. Each theory is then explored with one or two exercises. Students should be encouraged to try the theories through this practical work in an enquiring manner, seeking to understand the reasons for the practitioner’s emphasis on such and such a theory, but not being afraid to find the limitations of a theory either.

4. A final project is set in which the students are expected to explore the practitioner as fully and as ‘truthfully’ as possible.

The work on each of these practitioners should take between four to six weeks. This is sufficient for an informed taster but may not have enough detail for an ‘A’ level in-depth essay on that practitioner alone; it would be sufficient, though, for comparisons between practitioners and the work throughout invites this approach.

Note: should you want to cover a particular practitioner in more depth there are Study Programmes on Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud where all the theories are very thoroughly explained and explored through a wealth of practical exercises. The work in each of these Study Programmes is sufficient for one term’s exploration of that practitioner. The Study Programmes apply the theories in each case to a variety of texts, something which this series can do no more than suggest.

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There are many biographies of Stanislavski in existence and many text-books too that give excellent resumes of his life, influences and the progression of his ideas. In the present context, I believe that this just confuses students who then do not know how to pick and choose amongst the material for those facts that are relevant to them when answering essay questions in an examination. I propose only to put down those facts that tell us something important about Stanislavski as a practitioner.

1. He had a passion for the theatre from his earliest years. Born into a privileged family, he put on amateur theatricals from an early age. All his own acting experience until he was into his twenties was in the amateur theatre.

   These facts tell us:

   a] He had to start from scratch exploring the art and techniques of theatre. Having no professional training [and at first little skill but a tendency to ‘ham’] he started from the most basic ‘what’s and ‘how’s and ‘why’s of the actor’s craft. His passion and youthful lack of skill were the two vital ingredients to carry him through a prolonged period of trial and error to come up with a detailed analysis of the problems actors face and, eventually, ideas on how to tackle those problems - problems with which, because of his own early ineptitude he himself had had to grapple and through which he had had to work.

   b] The fact that his family was wealthy gave him both the financial backing for a life devoted to such an expensive ‘hobby’ - which it was at first - and the social status to allow him to meet influential backers and theatre ‘buffs’ of all kinds, vital to the trial and development of his ideas.

2. The theatre of his time was a mixture of the broad over-the-top gestures of those one-dimensional characters suitable for melodrama and the early ‘realism’ of playwrights like Gogol as explored by actors like Shchepkin, who believed in finding the source for
his characterisations by studying life itself. There was no actor training as such; actors were adopted into a company and served apprenticeships where they observed older actors and their techniques. This, of course, encouraged a perpetuation of the same style of acting; few young actors would dare risk being expelled from a company by ‘doing something different;’ far more likely, they would copy ‘tricks’ that an older actor had found effective - in, for instance, gaining a laugh or creating an impression of grandeur.

In addition, apart from one or two exceptions, most popular theatre made actors into stars, known for particular types of role whilst writers were often hacks, often forgotten and there simply to create the roles for the star actor.

Costumes and settings were taken from the theatre stock without reference to historical authenticity or suitability to the play. A scene in a forest, for instance, would bring out the stock ‘trees’ and painted backcloths used many times before.

This state of affairs in the theatre of his time explains:

a] why Stanislavski set out to put down a detailed actor’s training, identifying all the areas of body, voice and approach to a character that he would need to use in playing a role effectively and believably.

b] his emphasis on studying life and his search for truthfulness in portraying a role rather than resorting to empty ‘tricks’ and tried and tested methods from the past.

c] his work towards creating ensemble work with all actors equally important within the team. Stanislavski refused to use the idea of the ‘star’ actor to draw in an audience. Whether playing Hamlet or a gravedigger each actor was of equal importance to the creative unity of the finished production.

d] his insistence on the importance of the playwright and his text. He made every effort always to be true to the text and what he perceived to be the intentions of the playwright [This is despite arguments with Chekhov over interpretation, which stemmed from a basic misunderstanding of Chekhov’s intentions - something he only gradually came to understand. Nonetheless, his intentions were always honourable even when wrong!]

e] his insistence on historical accuracy and the research that a company should make into the background of any play. Settings, costumes, properties, should be accurate and created fresh for the particular production.

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f) At first this obsession with detail led him to become overwhelmed by these minutiae, to the detriment of sincere characterisation. In other words, external details became for a time, in the earlier part of his career, more important, until he realised that truth comes from an understanding of the inner workings of a character, i.e. what a characters says is less important than why he says it. It took Stanislavski a little time to understand this.

3. In 1897 Stanislavski met Nemirovich-Danchenko, a theatre critic, teacher and director, very well-connected in both the social and theatre world and together they devised a manifesto for a new type of theatre. Nemirovich-Danchenko also put Stanislavski in touch with Chekhov, recognising that here were two kindred spirits in their aspirations for theatre. The new theatre was called the Moscow Art Theatre and it took as its symbol a seagull, which was the title of the first Chekhov play performed there.

The Moscow Art Theatre became a centre for the growth of the Naturalistic style of acting but this was not easily achieved. First the earlier training of the established actors they invited to form the ensemble group at the new theatre had to be broken down. This took years of work, not always successful, and caused Nemirovich and Stanislavski to realise that a new type of actor was needed for the ‘slice of life’ style of playing. Thus the Studio was formed, the first of a number, as a means for practical experimentation into the art of acting and into discovering new ways to approach character. In addition, Stanislavski started to formulate what became known as ‘the System’, which for the rest of his life he experimented with, using it to improve his own acting and to teach other actors and acting students.

These facts tell us that:

a] Stanislavski’s System arose out of practical trial and error over a long period of time

b] though he often seems to present-day students ‘old hat’ and ‘obvious’ he was truly innovative in his own time

c] the System was constantly evolving and elements of it were being tested out all through his life. This explains the contradictions that are within much of Stanislavski’s writings - he changed his mind about a number of things, most notably the use of Emotion Memory.

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his long life devoted entirely to theatre and the improvement of acting practice tells us that he was a true enthusiast and it is this obvious passion for his subject that made him a great teacher and that inspires us when we read his books today.

STANISLAVSKI: THE THEORIES WHICH LEAD TO THE SYSTEM

1. NATURALISM/REALISM: THE STYLE ASSOCIATED WITH THE SYSTEM

Though Stanislavski took part in theatre experiments with other practitioners, the System and his main interest was to do with Naturalism. This means that there are huge numbers of plays and styles for which the techniques simply are not applicable. You could not use the System when putting on a pantomime, for instance.

There are many discussions about the differences between Naturalism and Realism but the fact is that Stanislavski himself used the two terms quite indiscriminately and clearly did not himself differentiate between the two. What he means by both terms is all that is important and that is simply: a stage impression of life. What one should experience in a Stanislavskian naturalistic play is believable characters that strike one as ‘true’, in the sense of as ‘like life’ as possible. The audience should also recognise that the settings are true to life; there should be a feeling that the characters will continue to live beyond the confines of the play itself.

2. TRUTH AND ARTISTIC TRUTH; THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEM OF NATURALISTIC ACTING

This idea of ‘truth’ in the sense of ‘lifelike’ was something Stanislavski tussled with for years. In the end, he defined what one should see on stage as ‘artistic truth’, that is real life tidied up a little to present an appearance of reality. If this seems a contradiction in terms it is nonetheless necessary and it is easy to prove why.

Consider a very emotional scene with a character in tears. In real life, this person’s words would be blurred, incoherent and gestures would be inward and over-cluttered. It would be embarrassing to watch, though undoubtedly ‘true.’ The actor has to remove unnecessary details which lead to incoherence and make sure that what the character says remains audible whilst still giving the appearance of truth. It is a fine line to
tread and needs considerable skill to carry off.

Out of this problem comes the problem inherent to all naturalistic acting: how to remain sincere and totally ‘in’ the part whilst retaining artistic control over what one is doing; how to be both ‘in’ character and aware that at a certain line one has to be Down Stage Right. The System devotes a lot of time to this problem and is centred always on the idea of ‘Truth’ and ‘Belief’.

The actor must believe in what he is doing for the audience to believe. It is imperative that he convinces himself that he ‘is’ the part he is playing, that the stage set is really his home; that everyday he puts his hat on the peg by the door just so, chucks his briefcase down on the sofa and falls into his armchair, for instance; he needs to convince us that offstage is not just a muddle of wires and cables but the rest of his home, and so on.

3. THE STATE OF ‘I AM ...’

The actor is striving for the state of ‘I am ...’ ‘I am Juliet; ‘ ‘I am Hamlet.’ To help ‘get into the skin of the character,’ the actor needs to give the character a background: home life, childhood, what happened before the play, after the play, and so on. All this detail is an aid to the actor’s own belief in his part. The more detail he adds - either from clues within the text, background research or if all that fails, his own imagination - the more he finds he can believe in the life of his character. He goes through the process of creating a real person out of the bare bones of script and playwright’s inadequate description. All the time he is building this character up, he is practically exploring the situations and events suggested by his research or his imagination until he knows how that character will behave in all sorts of circumstances. That is the point when he begins to ‘become’ the character.

4. THE ACTOR WORKS FROM CREATING THE INNER STATE TO THE EXTERNALISATION OF THAT STATE

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All the work on the background of the character, the long slow process of combining fact and imagination to flesh that character out and then the practical experimenting with the role, lead onto the application of this to the text itself. The actor discovers the thoughts and feelings of the character first throughout the play: why does he say this? what is he really feeling at this point? - he may be saying ‘Hello’ but we know through our research that the person he is addressing is his worst enemy so what is he feeling? How will this affect the way he says ‘Hello?’; for instance.

Having worked through the play in this way to discover the ‘subtext’ - the moods and emotions that lie underneath the text - the actor has to make these emotions his own. He must live them as closely as he can to the character’s experiences so that the emotions are ‘truthful’ and become the actor-in-role’s own feelings. Thus he builds the inner life of the character up first.

But it cannot remain inward. We have seen how inward emotions, though often true to life, would be impossible to watch on stage, so they must become externalised and some artistic controls have to be put on them: someone spitting and incoherent with anger is unwatchable - the spitting and the rage need to be polished and contained without taking away the impression of raw reality.

To a certain extent the external moves, facial expressions and vocal tones will arise naturally out of the emotion if the actor has got the inner state right. But unless the actor has kept up his vocal and movement technique they will not be translated adequately to the audience. Therefore, a Stanislavskian actor, like any other actor, must keep his voice well-trained and be aware of the speaking power of gesture, once again through practising daily at his technique. Nonetheless, this technique must not be applied from the outside in a calculating manner - I am angry, therefore I will use such-and-such a voice tone and such-and-such a way of moving - the voice and movement will arise out of the actor's true feelings that he has brought to life in his character but, because of the background training, will be expressed externally in a way that communicates without conscious planning.

5. EVERYTHING MUST BE JUSTIFIED

As the above ideas suggest, nothing must be done for its own sake, that is no
move, for instance, can be made because the director says so. If the director wants the character in a certain position at a certain point, that’s fine, but the actor must make that part of the character’s life on stage. Perhaps the character is in a terrible emotional turmoil leading to restless movements all over the place which can ‘naturally’ end up where the director wants him to be. Nothing can be imposed on the character from the outside; all must come from inner justification.

6. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR ‘THE CREATIVE STATE OF MIND’

The System addresses the problems and ideas briefly laid out in the above notes. Stanislavski’s idea was that every actor performing on stage should at the very least be able to put over a technically sound and emotionally believable characterisation which would satisfy an audience that they had witnessed a ‘slice of life’ rather than a group of actors in a theatre. Ideally, though, with all the groundwork in place each actor’s performance might occasionally and magically ‘take-off’ to deliver something truly creative and inspirational.

To reach this state Stanislavski advocates stringent practice: after all the preparation, the performance should be rehearsed so many times that every move and gesture becomes habit, automatic. The actor knows it so well that he no longer has to think about it. The body is on a kind of ‘automatic pilot’ and this frees the mind to become creative in performance. In the best possible cases magical performances of seeming spontaneity, night after night, can then occur! This does not mean that the actor will start putting in different moves or lines so as to throw the rest of the team totally; no, he is working with the moves and words as practised for so long. But he may well create different emphases because responding emotionally in a different way, and this means that all members of the team must be constantly ‘living’ their parts night after night, responding naturally to the slightly different nuances that will always occur. The whole team need to be ‘adaptable.’

6. THE SYSTEM IS A SINGLE ENTITY

Finally, do note that though we look at elements of the System separately, they
are supposed to combine to make up a single unified entity. Often, when studying Stanislavski, we become immersed in the details and forget that most of the different elements of the System are happening at the same time and continuously. For instance, the actor in performance is always using concentration, relaxation, imagination, adaption and so on.

7. THE SYSTEM IN A NUTSHELL

Stanislavski made a life-time study of famous and inspirational actors of his day. Eventually the notes he had kept led him to try to identify what key factors these ‘genius’ actors had in common. These were:

1. technical control of both body and voice
2. a high level of concentration
3. a state of relaxation which comes from feeling at home on the stage
4. what Stanislavski called ‘the creative state of mind’, out of which moments of inspirational magical theatre emerge.

Along with trying to reach these ideals, the System also aims to cope with the three central problems that, once again through his observation and personal experience, he identified as difficulties for every actor throughout his working life. These are:

1. the fear of being watched by an audience, which leads to self-conscious and unnatural behaviour on stage
2. the problem of having to keep up a pretence, the difficulty of ‘believing a lie’
3. the problem of keeping a part fresh over what may be a long run of performances
STANISLAVSKI: THE THEORIES EXPLORED THROUGH PRACTICE

1. IMAGINATION

An essential ingredient of the System, Stanislavski says that no one can be an actor without imagination. It is the imagination that keeps the actor concentrated on the task in hand because it adds interest and colour. It has fleshed out his role for him and made it real by building up his character’s inner life. It is also the active ingredient behind the whole process of playing a role; it propels an actor into action because his imagination has worked out the reasons why he behaves as he does and that is just as important as the facts in the text which simply tell him what he does.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Start with one or two classic exercises that are Stanislavski’s own and designed to activate the imagination.

1. Each student should do this one as a solo exercise. Imagine you are a chair in the drama studio or a tree overlooking the school or an object in a room you know really well. Describe what you see, what you hear, what you touch, smell, feel ...

2. Sit on a chair as if:
   - it were a throne;
   - the dunce’s chair;
   - a seat in front of an interviewing panel;
   - you were stuck to it;
   - it was covered with something truly disgusting....

3. Divide the class into small groups and give them the following bare bones situation:
   - two young people are locked in a room. They are to invent a reason as to why they are there. Who are these youngsters? What are they doing in the room? How are they passing the time?

   Once each group has had time to answer all these questions, hear their stories and then ask them to notice how interest in the story increases the more imaginative
detail they are able to add to it. Most importantly, the interest is not just increased for the audience but for the actor himself. *It is his interest in his own story that holds the audience captive.*

2. BELIEF.

Imagination is an essential aid towards the actor’s belief in what he is doing and belief is the most essential ingredient of the whole System. Basically, the System taken together is a structure to help the actor believe in what he is doing. It is not as easy as it may seem to believe you are, for instance, locked in a room when blatantly you are not. But the last exercise done on imagination should help prove that the more the imagination can add to flesh out a person and a situation, the easier it is to believe in them.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Belief makes the difference between ‘pretending’ and reality. An audience is quick to spot the insincerity of a pretence. Try this exercise to test the difference between ‘truth’ and ‘pretence.’ It is a useful one because it hones the audience’s observational faculties as well as proving this important point.

Divide the class into pairs. Each one of the pair is to tell each other about a real event that has happened to them to them recently. Then they decide which of their two events they are going to use for this exercise. This event - which can be as basic as something experienced last weekend whilst shopping or, more usefully, can be some incident perhaps from childhood - is then put over to the audience of the rest of the class by both people, one at a time. One of the people is going to be telling the truth but for the other it will be pretence yet both speak as if it happened to them and the one who is pretending it happened to them - the ‘actor’ - is trying to convince the audience that it is their true experience.
Can the audience tell whose story it is really and who is the actor? In my experience, it is always possible. The ‘actor’ will give himself away by any of the following:

- being too slick;
- not giving enough detail;
- a tense or unsure expression or body language;
- hesitation;
- trying too hard;
- lack of sincerity, feeling, colour...

The group should analyse what it was about the performance that did not ring true. It may turn out to be as vague as just a feeling: ‘I did not feel that it was true.’

This should be followed by the student who ‘acted’ the story analysing why it was difficult for him to believe in what he was saying. This might simply boil down to ‘It was difficult to believe because I had not experienced it. I did not know the colour of the dress or the sound of the angry man’s voice’ - whatever.

This is a very important clue to the nature of Stanislavskian acting. As closely as possible one has to live through a character’s experiences, hearing the voices of the other people in his life, seeing the colours of the countryside, tasting his food, feeling the enclosing walls of the character’s home. And these details can only be built up by the imagination.
3. MAGIC IF, GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES, IMAGINATION

The process of belief as we have seen is helped by the detail that the imagination supplies. Let us take the example of the two young people locked in the room.

The only facts we have are that the people in the situation are 'young'. Let us add some more:

- one is eighteen and the other nearly twenty
- the older one is streetwise and has had quite a rough upbringing
- the younger hero-worships the elder because of his relative experience
- the younger comes from a secure middle-class background

These facts are the kind of thing that would come out from studying a script written about these two characters. Any information found from within a script in this way or given in stage-directions by the playwright are called 'Given Circumstances.' They are the 'Circumstances' which the characters in a play are 'Given' by its author. An actor has to use these Circumstances along with any others given to him by the director and the design team. For instance, the costume designer could be insisting on a very tall hat for the character or the director could want a particular mannerism; these too would be 'Given Circumstances' and as such are the base material from which the actor has to build his characterisation.

The base material is never quite enough; it is merely the skeleton upon which the actor must add the flesh. So this is where the imagination can help. Here is an example: you have been given a character who is wary and reserved in the presence of women. That is a Given Circumstance but the understanding of that character trait requires imagination. Why is he reserved? Was he perhaps bullied by his mother? Or the only boy in a family of elder girls who teased him? It does not matter what imaginative reason the actor adds as long as it is sufficient for him to feel an empathy for the character and to start believing in him as a human being. That is what this process is all about.

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PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Ask the class to come up with imaginative reasons for the following Given Circumstances:
   - A man who hoards his money.
   - A woman who has plenty of money but cannot help shoplifting.
   - A woman who always talks in a little girl voice when addressing men.
   - A serial killer.
   - A woman who compulsively tidies her house.
   - A married man who spends most of his free time at the pub with his mates.

2. Next they should return to the same pairs as for the two young people scenario. In that exercise they invented some extra information for the characters and for the situation of being locked in a room. This time they are to see those details as facts - Given Circumstances - and, using them as their starting point, they are to improvise the scene.

   After the scene has been played, they should analyse how their characters behaved. What imaginative details emerged out of playing the scene? Did the characters start to build and become more believable? Were they consistent? Through discussion and analysis they should be working on a more and more believable characterisation. Members of the audience who observed the scene can help in this process. Then when they feel satisfied
that they understand not only the shape of the scene but why the characters behaved in the way that they did they should try the scene again.

This is the process that would be happening on any text too. The students have here combined Given Circumstances and Imagination with the Magic If. This last ingredient is what Stanislavski uses to propel the actor into action, into trying something out. It is the important step from an intellectual process - my character is twenty, has a bad homelife, is insecure etc - to adopting that information and playing it as IF it were your own set of circumstances - I am twenty, insecure, etc...I am feeling ....whatever comes out in the playing of the scene.

Thus a character within a play is built up through intellectual investigation based on the facts researched from the text and other relevant sources, to which is added imaginative details that make sense of those facts. Then the facts together are played with through improvisation which will illumine and explain the character and text. Improvisation can be used both to investigate a particular scene in a play - exploring the motives and general sub-text - or to add to the understanding of a character's actions within a play by exploring some incident or relationship that does not occur in the text.
4. CONCENTRATION AND RELAXATION

These two elements of the System might seem like contradictions. We associate concentration with tension, the opposite of relaxation. But Stanislavski means very particular things when he uses these words.

By Concentration, he means the ability to be completely focused on what you are doing and thus totally in character at all times. Because you are believing in who you are, that the stage is your own house - or whatever it represents, dependent on the play - you are unaware of the audience or of the people waiting in the wings. You have created the world of your character around you and nothing else exists. The audience is really not there: when you look in that direction it is with the long focus of looking at a horizon if you are outside or the short focus of looking at ‘the fourth wall’ of a room.

By Relaxation, Stanislavski means the state of behaving and moving as naturally as if you were at home in that character’s body. If the stage is supposed to be your character’s home, then his muscles should be as relaxed when he is sitting as if this were a familiar chair sat in every day. Because the awareness of the audience is not there, there should be no posing of the body when reaching for something so as to look attractive, and so on. The actor being comfortable in the skin of his character goes a long way towards convincing an audience of the reality of what they are watching.

Both these elements of the System are in use at all times.
PRACTICAL EXERCISES
A useful exercise that proves the point of both these elements is the following:

If possible this should take place on a stage or an area cut-off by light from the rest of the studio. Have the group sitting as if they were an audience, facing the acting area. Choose an individual and, having placed a chair on the stage, ask that person to leave the room. The rest of the group are then instructed to watch very closely every move he makes, in total silence. Then ask the chosen student to enter the stage and sit on the chair; you can ask him to do other things too if you want - walk around a little perhaps before sitting down. Once he is in the chair leave him there for a good long time - at least a couple of minutes - before stopping the exercise. If he seemed relaxed before, he certainly won’t be when left sitting there.

Try this with a number of volunteers, varying the simple activities you ask them to perform - for instance, you might ask one student to stretch up with one arm, another to crouch briefly on the floor. The point is that none of these activities are given any reason - and it is the reason for doing something, the justification, that gives an actor a focus which enables him to concentrate and at the same time relax into what he is doing.

Now take the same volunteers through the same movements as before, but this time they are to invent a reason for doing everything. The one who crouched on the floor might decide he is looking for a lost contact lens, the one who stretched an arm up might be reaching for a book off a high shelf, and so on. They should make sure that each has a reason for entering the stage too and for sitting. If they walked around - why did they do this? Were they restless because of waiting for a phonecall for instance?

Make sure the findings of this exercise are discussed both with the participants.
and the audience who will have observed any differences. Did they forget their self-consciousness once they had a justification for what they were doing? Did they forget the audience?

5.TECHNICAL CONTROL OF BOTH BODY AND VOICE.

Both the body and the voice, says Stanislavski, should be worked with daily to keep them fine-tuned and as responsive as they need to be at all times. These are the actor’s tools-of-trade and as such should not be neglected. As the musician will practice scales and arpeggios every day to keep himself up to scratch so must the actor do the equivalent. That is simply good sense. Obviously in a short taster of Stanislavski, as this course is, the students cannot achieve this but they need to be aware of the daily demands on a good actor.

As examples of the sort of work that can be done on both these instruments, try the following two exercises.

**PRACTICAL EXERCISES**

1. Stand the group in a circle. Establish a good fast rhythm with a handclap and then lead the group through the following sounds, all of which have to be fitted in with the rhythm of the handclap. Make sure that all are opening their mouths wide and stretching the lips to exaggerate the changes in vowel sounds. Each sound is carried on for a time before changing it, thus:

   TIP TIP TIP TIP
   TAP TAP TAP TAP
   TOP TOP TOP TOP
   TUCK TUCK TUCK TUCK and so on ....

The following is a list of suggested sounds in this sequence:

   TIP......TOP......TAP......TEP ......
   TUCK......TICK......TACK........TOCK......
   TACKETY.........TECKITY.........TICKETY......TOCKITY......TUCKITY
   TICK-TOCK.....TACK-TICK......TUCK-TECK.....TICKITY-
   TOCK.....TECK-TACKITY ....TOCKITY-TUCKITY ......ETC.
Try different word and sound combinations similarly. Keeping a similar fast rhythm, try fitting in longer words, phrases and short sentences in the same way, e.g.

PETER PIPER PICKED, PETER PIPER PICKED. etc.
ROUND THE RAGGED ROCK, ROUND THE RAGGED ROCK ....
SELLING SEASHELLS ON THE SHORE, SELLING SEASHELLS ON THE SHORE....
LETS BUY LOTS OF BISCUITS, LETS BUY LOTS OF BISCUITS...

By the end of this they should understand the need for a dexterous tongue and lips, at the very least!

2. Follow this by Stanislavski’s own exercise, known as the Mercury exercise. It is an exercise that requires very precise control of the muscles of the body.

Imagine that you have a small drop of mercury placed under the skin of your middle finger [and for the purpose of this exercise it is not poisonous!] It has a more sluggish and controllable movement than water.

You then ‘watch’ the drop of mercury and control its movement so that at a steady rate you move it up to the shoulder and back down again. The aim is to move your limb as smoothly and fluidly as possible.

Try the same movement, ‘watching’ the mercury’s progress, in both arms and then both legs.

Get really daring and move it from the right finger-tip up to the shoulder, passing behind the neck and right down the body to the left leg, finding ways of controlling the speed of the movement and keeping it constant.
6. COMMUNICATION

The actor is of course in the business of communicating at all times. His body needs to be so finely tuned that he can communicate a world of meaning just by the shrug of a shoulder or a flicker of the eyes.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Using the same pairs as before, ask the group to go back to the previous idea of the two people locked in a room. They are to try the following brief scenarios:

one person notices a poisonous snake above the other’s head. Not wanting to alarm the other in to making a sudden move that might cause the snake to strike, alert him to the danger and direct him out of harm’s way.

A guard [imaginary] comes in. One is to approach the guard and make friendly overtures [the guard is not allowed to speak], whilst the other tries to work his way round to the escape route whilst trying to look as natural and casual as possible.

Last night, the two had a terrible argument. Now one wants to make up but the other is still huffy and difficult. Gradually the difficult one is wooed into changing, but it is an uphill struggle.

Watch a few of these and try them both with and without words, so as to observe the role of body language and facial expressions as well as the role of vocal tones. Ask the group to analyse the tones of voice used. When is the ‘sub-text’ different from the actual words spoken? How does this subtext communicate? For example, I would expect the audience to be aware of the change of heart of the difficult one in the last scenario before the actual words of reconciliation are voiced.

Stress that the feelings inside must be genuine for any of the above to work properly. If anyone has imposed, say, fear of the snake, from the outside, it should be
obvious to the audience. Ask the group to analyse the difference between those that are believable in performance of any of the above and those who are not and try to determine why.

7. THE APPROACH TO A ROLE IN A TEXT. A FINAL PROJECT TO USE AND EXPLAIN THE SYSTEM IN PRACTICE.

A[entering]: What are you doing here?
B: Actually, I was going to ask you the same thing.
A: You were going to ask me the same thing? The cheek of it!
B: I have as much right to be here as you, you know.
A: Indeed, we’ll have to see about that....
B: Where are you going?
A: Where do you think? To complain, of course.
B: Who to?
A: Who to? Who to? Why, to the boss of course. Where did you imagine I was going?
B: Don’t ask me. I’m merely an interested spectator.
A: The boss will see my point of view. You’ll be out on your ear. Your feet won’t even touch the ground. You’ll ...Why are you looking at me that way?
B: What way is ‘that way’?

Using this short script as a basis, deliberately kept as bland as possible, allocate different ‘Given Circumstances’ to each pair in the group, as follows. In each case, the players should play the role as their own gender:

i. A is applying for the same job as B. A was led to believe that he was the only applicant and that the interview is only a formality.
ii. A and B are early for a school reunion. B was the school bully.
iii. The setting is a lunatic asylum. B is the psychiatrist.
iv. The setting is a lunatic asylum. Both A and B are patients.
v. Outside the gates of Heaven; B has caused A’s death.
vi. Outside the gates of Heaven A has caused B’s death.

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vii. In limbo. Neither A nor B have a clue where they are. But B has realised at least that
they are dead.
viii. A has a secret assignation with B’s partner.
ix. A is a bullying teacher and B a cocky pupil. They meet outside the headmaster’s
study.

In all of these, there is insufficient information to be going on with. The students in their
pairs need to fulfil the following:

1. Identify the Given Circumstances - the Facts.

2. Using their imagination, build up on these facts, inventing others to build a
more rounded idea of their characters.

3. Play with these real and invented facts through improvisation to extend and
depth understanding of the character and how it would feel like to be
that person by
   a] Improvising the situation they have been given, i.e. exploring
      the text by translating it into their own words and thus making the
      situation real for them

   and

   b] Improvising another situation these same characters might find
      themselves in - preferably suggested by the known facts, e.g. for
      situation ix. an earlier classroom encounter might be useful to
      Improvise, or the first time the two encountered each other in the
      school.

4. Explore the Sub-text and find the character’s objectives. Through close
discussion, they should decide what the characters are thinking and feeling,
which will inform the way they say the words. They should experiment
with different sub-texts before deciding which one is the most likely or
consistent for their character. For instance, taking the first two lines
alone, having decided what mood or emotional state the characters
are in, experiments should be made as to how to stress
the lines - try stressing
different words and discuss the consequent
changes in meaning. What

*are you* doing here? has quite a

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different meaning from What are you doing here? or What are you doing here? for example.

Try, too, adding pauses in different places. A long pause between A’s What are you doing here? and B’s response.....Actually .....I was going to ask you the same thing adds a feeling of threat, for instance.

And don’t forget pace too. Saying What are you doing here? at a great rate, for instance, has quite a different effect from saying it very slowly. The first might suggest panic, the second menace.

This kind of process is what Stanislavski suggests the actor should do with the whole text of a play. The students will begin to realise to what an enormous task the Stanislavskian actor is committing himself.

Pausing, pacing, and stressing lines must always be consistent with the character’s subtext and that will only be evident once each actor has decided what his character’s objectives are in the scene.

How is an objective worked out? Stanislavski says an objective is what a character wants at a given moment of the scene. It is this ‘wish’ that will impel him to act. An objective must contain ‘the seeds of action’, that is, it must be something that is active rather than intellectual. It is best to understand this through example. For instance, in our little scenario, A might be saying ‘What are you doing here?’ whilst thinking ‘I want to be out of here’ - that is, the shock of seeing B has propelled him into an instant response that will effect both what he says [how he says it] and his actions on stage. If his objective on first seeing B is ‘I want to be out of here’ then the words will come out short, sharp, shocked, clipped, and his body may be propelled backwards towards the door he has just entered. The objective, if correctly identified - and Stanislavski says that it is crucial that it is - will create the impetus to act and all else will fall into place.

Like all else with Stanislavski, there are often at least two ways of going about something and the maxim is if one doesn’t work for you, the actor, then try out another

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way. If, in other words, you find it difficult to find the true objective of a character at a given moment, then try experimenting on the lines in a more technical way – playing with pauses, stresses, pace – until something strikes ‘true’ and the ‘objective’ becomes clear. In this case, the aim of the technique is to ‘awake’ a true inner response.

5. Make the character’s inner life your own through the use of Emotion Memory and Tempo-Rhythm.

These two elements of the System are both useful tools. Emotion Memory is the one that Stanislavski favoured for many years though in his last years he began to lean more towards the use of Tempo-rhythm.

What do the two things mean? Emotion Memory uses the idea that the actor should, as closely as possible, match his character's emotions with his own. If the character is jealous, for instance, the actor should find a memory of jealousy within himself that is as close as possible to the circumstances that his character is experiencing. Making the exact match may take the use of the imagination too, to shift the details around.

6. Having made explorations into the subtext, as suggested above, the actors should have made decisions about their character's emotions. Try to match these emotions with similar ones of their own.

To use the tool properly, as suggested by Stanislavski, the actor needs to go one stage further still. Having found the similar emotion memory, he needs to relive it, replaying it first in his mind and then, if possible reliving as much as possible of it through action. This is important because ultimately the actor has to translate these emotions into action on stage; if he has relived them through - pleading perhaps with an imaginary loved one, shifting himself about amongst the furniture of his own room, where he suffered his jealousy - he will be able to feel and therefore move more believably in his own character.

Tempo-rhythm has already been used, when I suggested using different paces to help discover the subtext of a line. Roughly it means ‘pace’, but it has very specific connotations for Stanislavski.

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Real life is a mixture of paces and rhythms, both internal and external. A realistic crowd scene will have people moving at different speeds, obeying the inner rhythms of their emotional states. On the simplest level, even the person sitting quietly on his own in a room may be using two at least different rhythms: an outer one of calm and quiet and an inner one which is more alert, faster perhaps, depending on his thoughts. Perhaps he is suppressing extreme anxiety, in which case his inner rhythm will be syncopated and uneven and will betray itself occasionally through the calm by a startled turn of the head, or by eye movement.

Usually the tempo-rhythm will arise out of the correct identification of the emotional inner state. But occasionally, if this inner state is difficult to find, if, for instance, emotion memory has not worked because there is nothing the actor can find within his memory that is similar, then using tempo-rhythm may be an alternative.

It is the same dilemma that we see throughout a study of Stanislavski. Though he advocates working from ‘inner to outer’ - that is finding the ‘right’ inner state and suggesting that the movements and vocal tones will arise naturally out of that, he also often suggests that working from ‘outer to inner’ can work. Thus we have the technical approach suggested above when discovering the subtext and the use of tempo-rhythm to find the inner state of the character. Remember that in ‘Building a Character’ Kostya, the student, ‘discovers’ his character the Critic by playing around with makeup - definitely a ‘way in’ to character by using external means. Stanislavski is full of such paradoxes - which merely means that he remained always an experimenter.

7. The students should try both methods: finding equivalent emotion memories and discovering the use of tempo-rhythm by moving at different speeds around the room whilst playing the lines. Try the lines too at different speeds. See if a ‘truer’ character begins to emerge from either of these and by ‘true’ I mean a character that the actor feels he could ‘be’.

8. Finally, play the scene and extend it believably, keeping consistent with the characters studied, to a satisfying conclusion.

This final exercise should give the students a solid basis for understanding the methods.
used in playing realistic ‘slice of life’ drama.

If you have time for a further exercise, try applying these methods to a text that you are studying. Even if the text is not a naturalistic one, there may still be characters within it that will respond well to this kind of treatment.

ANTONIN ARTAUD [1896 - 1948]: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Once again, I do not propose to give a complete biography of Artaud’s life; though fascinating, it is not particularly useful to students, who tend to wedge details unnecessarily into essays which should be devoted to theories. Nonetheless, there are influences and strands of his life that need mention to show how they impinge on his work.

1. As you can see from the dates, Artaud overlaps the working life of many of the great practitioners: Stanislavski, Brecht and Craig. Like them, he lived through wars which profoundly disturbed his vision of humanity. Unlike them, he had little impact on theatre in his own lifetime.

These facts tell us that:

a] Artaud was a lone voice, outside the mainstream of theatre. Like all real rebels his importance was only recognised by a few friends and supporters. It was left to later generations to discover him: the sixties particularly found his ideas chimed in with the mood of rebellion [student revolt in Europe; happenings; Peter Brook and his season of Cruelty in England that culminated in the Marat/Sade.]

b] Surrounded by the violence of war, which tore France apart twice during his lifetime, goes towards explaining the Plague analogy with its pictures of violent and sadistic behaviour in a society overturned by a random life-shattering disease. War has a similar effect on society; people behave differently under its shadow. War invites cruelty and extreme situations.

2. Most of his life, Artaud’s body and mind was ravaged by drug-addiction and nervous disorders brought about by an early childhood bout of, probably, meningitis. Mental disease was treated in those days largely by suppression through laudanum or opium. Early ‘cures’ by these methods gave him his life-long addiction.

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These facts might explain:

a] the visionary nature of his writings. He hurls words and images together in a way that is exciting and inspiring if sometimes hard to follow. Because the logic of his thought patterns is sometimes difficult he works on the reader by a kind of ricochet: images inspire images; we are carried along by the power of his words that take us beyond sense in a similar way to how he proposes a theatrical experience should slam an audience into a welter of impressions, images, sounds, lights.

b] the ridicule he encountered often in his lifetime and the consequent difficulties he found financing any real practical experimentation along the lines he wanted. This lack of actual practice may be to the advantage of his followers, who are free to interpret and use his theories as platforms for a new type of theatre, without models of his own attempts to tie them down. The fact that such attempts on Artaud’s part may well have failed in the same way as the few trials he did achieve failed, might well have caused his influence to be diminished still further.

3. For two years, he was a member of the Surrealist Movement. Though ironically he was expelled from this group, the Surrealist dedication to rebellion, shock tactics and the exploration of the subconscious mind in order to translate dreams and fantasies into expressions of art, remained Artaud’s main consideration.

Surrealism goes much to explain:

a] the subject-matter he was interested in putting into performance: plays and ideas that were shocking, violent, often dealing with taboo subjects such as incest or rape.

b] the manner of presentation: even a cursory glance at a representative sample of Surrealist painters [Dali and Magritte, for instance] show that objects are often put in strange relationship to each other. This helps to break down the onlooker’s logical concept of the world as he expects it to be seen and throws the mind into a turmoil where logic cannot prevail but a more sensory appreciation, if not understanding, takes place. In other words, the onlooker reacts on a gut level, just like Artaud proposes an audience should. Real life logic and the intellect are bypassed. We are offered instead in both painting and Artaud’s theatre the crazy logic of dreams.

c] another way the Surrealists challenged the ordinary world was to challenge
language itself. Paintings such as Magritte’s pictures of objects with the wrong words written over them - calling a cloud a table, for instance - make us trust our vision of objects more than the labels the human mind tries to contain them in. To label something, to define it, is to limit it; a cloud will still look like a cloud whatever it is called,

but the word ‘cloud’ tells us nothing of the beauty, the changeability, the texture, the colours of a cloud. Artaud was obsessed with the limitations of language, searching instead for a common language to all humanity, composed of sounds, breaths and visual symbols.

4 Because so much of his life was spent in one hospital or another, Artaud had little chance to test out his own theories. From 1926 - 1928 he was involved in projects for the Alfred Jarry Theatre, which he formed with Surrealist colleagues. In 1935 he put on a production of Shelley’s ‘The Cenci’ which folded after only a few performances. It has to be remembered that he was a film-actor in silent films for much of the early part of his life and was also involved with other acting ventures. As his ideas on theatre developed, his acting became more and more extreme and others found him difficult to work with.

These facts confirm for us:

how little tried and tested the theories were at the time they were written. In fact, most of the theories are ‘interpreted’ and reduced from the impact he was proposing by other practitioners. Nonetheless, the fact that no real System is propounded releases those inspired by him to pick and choose amongst his theories and his influence on the present-day has been as far-reaching in its own way as that of Stanislavski. Most far-reaching in its consequences are his proposals to break down the barriers between audience and actor - a barrier which Stanislavski put firmly in its place and Brecht only made small inroads into breaking.
ARTAUD : THE THEORIES

1. CRUEL TO ONESELF - THE PLAGUE ANALOGY

Artaud’s starting point is a pessimistic view of Man and society. Writing as he did in a Europe hurtling towards war and the cruel extremes of Fascism, he sees Western civilisation as an ‘abcess’ which needs to be lanced. Citing the excesses in which civilised beings will wallow in times of plague as his proof, he shows that humanity has not changed much since the times of Boccaccio and his ‘Decameron’ which was set in plague-ravaged Italy in the fourteenth century.

In fact, one of Artaud's main premises is that humanity does not change: whether we are native Australians, tribesmen of the Amazon jungle or 'civilised' Parisians, we are the same under the skin. Given a situation in which the normal rules of society are overturned, like a town overrun by plague or besieged by an enemy, we will do extraordinary things. We will murder, rape and pillage in these situations because law and order is out of the window and, after all, why not? Might we not be dead tomorrow? Artaud shows us how close is the savage under the skin.

This is a major clue to his ‘style’: to reveal the essential man under the civilised veneer, he must be put in an extreme situation, as close as possible to the conditions in which he would experience the plague or similar presentiment of imminent annihilation; only pushed to an extreme will the inner man be exposed; so actors [and through them audience] must be ‘cruel’ to themselves - push themselves to their limit. This explains too Artaud’s choice of subject matter which always deals with human beings in extreme situations.

2. THEATRE AS A WAY OF EXPOSING, CONTAINING AND DRAINING SOCIETY’S ILLS

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Artaud sees theatre as a powerful tool for exploring and releasing society’s ills. If we are all savages under the skin with, as our dreams suggest, secret desires to commit outrages - the man who dreams of rape, the woman who dreams of being raped, for example - then something must be done to both release this poison and contain it before a real event, such as a war, allows dream to become reality. Brutalising other human beings, releasing our secret desires to ‘sin’ is unacceptable behaviour but by containing these things in in the theatre, living them with and through the actors we may both lance the ‘abcess’ and translate the energy created through the shared excesses of actor and audience into a higher form.

3. WAKING THE DOUBLE...THROUGH PURGING, A KIND OF SUPER-CATHARSIS, THE AUDIENCE RELEASES HIS DESIRE TO SIN AND ACHIEVES A HIGHER STATE

Note that it is not enough just to lance the abcess; in simple terms that would be to offer an equation: allow the audience to ‘participate’ in the actor’s brutal murder of a rival and their own desire for brutality to another is drained away. That simple solution is only part of the equation [ though, as an aside here, it is a part that some drama therapists experimented with influenced by forerunners of modern psychology such as W.M. Reich, who mooted the idea that if you allowed a patient to take out his anger against, say, his father by pummelling an effigy of that parent, then that anger would be worked through and dissipated - another route which Artaudian drama has influenced]. For Artaud it is not enough to drain the poison away, it is also hoped that the audience will find their higher selves, will be in some way transfigured, as the actor is himself when he builds passion up on stage but does not release it in a real act of, say, murder. The build up of that extreme state of emotional energy wakes up what Artaud calls ‘the double’, which is the essential man, the higher self - that part of everyone that is often repressed in waking life and which, in consequence, only finds its expression in dreams and fantasies.

It is clear that Artaud intends the audience as far as possible to experience the
same as the actors, actually to be carried along with the emotions the actors generate into that higher state. Thus Artaud sees theatre literally as a regenerative power.

Interestingly, though he is a pessimist about his own society these hints at the possibility of a higher state show that he believes Man may be redeemable. And redeemable through the intervention of theatre, just as primitive actors by taking on the persona of a god led the audience to experience the god firsthand.

4. IF MAN IS BASICALLY THE SAME THE WORLD OVER, INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES ARE INADEQUATE TO EXPRESS MAN’S REAL CONCERNS

Artaud wants a type of theatre that crosses the barriers of language and the veneers of civilisation to awaken the common primitive roots of shared humanity the world over. Language is a problem for two main reasons:

i] It defines a particular people in a particular place and time and is thus limiting and

ii] it is inadequate to express the extremes of human emotion. Better would be sounds - howls, sighs, groans - expressions of emotion wrenched from the innermost core of the human soul.

So, rather than words, a language of sounds, or words used as vehicles for emotion rather than for logical sense, would be more universal. On top of this, visual symbols have a power to reach people on an emotional level far more potently than words alone. This is something that theatre, which is a visual art form, can do wonderfully.

This is what Artaud means by ‘concrete language’: a language of visual symbols that can be understood on an emotional instinctive level by an audience anywhere in the world. Thus, to give the simplest example, the curled protective body of one actor cradling the sobbing body of another, speaks more immediately to an audience of warmth and caring than any amount of speech. However, the body shapes coupled with the sounds of sympathy and caring, either couched in language or in sounds alone

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can be just as effective: here the language would be used for the crooning tones, the warm open sounds the words made rather than their sense.

5. IF LANGUAGE IS INADEQUATE THEN A THEATRE ROOTED IN LANGUAGE AND DEPENDENT ON IT AS ITS PRINCIPAL MEANS OF EXPRESSION IS ALSO INADEQUATE. LITERARY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ‘SLICE-OF-LIFE‘ PLAYS ALLOW NO ROOM FOR UNIVERSAL EXPRESSION.

The main problem with literary plays, especially those which explore people in realistic situations - the naturalistic theatre which was prevalent at the time of Artaud's writing - is that these go nowhere near an understanding of Man in the larger sense. They are as limiting to the actor and to theatre as language is itself. The plays he likes - Greek tragedies, the macabre works of such as Ford's ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore', have this in common: they deal with men and women in extreme states of passion, living on the knife-edge of their existences. They are forced by circumstances to overthrow the rules and conventions of their societies and in so doing, out of their defiance, they become super-human: heroes or anti-heroes, but in any case larger than life.

6. A NON- LITERARY THEATRE NEEDS A DIFFERENT SPACE.

Artaud proposed a hangar-like space for his form of theatre where an audience, seated in the middle, could be literally surrounded by action. Actors on cat-walks could be above the audience and on every side. The barrier of the normal actor/audience relationship is broken down, entirely necessary in a theatre which promotes the idea of breaking down the intellectual barrier of the audience’s reasoning brain and aims to encourage an entirely emotional response. If an audience’s experience is unsettling from the first: they are never quite sure from where the action may be coming, to what they might be next exposed, then the civilised intellect is already jittery and the animal instincts of a more basic primitive being is on the alert.

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7. THEATRE OF CRUELTY AND TOTAL THEATRE; THE TWO NAMES ARTAUD CALLED HIS FORM OF THEATRE.

Artaud called his theatre both these names seemingly randomly. Both are equally true but ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ refers to the idea of pushing actors and audiences to extreme states of experience out of which they may transcend themselves. ‘Total Theatre’ refers to the means by which this heightened state might be achieved. Modern ‘civilised’ human beings have an innate capacity to reason themselves out of situations, to ‘explain away’ emotional or spiritual experiences. Aware of this, Artaud wanted to bombard them with so much sensory experience at once that the mind is literally battered into submission. Hence ‘Total Theatre’, which means combining all the elements of light, sound, colour, costume, music, mask and acting - which is only one of these many elements - into a sensory experience of gigantic proportions which assaults the audience from all sides at once. The brain is thus softened up and the audience’s inner selves, their ‘doubles’, can be freed.

In extremely abbreviated form, the above is the essence of Artaud’s theories. The practical route I intend to follow through, explores each of these theories and will give a student a handle on each of them. It is important that they:

a] understand the theory
b] try it out in practice
c] assess the potential effectiveness of that theory in relation to Artaud’s intentions.

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ARTAUD: THE THEORIES EXPLORED THROUGH PRACTICE

1. BEING CRUEL TO ONESELF.

Artaud says ..."cruelty means strictness, diligence, unrelenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determination."

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Taking this as a starting point, try an exercise where they imagine the whole room divided up in large squares like a huge grid. They can move only along the imagined straight lines.

   Each student is to think of something that they want to reach - something that is so important that it is imperative they keep it uppermost in their minds. For example, they could have a loved one they are trying to reach, or a desperately important object such as the medicine that will save a loved one’s life.

   Whatever they choose as the person or object they are trying to reach, it is an impossibly long way off. Nonetheless it must be reached and this can only be done by keeping that thought uppermost in the mind: focus on the thing being attempted with the whole concentration. And then start walking along any of the straight lines of the grid, avoiding all obstacles and not bumping into people, nor stopping on the way for any reason.

   The pace of the movement must be steady and relentless.

   Most importantly it must carry on beyond the point when the students would want to stop.

   Keep them moving with strictness; keep them focusing on what they
are striving for. They must keep moving until they are exhausted mentally and physically.

Then stop them and talk about the breaking down of barriers, mental and physical. What does this mean in fact? Did they begin to get a glimmer of the rigour of concentration needed? If they were Artaudian actors what would they need to improve on?

This exercise is good for breaking down those physical and mental barriers as well as for the discipline needed to stick to walking in straight lines without bumping into anything or anyone. Part of the mind is concentrated on the desired object, part on keeping in touch with the surroundings and avoiding accidents.

2. Try further pushing the limits by giving the students a series of actions to repeat over and over again.

For instance, stretch towards the ceiling, down to touch the floor, push out to one side with both arms stretched and then the other.

Repeat and keep repeating, establishing a fast rhythm in which to do this, until well beyond the point where they are looking fed-up and exhausted.

If you keep going they will go beyond the point of being fed-up and move onto a different physical plane where they are acting under a sort of automatic pilot.
2. LARGER THAN LIFE.

To perform in the huge spaces that Artaud proposes, actors would need to be larger than life in their voice and gestures. I don’t mean by this the sort of ‘hamming it up’ of bad amateur acting, but rather a very controlled broad physicalisation where every gesture is taken to its limits.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Slow motion work of any kind encourages this broadening of gesture along with great body control. Try the following, therefore:

   Work on any type of sport event in slow motion.

   Start with pair work:
   wrestling; tennis.

   Move on to team work:
   running a race; a tug of war with an imaginary rope.

   Try also solo work:
   weight-lifting; discus throwing.

   All of these are in mime of course and all as painfully slow as possible. Concentrate on pulling the facial grimaces out to extremes - the outward signs of effort - and controlling the body by keeping the whole sequence at the same pace.

   This is not as easy as it sounds, particularly a sequence that involves a body dropping to the ground, such as in a wrestling match.

   Sometimes I find it helps keep an even pace if you put a slow-rhythmed dreamy tape of music on for them to work with.
2. A further exercise, which concentrates more on physicalising emotion is the ‘emotion line.’

Ask six students to stand in a line at one end of the room facing the rest of the group seated as an audience at the other end.

They are given an emotion such as ‘panic.’ The first in line starts with as slight a response as possible. The next in line watches and builds the response a little further, then the third builds it a little more, and so on, until total hysteria is reached. Note that they should not aim to reach the most extreme point by the sixth in line - that would be to build it too quickly - but once the sixth person is reached the responses move back down the line again continuing up and down as long as is necessary.

Keep pushing them to take it further and further. Even when it seems impossible, push them once more; it is amazing how suddenly some sort of barrier goes down as they reach a kind of desperation and finally lose all inhibition, contorting themselves into all sorts of body postures accompanied by some incredible noises.

Only when you as teacher deem that the emotion can be taken no further are the six let off the hook and released to sit down with the group again.

A further six are then chosen and given a fresh emotion with which to work.

Good follow-ups are:

anger
suspcion
love
3. RHYTHM AND RITUAL

Artaud talks about bringing audiences back to ancient forms of theatre, with their emphasis on religion and ritual. In his own time, he saw a Balinese folk theatre troupe, who performed a piece about the battle between Good and Evil represented by a dragon and a witch. He was impressed by how the troupe could communicate the story through strong symbols, ritualised movements and rhythms to stir the audience’s imagination. It did not matter that the language was not French, it communicated anyway and in a more exciting way - by stirring the emotions and the instincts.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. If possible, have some percussive instruments handy for this exercise. If the music department is unwilling, it is easy to make some out of tins and boxes of different sizes filled with different-sounding contents, e.g. woodshavings, pebbles, grit, lentils, etc. Different textures of sound can thus be created.

   Hand these out to some of the group and instruct the others to use claps, stamps, thighslaps or breaths. If no instruments are available, the exercise can still be done with just these.

   Now, standing in a circle, establish a strong, steady beat. Each one in turn round the circle must now add their sound and rhythm to fit in with the central beat. They are not trying to change the rhythm; instead they must match it or add counterpoint to it till by the end of the circle a rich and intricate pattern of sounds is produced.

2. Capitalising on this exercise ask them to create a tribal ritual dance based on either war or a prayer for rain. They could use the instruments to help plus rhythms created by their voices and bodies. Simple movements will need to
be added which express the aim of the dance. A wardance will use strong aggressive movements, stamping, harsh guttural sounds and a blood-stirring rhythm whereas a raindance may mimic the sound of the rain itself and use pattering, light movements, sounds and rhythms.

4. BREATHING

Just as rhythm can infect an audience - think, for instance, how rhythms can infect and uplift in such venues as a nightclub - rhythmical breathing, thought Artaud, can have the same effect. He sought a way to find the breathing patterns for each emotion, certain that if these could be identified then that would be a quick way of carrying the audience along with the actors. He wanted the audience to identify with the show ‘breath by breath’, literally carried along by experiencing the emotions of the actors along with them.

There is some truth that is easy to test in these ideas. Healers will calm a panic-stricken person by imposing calm breathing on them, matching their slow breaths with stroking and vocal sounds in the same rhythm. In the same way, it is easy to wake up feelings of panic and stress by imposing a ragged loud breathing pattern in a fast syncopated rhythm. Try it out in a darkened room and the whole group will quickly feel uneasy.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Try sitting the whole group in a darkened room or, at the very least, with eyes closed. One person, selected by the teacher, begins, focusing on a particular emotion and trying to establish a breathing pattern for it.

How quickly does the rest of the group feel what he is feeling?

Note that the breaths need to be made audible in some way, with vocal sound of an appropriate kind lightly added to them.

This, Artaud believed, was the universal language of the human heart: not a verbal language, but one of screams, grunts, guttural sounds, sighs and breaths.
5. THE PROBLEM WITH LANGUAGE AND WESTERN THEATRE.

Artaud rejected the theatre of his own time, which devoted itself either to naturalism with its wordiness and introspection or to reproductions of the classics. Neither of these have anything important to say to us, avers Artaud; rather we should find a drama for our own time that deals with the real concerns of humanity: his hopes, dreams, fears and large subjects such as the struggle between good and evil or seeking to understand the nature of divinity. These are the subjects that the ancient theatre dealt with but Artaud does not propose reproducing those ancient plays. Instead we must find our own expression of those universal themes which are common to humanity the world over.

To express those themes adequately, a new kind of language needs to be invented, one that will both cross the barriers of nationality and that will express those things that language cannot adequately encompass. To use an example, the word ‘cold’ goes no way towards expressing the sensation of being cold. Words are reductions and a theatre that concentrates on words as the most important feature is ignoring the potential of the areas of sensation - smell, touch, hearing, sight - that theatre as a live form could use.

He does not, however, propose a theatre without the spoken word, but wants rather to take the emphasis away from that area and reduce its importance. Language is inadequate to express anything on its own, therefore it must be linked with other means of expression, physical and sensory. Moreover, the more difficult and metaphysical the concept to be communicated the more inadequate spoken language becomes: instead these areas ought to be communicated through suggestion. Why? Because if whatever happens on stage elicits a response in the audience that is couched in verbal form, albeit in his own head, then the fact that the audience is rationalising his response in linear verbal ways means he is also in the process of reducing feelings and ideas. To prevent this, the audience must respond in visual images and sensory impressions; he will understand on a deep, gut level and ought to avoid trying to rationalise that.

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understanding. Oblique images, symbols, archetypes, work in this suggestive way.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Ask the class to divide into pairs and, using sounds only, build up an argument from the first signs of disagreement, through a full-blown row, to apologising and making-up. Use as full a range of sounds as possible. For instance, derision can come through in tongue clicks, rolled ‘rrrrrs, whistling breaths, snorts and a number of other ways. All this will be accompanied by intensified body language and gestures that are clear and sharp. Once they have done this, ask them to choose a word between them, any word, to use as part of this symphony of sounds. Now repeat the exercise with the word being used as well.

   The word will have the effect either of simply being another sound, one amongst many, showing the reduced status of verbal language in this style of theatre, or it will trigger off a string of associations, if the word is well-chosen.

2. Stand the group in a circle. In turn, each should take a word of their choice expressing the sense of that word both physically and through exaggerated verbal inflexion. For example, the word ‘heavy’ could be expressed by lowering the body towards the floor showing strain in every muscle whilst at the same time saying the word in a deep ponderous voice. Or ‘cold’ could be expressed by hugging the body and trembling all over, whilst stammering the ‘c-c-c-c-cold’ as if shivering.

   Whatever language you spoke or your audience spoke, these words would communicate their sense in this way.

3. Now with the group working in pairs, take the following words one by one and express them physically and by using the sound of the word to enhance their meaning:
   massage; insanity; order; captivity; meticulous;
blossoming; partnership; distance.

Some of these words, of course, have more than one meaning. Hopefully, the brighter ones will see that and bring the added richness of layers of meaning into their interpretations.

6. FINDING A CONCRETE LANGUAGE OF SYMBOLS

Already the students are well on the way to finding a ‘concrete language’ for themselves. Artaud means by concrete language - language in a total physical form. So far, we have merely been exploring how to make words physical by accompanying them with body language or gesture which, along with sound, interpret the real meaning of the word. But Artaud’s concrete language ideas are more than this. He wants a language that is turned into visual symbol and this is altogether richer and more allusive.

Symbols work in a powerfully suggestive way, as any poet knows. Sometimes an image can trigger off a whole series of emotional responses in the reader e.g. the word ‘night’ conveys ideas of darkness, death, fear, destruction, evil, etc. Test out ‘horizon’. ‘tree’ and ‘water’ on your students. What connotations might these have other than their literal meaning? For instance, I would expect ‘horizon’ to trigger off ideas of goals, aims, adventure, etc. ‘Tree’ might provoke Christian responses as well as ideas of strength or a symbol of life.

The above is working with images in language alone, but how much more powerful do these become when they are made visual. Visual images stick in the mind far more than the spoken word and a strongly allusive image will send the brain off into all sorts of emotional responses as it were subliminally, bypassing the intellect and its reductive reasoning.

As with written images, discovering a visual symbolic response works best through brainstorming, using the word ‘like’.

For example, given the idea of boredom to express, a group might come up with:

Boredom is ‘like’ a clock ticking very slowly ....
a fly buzzing underlined by the droning voice of the teacher ....
leaves drooping in heat .... etc.
PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Divide the class into small groups of about four. See if they can come up with ideas for physical images for the following:
   
   anger
   rejection
   deceit.

   In every case, the group need to start with brainstorming: anger is like two dogs fighting over the same bone, etc.... Then they need to try these ideas out physically.

2. Next, extend this a little further.

   Take the idea of non-conformity. A symbol for this might be a group of people marching or doing a strict routine of repeated movements while one person begins to dance slowly and dreamily. Add sounds to this idea and extend it further. What happens next? How do the conformists react to the odd one out?

3. Using wherever possible the whole of their small group, explore a more extended symbolic portrayal of:
   
   the sudden flaring up of a streetfight
   the protectiveness of parental love

   In each case see if the group can take the central idea a step further into some sort of resolution.

   Note that symbols can be mixed. For instance, an argument could involve the slinky moves and hisses of big cats at one time, the snarling and howling of a dog-fight.
at another, the fizzing and exploding of matches igniting at another. The idea is to hit the audience hard and fast with a whirligig of impressions, not all of which will resonate for every person, but enough will.

Discuss what other additions might have helped too—sounds, lights, visual images back-projected on the cyclorama, props, costumes, colour washes or anything else. Explain that the elements combine in a production to make Total Theatre.

4. Ask the group to try now to express a whole storyline in a symbolic way.
For this, the groups should be larger, ideally around eight in number.

A suggested storyline is as follows:

Boy meets girl. They fall in love. Angry parents try to keep the two apart. The two find a way of escaping and run off together.

Obviously this very simple story needs interest added by the richness of the imagery they could produce. It also needs some sort of resolution.

Before beginning, the students need to talk through how to prepare a storyline in an Artaudian way. It cannot be approached in a logical naturalistic manner, with single characters allocated to individual members of the group. Certainly two people have to be the young lovers but the rest of the group will be taking an active part throughout, expressing symbolically the emotional states of mind of one or other of the lovers, as well as taking on parts of the storyline as other characters where necessary, even becoming physical things such as doors slamming, bubbles bursting, and so on.

Remind them too of other things they have touched on: rhythm, breathing, sound, repetition, chanting, music, ritual, masks, words used as sound.

They will need to:

a] Break down the story into small sections.

b] Brainstorm each section looking for startling and individual ways of expressing something symbolically.

c] Choreograph each section to maximise the use of the whole group as they move from image to image, from impression to impression. Check that physical expression is large enough.
d] Add whatever can be added in your particular space and circumstances to enhance the action and the moods: amplified sound, light, cloths or costumes, and so on. If some or all of these are impractical then they should at least come up with ideas that they could use in ideal circumstances.

7. THE AUDIENCE: THEATRE AS LIFE

Artaud believed that theatre should be a participatory event for the audience. It should express modern life and the universal concerns of mankind nowadays in such a way that the audience will recognise and ‘discover’ their true selves. Followers of Artaud took this idea in two different directions. One direction, which actively involved the audience by making them actually take part is the Happening or Event. The other way was to involve the audience less directly by carrying them along emotionally through the elements of Total Theatre.

Happenings were very popular in the Fifties and Sixties and ranged from simple scenarios such as a group of people smashing a piano up in the middle of the street and inviting passers-by to join in, to quite complex ideas where audience were taken on a kind of magical mystery tour, often exposed to nudity or sexual fantasies, never being quite sure whether what they were experiencing was ‘real’ or not.

In both types of scenario the audience were often invited to break rules or taboos and those who participated often found this a very liberating experience. They were able to observe how they reacted in such strange circumstances and gained an understanding, a discovery of themselves which often shocked them.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Your students could try both kinds of these happenings. Here is a suggestion for the first kind:

Take a number of helium balloons, some gift tags and pens to a crowded pedestrian precinct or square. Recite, in a choric way, a piece of
moving verse, or read out a newspaper report of something that has happened recently, or sing a stirring protest song. When a number of people have stopped and are watching, tell them they can take a tag and write their own message on it, of hope perhaps, or protest, attaching it to the balloon of their choice. Then when all have done this, devise a simple ceremony at the end of which all who are now participating, read out their message and release their balloon.

2. For the second type of Happening, prepare a treasure hunt [no actual treasure is necessary] using written clues, perhaps set in riddles, that send participants from one area of a room or building to another. Invite a small number of people to participate in this event. They should not be close friends of the students; it is better if they are a different year. It is necessary that the drama students running this event remain strict and firm at all times. Blindfold the participants to start with and keep them apart from each other and in silence. Allow one at a time to go into the treasure hunt area and remove his blindfold. Talking only in whispers to him, tell him he has only five minutes to solve all the clues and find the treasure. If he fails ... allow this to hang threateningly in the air. Those who fail [and they all do - make sure that at least some of the clues are impossible] are herded into a small darkened room and left there with strict instructions not to talk. They will. Turn bright lights on them all at once. And instruct them to clap. Anyone who stops clapping will be punished ... Then the students should turn their backs on the participants. The clapping will continue for a little but first one, then more, will stop and when nothing is said or done, all will stop. Students leave a silence before turning round with a huge smile and moving round the participants to congratulate them.

Afterwards make sure that the students ask the guinea-pigs what they felt about the experience.
8. THE AUDIENCE 2]: TOWARDS TOTAL THEATRE

Even if the audience are not actively participating, Total Theatre demands that the barrier between the theatrical event and life must be broken down. There must be “no let-up” in the assault on the audience’s senses. Their minds must be battered into submission so that they are no longer able to put up the barriers of reason and intellect and so that they respond on an emotional gut level. They will be living the event of the show by identifying with it “breath by breath and beat by beat.”

To do this, the audience needs to be disorientated from the start. They are put in an unexpected relationship to the actors, who might surround them, be above them, or whatever; they are assaulted by sound, rhythm, light and colour, sensory impressions of all kinds; their subconscious is awoken by the subtle resonances given by a welter of images and symbols.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Allow the group to experiment with sound at least and light if that is feasible. They should discuss and try out how certain effects can be achieved, thinking all the time of the audience.

   How, for example, might they build up a tense and threatening atmosphere?

   How prepare for the entrance of a god or hero?

   For an atmosphere of extreme loneliness?

   Use all three of these ideas as exercises for the group to discover ways and means of using the apparatus of total theatre. Much of this will be through discussion, but as much as possible they should try things out in practice. Have for their use a variety of instruments, a tape-recorder that will
record live and a microphone, cloths, masks and anything else that you have lying around your studio that might be of use.

For instance, they might come up with some of these ideas for the preparation for the entrance of a god:

- a hummed chord rising up to full amplification
- mysterious masked figures in procession
- the smell of incense or flowers
- ritual chants or a ritual dance
- a huge effigy
- light growing to an unbearable whiteness that bursts on the audience.

They might perform around the audience or involve them in the ceremony in some way.

2. Then ask the individual groups to come up with a theme suitable for Artaudian treatment, e.g.

- the Holocaust ....
- rape ....
- bullying ....

They are to present the first few minutes of a show on this theme, thinking of challenging ways of using the space they have and of breaking the boundaries between actors and audience.

Encourage them to use as much as they can of what they have learned and aim to unsettle the audience so that their intellects are on hold and their emotions and instincts are thoroughly aroused.
ARTAUD’S TREATMENT OF TEXTS: A FINAL PROJECT

Finish the work on Artaud by using his approach to literary texts.

Ask the students to bring in a play they have all studied - or provide them with copies out of school stock. Most likely, common ground will be found from texts studied for GCSE.

Divide them up into groups according to the text they have chosen. It doesn't matter if they have not each got a copy since all will have previous knowledge to start from and this will be enough providing there are one or two copies per group. Shakespeare is the best starting point since the plays have room for manoeuvre and most of those set for GCSE have violence or magic or at least passionate emotions.

With their texts they are to ask themselves the following:

What is the bare bones of the storyline?

Are there any scenes whose language one might want to retain all or part of? [For instance, some of the witches’ chants in ‘Macbeth’ might be useful or individual lines can be picked up and amplified. I have used the line ‘A drum, a drum, Macbeth doth come’ to play with, for example.]

Can some of the features of the story be translated into the concrete language of symbols? [For instance the idea of ambition, or greed, or suspicion might trigger off associations like they did in a previous exercise.]

What effect would they want to have on an audience? Ask them to
imagine that the audience is multi-national and so should understand the piece from visuals and sounds rather than language [except that language itself can at times be part of that sound].

Note that language is not banned but cannot be used for its logical sense by appealing to the mind; rather it needs to be used, when it is, for its emotional effect. You could use part of a passionate speech from Romeo to Juliet, for instance, with the intonation heightened to a degree that all would understand this is a declaration of love from the tone alone.

Finally, they should make decisions about the type of space in which they would want to perform their piece and where the audience should be. What would be the best way of breaking down the barrier between action and audience so that the latter feel thoroughly involved and are an active part [at least emotionally] of the experience?

They should combine all the elements they have learned so far to come up with something that can be shown and tried out on an audience if possible.

Where they cannot fulfil their intentions with technical details, they should be able to explain what they would want to achieve and how it might enhance their production.

This is a very brief taster of the kind of work students should be attempting when studying Artaud. For further exercises and, particularly, further explanation and practical and theoretical exploration of Artaud’s theories, there is a study programme ‘ARTAUD THROUGH PRACTICE’ available.
As with the other practitioners in this volume, I propose only to bring out such details of his life and background as help us to an understanding of Grotowski’s work and theories.

1. Grotowski is Polish. Why is that important? To understand, you need to know just a very little about the history of Poland.

   For hundreds of years Poland has been in a state of ferment, sometimes independent, sometimes under the rule of another country: Russia, Austria, Germany have all taken turns in occupying the land. Its borders have often been changed; in fact, from 1795 onwards Poland ceased to exist as a country at all until 1918 when it was re-established as a Republic. There followed a brief respite until 1939 when Germany invaded and millions of Poles - both Jews and non-Jews - were exterminated. Whole villages and towns were burned. Under the Germans, the Polish people experienced even more torture, starvation and oppression of all kinds. The death camps, Auschwitz and Treblinka, were also set up in Poland. After the war, Poland became one of the Iron Curtain countries, a Socialist state answerable to the Soviet Union.

   These facts explain:

   a] Grotowski’s obsession with Poland’s tormented past, as depicted through the masterpieces of the Nineteenth Century he chose to use as springboards for his work.

   b] it is impossible to be brought up in a country so full of age-old memories of oppression and suffering, in addition to the suffering Grotowski himself lived through during the Second World War, without being deeply affected. He was working too against a background of Marxism and had to be careful not to offend authority; many of his pieces are hard to read politically: by focusing on Poland’s past
history, Grotowski is able to raise protests against oppression without his contemporary leaders taking offence.

2. Not only is Poland a country with an extraordinary history, it is also deeply Roman Catholic. If anything, its faith over the centuries has been strengthened by oppression. Even amongst the Marxist officials that ran the country until recently, Roman Catholic religious feelings were strong.

   These facts help us understand:

   a] why Grotowski’s language and subject-matter is so full of religious imagery. The actor is ‘holy’ and his role is to achieve ‘grace’ through the ‘revelation’ of the theatrical experience.

   b] the use of phrases like ‘secular holiness’. Though a Grotowski actor is seeking a spiritual salvation, it is not the salvation of the Roman Catholic church, but a personal salvation by the secular means of the theatre. The plays themselves offer images that are often critical of religious tradition as they are of other social traditions. The undercover political nature of his work is explained by the obvious need for caution in such a country.

3. Grotowski’s famous works were based on the following plays:

   Forefathers’ Eve by Mickiewicz
   The Constant Prince by Slowacki
   Akropolis by Wyspianski

In addition, he had enormous admiration for the French philosopher Simone Weil, born a Jew, who converted to Catholicism and to Socialism. During World War Two she starved herself to death as a protest against the suffering and deaths of all those in the war. She believed that the chain of evil she saw surrounding her could only be broken by acts of extreme self-sacrifice such as her own.

   Mickiewicz and Slowacki were Polish Romantics who fled into exile after the 1830 revolution when the Polish people rose up and tried to overthrow their oppressors. The Revolution failed and many intellectuals and aristocrats fled to France

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to establish a kind of ‘Poland-in-Exile’. Their works are full of romanticised images of suffering Poland. For Mickiewicz, Poland becomes a symbol for Christ; for Slowacki it is up to the individual to be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice to die for his country. Both playwrights use mystical religious language and imagery, encouraging ideas of martyrdom, romantic death and an ultimate resurrection of the spirit.

Wyspianski was the father-figure of Polish theatre. He saw the theatre as a ‘temple’ - as did Stanislavski too - but, unlike Stanislavski, felt that play texts should be abandoned and instead theatre should be a place of visions and dreams.

These influences help with:

a] further understanding of the religious imagery used throughout Grotowski’s work and the ideas of personal self-sacrifice and public suffering: the offering up of the actor as a sacrifice to counteract the cruelty of the modern world.

b] understanding of his approach to text. Grotowski states that text should be abandoned, though ironically he always used a text as a starting-point.

4. Grotowski formed the Polish Laboratory Theatre, dedicated to investigating the art of acting. He goes further than Stanislavski, whose Studios were areas of experimentation into the actor and his art; gradually, Grotowski went beyond the techniques of acting itself to an interest in the actor’s personal journey into himself, stripping away his own ‘masks’ to discover his ‘real’ inner self. In other words, Stanislavski and Grotowski differ in a very basic way: Stanislavski is interested in what makes an actor into a better and more convincing actor; Grotowski is interested in what acting can uncover in a person’s own psyche. The acting, the act of theatre, becomes less important than the personal journey. Acting really becomes a kind of therapy which an audience may be invited to witness but as Grotowski’s ideas progressed, more and more one gets the feeling that the audience is almost an irrelevance.

These facts help us realise:

a] that audience is not important except as witnesses to the actor’s personal suffering and sacrifice

b] that Grotowski’s theatre was never and could never be a commercial theatre.
GROTOWSKI: THE THEORIES

1. FINDING THE RIGHT PHYSICAL ACTION TO UNLEASH THE EMOTION

Grotowski’s starting points are a variety of theatrical sources; it is useful to identify these in order to see a) what he takes from the originals and b) how he changes and diverts from them.

From Stanislavski, who was his original hero, he took the working method of investigation, experiment, trial and error. From him, he takes the idea of a laboratory, a place to study the mechanics of, and impulses to, action. Much of Stanislavski’s thinking, particularly his emphasis on truthfulness and on basing acting on the actor’s own experiences and individual stimuli, Grotowski also admired. Particularly he respected Stanislavski’s dedication to his art; Stanislavski himself calls the theatre a ‘temple’ at the end of ‘Building a Character’ and speaks often about the respect the actor should show towards it as an art-form. Stanislavski’s idealised view that an actor’s life should be dedicated to his craft, though on a more human and mundane level than the dedication proposed by Grotowski, encouraged Grotowski to see the actor as a disciple on the way to finding ‘revelations’ through ‘self-revelation.’

The one area which Grotowski disagrees with in the System [and this is a disagreement shared by many other practitioners] is the idea of Emotion Memory. Stanislavski’s theory of Emotion Memory suggests that the actor finds emotions within himself through an intellectual process and then tries to awaken that same emotion again by living it through in his head.

The whole process in Grotowskis’ view is both too cerebral and too calculated. Grotowski believes that the key to action is that it is a physical reaction to an emotional impulse. In other words, the emotion is released by finding the right physical action to
unleash it, not the other way about. To be fair to Stanislavski, he was working along these lines himself towards the end of his life in his work on tempo-rhythm. Nonetheless, Stanislavski’s tendency would be to detect an area of tension - say a stiffness in the neck - and then to seek to eliminate it, while Grotowski would seek to find the emotional reason for the stiffness. Perhaps, for example, Grotowski might notice that for a certain actor the action of raising his right arm to shoulder level releases a strong feeling of grief and loss - he associates the action on a deep level with putting his hand on the shoulder of his father the last time he saw him alive - but it is the action that releases the emotion. From this example, you can see how important Grotowski felt it to be to work with each individual actor separately. Every actor has to find his own physical associations; it is an intensely personal journey.

So Grotowski believes that emotion can be tapped and released from physical action and that that action is linked to a strong inner impulse that needs to be discovered, which in turn is linked to a shared collective unconscious. Though the actor’s journey is a personal one, enough of his self-discovery translated into physical form, will resonate for others so that the actor’s revelation, shown on stage, becomes a shared journey for the audience too.

There are echoes here of Artaud and his insistence that we all share, the world over, the same basic instincts, fears and so on. Unlike Artaud, though, who theorised but came up with few practical ways of tapping into this basic unconscious from the actor’s point of view - Artaud’s concern seems to be more for finding ways of using the actor as a means of tapping into the audience’s subconscious - Grotowski’s whole method is about finding ways for the actor to uncover all the pretences and masks behind which he hides so as to find his true self; the journey the audience takes too is incidental.

2. STRINGENT EXERCISES STRIP AWAY THE ACTOR’S MASKS

Grotowski’s exercises - ‘corporeals’ and ‘plastiques’ are adaptations from Meyerhold, especially the famous ‘cat’ exercise, Vakhtangov, the Peking Opera and the Kathakali theatre. All the exercises are intended both to extend the body’s capacities and expressiveness well beyond the norm and to be linked in with inner emotional
impulses. In other words, these exercises Grotowski found useful for breaking down the actor’s personal barriers and ‘masks’. The idea is to do the exercises for an extremely long time, breaking through first of all the exhaustion barrier where the brain says ‘I can’t’ and then finds that it can after all, to expose and ultimately eliminate all the other blocks that each individual has.

‘Corporeals’ are exercises that particularly centre on the vertabrae, as does the ‘cat’. The work is done with great energy, concentrating on increasing the suppleness of the body, especially the spine, as well as, through the speed and energy of the actions, breaking down the previously mentioned barriers.

‘Plastiques’ involve many exercises that rotate individual joints very fast. The idea seems to be to identify and be able to move separately different parts of the body. As the actor becomes more experienced at isolating different parts of the body, more advanced plastiques use parts of the body moving in opposition to each other. As well as further breaking down the physical and emotional barriers in individual actors, this opposition of different parts of the body - making one side of the body ugly whilst the other is beautiful, for instance - chimes in with Grotowski’s theories about dialectics. See Theory Note 3 for a further discussion of dialectics and its meaning.

In general, then, the exercises are a means to the actor breaking down his physical and emotional ‘masks’. Out of daily stringent work at them the actor not only makes himself a more supple being, capable of extraordinary control, but by going through such ‘torture’ in the company with others he has both discovered deep emotional things about himself and has shared difficulties and the shifting of masks with the others in his group. Working together in this way leads to an extraordinary intimacy and trust. Actors become very sensitive to each other and in tune to an extraordinary degree. For this reason, many of the later exercises involve working together as a group in very precise and terrifyingly fast exercises in which every member of the group is reliant on the others and as important as the rest. One person not concentrating intensely at all times could cause actual harm to the others in the group; they need to achieve the group bonding and trust that a troupe of acrobats or high-wire artistes, for example, need.

3. THE ACTOR’S PHYSICAL BODY MUST BE ABLE TO EXPOSE THE
CONTRADICTIONS FOUND WITHIN SOCIETY; GROTOWSKI'S DIALECTICS

Some of the exercises used by the Kathakali theatre form the basis for many of the ‘plastique’ exercises and also for the type of acting that Grotowski so often favours, that of an exploration of dialectics. For example, a Kathakali actor may tell a story with very precise movements of the hands alone, whilst commenting on the story through his facial expression, especially his eyes. This example tells us a lot about dialectics as well as about Grotowski’s style of acting and the reason for reaching a level of skill where different parts of the body can contradict each other.

Dialectics is basically a form of argument. Grotowski, brought up in a Marxist regime, would have been aware of ‘dialectical materialism,’ which is the idea that historical events are made by the clashing of two opposing social forces, both wanting different things, such as workers and aristocrats, for example. Dialectical materialism is a very specific way of looking at things but in a country and society which has been so consistently ripped apart by opposing forces: Catholicism and Marxism, for example, or simply the clash between the Polish people and all the different peoples over the years who have marched in to suppress them, makes it a world view that is particularly apt. Others, such as Hegel and Kant, have seen dialectics as the opposition of contradictory forces out of which comes something else which is more than the sum of both those forces. In other words, to give a very simplistic example, if a person were beautiful from one point of view and ugly from another, the co-existence of both those qualities pulling against each other creates a unity which is more exciting or interesting or wonderful than either of the viewpoints taken on their own.

I hope I have managed to make some complex ideas accessible without reducing them to the point of idiocy! It is important, however, to understand what Grotowski is trying to do when, for instance, in ‘Akropolis’ he has the actors playing prisoners offering their chants and prayers to God whilst at the same time other actors jeer and undermine them. The example is one of many and shows that Grotowski’s method is to seek to expose the contradictions in society, creating by so doing a form of theatre that is powerful, moving, frightening and totally engrossing: the unity that is greater than the sum of its contradictory parts.

To show the contradictions that are all around us and in our own beings, the actor’s
body must be capable of expressing the contradictions within himself. For instance, he may have to show that within himself is both the desire to live a ‘good’ life and at the same time the desire to sin; this might be expressed by the actor’s expression fixed in a beatific ‘mask’ such as a saint might have, whilst his body commits outrages.

4. THE VOICE AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE INNER SELF

It has become obvious why the physical exercises are so important. I have not mentioned the voice, which may also through sounds, groans and cries, expose the inner emotions which are propelling the actor into action. They should arise naturally out of the impulse, just as an action does. Nothing should be imposed from the outside; all comes from deep within the actor himself. This is similar to the insistence on acting truthfully put forward by Stanislavski but of course the end-result is entirely different: Stanislavski observes people in a social context and keeps the social masks in place, because that is how people behave in real life; Grotowski works to expose, understand and break through those masks to expose the naked soul within.

5. THE VIA NEGATIVA STRIPS AWAY PRETENCE; THE GROTOWSKI ACTOR DOES NOT ‘ACT’

Grotowski’s most unique theory is that of ‘the via negativa’- the negative way. The via negativa is this stripping away of masks and blocks already referred to, to get down to the ‘tabula rasa’, the blank sheet of paper, the core. The actor has already pushed himself to physical extremes in order to strip away some of these masks; by pushing himself to extremes, by seeking to understand what impels him to certain actions, by, in fact, supremely understanding himself and the unique inter-relationship within himself of feelings and actions, he has gone beyond any pretence. The Grotowski actor does not ‘act’ in the sense of pretend; nor should he ever imitate because that is imposed from the outside. Once he has found the ‘way’, night after night he exposes his true inner self [called ‘finding the Man’] to the audience in an act of self-sacrifice that is truly gruelling to watch as well as being uplifting because so completely honest.
6. THE POOR THEATRE STRIPS ALL ARTIFICE FROM THE PRODUCTION

Just as the actor strips himself of his masks, the theatre too is stripped bare; this is the theory of ‘the poor theatre.’ As all pretence is removed from the actor, so all that is artificial and ‘stagey’ should be removed from the production. The whole weight of productions rests, therefore, on the actors and what they can create with their bodies or with what ‘happens’ to be lying about the space. A few pieces of cloth, bare pieces of wood or metal: out of these simple things the actors should be able to build or suggest such set, props and costumes as they need. Lighting should be minimal and as far as possible, once again, created by the actors’ bodies. An example might be that a moody, frightening atmosphere is required: out of two basic standing lanterns, the actors, their bodies blocking and unblocking the light as necessary can create the shadows needed for the piece. Or they could temporarily hold a piece of cloth in front of the light source - and so on.

7. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES : ARTAUD AND GROTOWSKI

Much of Grotowski sounds very similar to Artaud. Grotowski himself denied any link but it is hard to ignore the similarities. Sometimes, Grotowski seems to have put into practice what remains largely theory to Artaud. The end result, however, is entirely different. It may be helpful if I give a quick run-down of the similarities and ultimate differences.

   i. THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

Both practitioners talk about a ‘collective unconscious’ shared by human beings everywhere, which can be tapped into. That is, mankind shares the same fears, hopes, passions, desires, which have been explored throughout man’s history in myths and legends that share many common ingredients.

   ii. THEATRE AS RITUAL

Both propound a theatre based on ritual, which draws on this mythic common ground BUT Grotowski takes this much further. In his hands the ritualised act of theatre becomes a sacred act and the actor himself is holy.

   iii. THE ACTOR PUSHED TO EXTREMES
Both talk about pushing the actor to extremes but Artaud’s ‘cruel to oneself’ becomes Grotowski’s ‘via negativa’: the stripping away of the actor’s masks and blocks to reveal the purified soul within.

iv. LITERARY TEXTS AND THEIR TREATMENT
Both consider literary texts to be obsolete but Artaud goes further than Grotowski in that many of his proposals were for ideas without any textual platform, e.g. his idea for a piece entitled ‘The Conquest of Mexico.’ Grotowski always uses a text as his starting point and treats them in the same manner as Artaud suggests when he says he would like to put on plays from the Elizabethan theatre “stripped of the lines, retaining only their period machinery, situations, character and plot.” [from ‘Theatre of Cruelty First Manifesto’] The ‘period machinery’ probably would not interest Grotowski, who concentrated instead on a theatre stripped of such things, but he does take the plots of plays and completely re-interprets them to bring out their mythic content, their universality.

v. HOW THE AUDIENCE IS AFFECTED
Both talk about the actor transcending himself, taking the audience with him with a result that is cathartic/therapeutic for both actor and audience. Here is an Artaudian theory that has truly been translated by Grotowski into reality. The audience at a Grotowski performance became so caught up in the pain and trance-like state of the actors, especially of Ryszard Cieslak, Grotowski’s main actor, that they were taken on a journey to self-revelation with them. However, it has to be said that this journey for the audience is incidental. Grotowski is far less interested in the audience than Artaud; for him the actor’s rite of self-sacrifice is the important aspect; the small invited audiences he allowed in were invited as witnesses and no direct attempt was made to change them other than their proximity to the actors.

SUMMARY: TOTAL THEATRE AND POOR THEATRE
In the end, the effect of Grotowski’s style of theatre is vastly different from the effect proposed by Artaud, despite the many similarities of the ‘ingredients.’ They could almost be said to be opposite in the final analysis: ‘Poor’ theatre as opposed to ‘Total’ theatre. Grotowski’s Poor Theatre is a stripping away of all artifice, first of all from the
actor himself and secondly from the technical side of production; as far as possible the actors create their own sound, set and costume from whatever they have to hand. But Artaud’s Total Theatre is about throwing all that theatre has to offer in the way of light, sound, effects of all kinds and so on, to overwhelm the audience and break down their ‘blocks’ and barriers by that means.

8. EACH PLAY REQUIRES ITS OWN UNIQUE SPACE WITHIN WHICH THE AUDIENCE MUST BE BUILT AS PART OF THE ACTION

Finally, a word about the theatre space that Grotowski used. For each production, a special individual space was designed which as far as possible incorporated the audience - which could be as few as a dozen - into it. To give one or two examples:

for ‘Doctor Faustus’ based on Marlow’s script, the action took place on two banquetting tables with the audience seated on benches at those same tables. Action took place on and under those tables.

for ‘The Constant Prince’ based on Slowacki’s script, the audience peered over a wall looking down on a rectangular space with an operating table on it. The effect was to be looking down on some forbidden act that took place in, perhaps, a torture chamber or an operating room.

for ‘Forefather’s Eve’, based on a script by Mickiewicz, actors and audience were scattered around the whole room, completely intermingled

for ‘Kordian’. based on a text by Slowacki, the scene was a mental hospital and the audience were scattered throughout the space once again, this time as patients - seated on chairs or on beds.

It is clear from Grotowski’s own comments that the idea is to break down the barriers between actors and audience completely, so that the audience are literally part of the action. The skill is to come up with a spatial design that will force them to empathise with the actors; this makes it easier for the audience to experience the same personal revelations as the actors do, because they are forced to participate in the same ‘journey.’
GROTOWSKI: THE THEORIES EXPLORED THROUGH PRACTICE

1. STRIPPING AWAY THE MASKS.

In order to act with the necessary truth and purity that Grotowski requires, the actor must be prepared to strip away all those masks - call them excuses, subterfuges, embarrassments or whatever, that stop him revealing ‘the Man’ which is his true inner self. ‘The Man’ is the essence of himself - the self free of all encumberments.

To be able to reach this purified state it is necessary for the actor to push himself to physical extremes. He must go beyond his perceived capacities; this is the first mask to fall, and having done this many other masks will follow. The body will be able to achieve amazing things if the mind is bulldozed into submission; it is the mind that so often prevents us achieving our potential; it throws up excuses of all kinds; so one of the purposes of this stringent exercising is to reach a state of mental exhaustion in which the body starts to act on a kind of automatic pilot - a sort of trance-like state. In this state it is capable of far more than the actor could have imagined.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1 & 2. Recognising that all we can do in this short space of time is another ‘sort-of’ approximation of what Grotowski is after, start with the same two exercises as I used for Artaud in the section on ‘Cruel to Oneself’ and for the same reasons. These two exercises will soften the students up a little.

3. Then ask them to find a space in the room on their own [ note that though they are on their own, each student needs to be aware of his surroundings, including the proximity of other people around him; this awareness is part of
the hyper-sensitivity he will be developing.] In this space, ask them to take deep inward breaths, drawing each breath right down into the solar-plexus. They need to concentrate on a feeling of gathering the breaths down there so as to build energy; allow the breaths to become faster and deeper, building energy up but containing the body in stillness. Only when the energy becomes unbearable and the student simply must move or burst should he then move - and the movement must be anywhere and in any fashion he likes. Allow the energy to carry each person around the room randomly, though always retaining enough perception of others not to bump or barge. The energy needs to dictate the movement. Each person should move without any conscious thought or embarrassment just as he feels appropriate. Some you will find will move to an inner rhythm of their own, some will simply repeat the same movement over and over, others again will drift randomly around the room following the dictates of a particular part of the body perhaps.

After this exercise, sit and discuss what blocks or masks were encountered: most of these, given the stage the students are at will be masks of self-consciousness. Another block could be stiffness - manifested by following a part of the body such as a shoulder or the suddenly heavy head; this type of action could also be a manifestation of blocks from embarrassment or reluctance stemming from another source.; it will be interesting to see if they can begin to investigate these blocks in a spirit of self-discovery. Giggles, of course, could be another way of blocking and should not be squashed but discussed as seriously as any of the other masks which manifest themselves.

4.If they managed to do this exercise with minimum embarrassment, move onto the ‘passing the energy’ exercise. Here the students should stand in a circle. Remembering how movement should come from within, from impulse in other words rather than from any calculation - a difficult enough task on its own - ask someone to go into the middle of the circle and to stand there and wait [eyes closed helps] until the impulse to move in a particular way begins.
There must be absolutely no planning of this movement - there are no marks for a clever or amusing set of movements - it may manifest itself in a repeated movement or dance-like steps to an inner rhythm. However it shows itself, the student should follow its dictates until he feels the need to include someone else. At that point he goes to someone else in the circle and moves in front of them; that person accepts the invitation, allows the other person’s movement to fill his being until he too is joining in whereupon the originator of the movement drops out.

As far as possible, the next person takes the movement and empties his mind till the movement has taken him over; he then may find it changing but once again the impulse to change will come naturally from within and must not be in any way forced from the outside.

This exercise can go on for a very long time and you will find the students tire of it easily. In an ideal world of course this would not happen and such an exercise would continue until an actor’s blocks surfaced when all would help him work through them. But because it is boring in the attenuated version we are having to do here, I find it better to do a slightly different version of this, as follows:

An Easier Alternative to Exercise 4.

In this one, the originator of the movement ‘dances’ or moves to the whole group standing in a line or loosely positioned at one end of the room. The whole group watch him whilst emptying themselves of any thought and allowing the rhythm and moves established by the leader to fill their pulses and senses until they find themselves swaying along and finally moving with him. At this point they may each find individually that they start to break away from the model and find a version that is all their own.

Whichever version you attempt make sure that the findings are fully discussed. What masks or blocks did they discover in themselves? How hard might it be for them to follow the ‘via negativa?’
2. THE HYPER-SENSITIVE STATE - WORKING AS A TEAM

Some work along this manner has been already begun or at least been hinted at in the last section. The idea of moving, following the dictates of inner impulses whilst still retaining awareness of others in the room, is a part of it.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Start the students off by asking them to lie absolutely still on the floor with eyes closed. Ask them to listen and make a mental list of any sounds they can hear, identifying also the source of the sound.

2. Follow on by asking them to concentrate on the people or objects nearest to them on every side. With their eyes closed can they say whether each person/thing is only two inches away or several feet?

3. Using this heightened awareness, move the group around to a space in the room. They should be standing randomly, facing any direction. On a signal, all should move forward at top speed, ducking and weaving around everyone else in the room. Anyone who bumps into another should immediately stop still and become another static obstacle for those remaining in motion. If you have a small group in a large room, reduce the area in which they are working in some way.

4. See if you can borrow some bean bags from the P.E. department, enough for everyone in the group to have one. This exercise is a follow-up from the last one, harder to achieve but still possible with intense concentration. This time the group move around - start slow and move faster only when some confidence has been achieved - throwing the beanbags to each other at the same time. The bean bag must not remain in the hands for longer than a
second; it must be moved on instantly.

The group will probably only be able to sustain the success of this for brief moments. It will give them an insight into the sort of concentration needed for such exercises as Grotowski’s one where a constant flow of bodies move in and out from all four corners of a room somersaulting over each other in the centre.

3. CORPOREAL EXERCISES

By picking out samples from Grotowski’s own exercises - those that are within the range of untrained students, at least to some extent! - I have made a list, slightly adapted from Grotowski’s originals, as follows:

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Walk as a group in strict rhythm, following a piece of music or a hand clap, whilst rotating the arms. Vary this by walking with arms held outstretched, rotating the hands alone.

2. Walk with knees bent whilst gripping the ankles firmly.

3. ‘The Cat’: Lie stretched out on the floor on the stomach, hands stretched above the head with palms flat on the floor, legs apart. Pull the hands in towards the chest keeping the elbows pointing out and palms firmly on the floor supporting the body. This is the cat waking. Now tiptoe the feet towards the hands. Taking alternate legs, stretch each one out whilst lifting and stretching the neck. Once both legs are done stretch the full spine, feeling it extending. Then roll over onto the back and relax all muscles completely.

Try to repeat this exercise, each student establishing his own rhythm in which to do this. Rhythm and repetition are important in all the exercises, since they are another way of blocking out calculation.

Try the cat slowly, as a cat itself might do it, and then translate it into a series of movements done at great speed.

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4. Lying on the back, roll the body from side to side as violently as possible.

5. Squat down on the heels and curl up the body. Hop from foot to foot like a bird, flapping with the hands as if about to take off into flight. Still hopping, straighten the body whilst still flapping the arms like wings, trying to lift the body from the ground.

6. Now divide into threes. One person repeats the above whilst the others wait at each side of him ready to catch him when necessary. The ‘bird’ now uses his arms in an action like breast-stroke, propelling his body forwards. It is important he allows his body to give in completely to the impulse to ‘fly’ forwards, trusting that he will be caught by the two waiting on either side.

   Make sure that each of the threesome has a turn at being the bird in flight.

   Stop and talk about findings. Grotowski himself said that all the exercises should be done in an investigative way; they are not simply a way of ‘massaging the muscles’; each participant should be constantly investigating the workings of his own body and identifying his own particular blocks in order to eliminate them. How far were they able to yield to the forward impulse, for instance? I would imagine the main blocks would be whilst performing this exercise.

   Students should remain aware that these are only a sample of exercises and that the real thing would take a long time and thoroughly test out and stretch all areas of the body, not just the few delineated here.
4. PLASTIQUE EXERCISES

These exercises further work to eliminate blocks in the actor's body. By concentrating on contrary motions, making parts of the body move in opposing ways, the actor is constantly challenging his particular blocks as well as being able to achieve a high level of plasticity, where, for instance, he can move different parts of the body completely separately. If students think this sounds easy, try a few of the following, which are relatively simple compared with some of Grotowski’s suggestions!

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Start with the classic ‘children’s’ challenge of moving the right hand in a circular fashion held palm-down above the head. The hand must be kept flat and the movement is clockwise. At the same time, the other palm of the hand is held close to the stomach and rotated anti-clockwise. Both hands must remain straight and flat and the contrary movement must be definite and strong.

2. Try walking very slowly and deliberately whilst rotating the arms extremely fast.

3. Use one hand to punch the air whilst stroking the air with the other; swap hands.

   Next try to allow the face to react to these movements - alternating response to the caressing hand with that of the punching hand. First try acting surprised to the movement of each hand; then try reacting as if punch or caress were happening to your body.

4. Imagine that the torso of the body is a hatstand with many pegs; the
different parts of the body are the hats which are being hung onto the torso one at a time. Start with a shoulder, then a hand, the other shoulder, the head and neck, a foot, a hip. This exercise is good for separating parts of the body. Allow each individual thing to ‘hang’ then to stiffen as if about to be taken off the peg. It is not easy to do.

5. VOCAL WORK

As with the physical exercises, Grotowski’s aim was to eradicate the actor’s blocks and to find ‘the Man’ whole and new inside. For the voice it is much the same process as for the body. The ‘true’ voice is discovered through a process of experimentation, using the body in different positions to see what this does to the voice. Sometimes a particular body position will eradicate a block that the actor did not know he had, through emotional association. For instance, the voice might suddenly come out full and strong with the arms cleaving the air as if doing front crawl - because the actor remembers the feelings of power and rightness he had when winning a swimming race at school.

This is the sort of association the actor is seeking and it is obviously going to be different for everyone. Once again, the stress is on the personal journey which the actor undertakes.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Ask each student to try making sounds with their mouths and throats open with arms, legs and bodies in different positions. Use different levels too, sitting, standing, lying down on front and on back, kneeling, and so on, each time with legs, arms, heads, etc. in different positions. Investigate any differences in quality.

2. Then, having found one which sounds good, try a few lines of a speech in that position. Anything will do.

See if the student can identify the memory or feeling that lies behind this ‘right’ voice. Were there positions where the voice came out ‘wrong’? [Note that this should not be because the position was so unnatural or uncomfortable that it is bound to come
out tense and ‘squeezed’. Can they discover a memory or reason for the voice not sounding at full strength in that position?

This would be the same kind of work that Grotowski actors would be undertaking on their journey towards eradicating their blocks and freeing their voice to a fullness that will occur in any position.

6. EXPLORING DIALECTICS

In a sense the plastique exercises are already exploring the realm of dialectics: the parts of the body are put in contradiction to each other. Grotowski was particularly fond of exercises that used opposites in the plastique exercises, such as beautiful versus ugly or fast versus slow.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Start with an idea that is in Grotowski’s section called ‘Exercises in Composition.’ In it he suggests an exercise that in its early stages will be familiar to all drama students: walking over a variety of different surfaces [imaginary] with bare feet and then with shoes but reacting as if with bare feet. Thus, one can start on familiar ground:
   - walk over ice;
   - hot coals;
   - on a slippery surface;
   - on a sticky surface.

Try as far as possible to stick to opposites like this: wet and dry, hard and soft, and so on.

Ask the students to show their reaction with their feet and let it reverberate from feet up through the whole body, a section at a time.

2. Next try to react with hands to touching different imaginary surfaces; once again stick to opposites:
rough and smooth;
furry and scaly;
wet and dry;
soft and hard.

3. Then try reacting with feet and hands alone to, say, a prickly surface or a slimy one.

4. Finally try to use hands and feet reacting at the same time but to opposite stimuli, e.g.:
   the hands react to touching a furry surface while the feet experience slime;
   the hands pack snow into a snowball whilst the feet dance on hot coals.

These exercises will seem intensely difficult and even perverse to some students. Perhaps there are some pianists amongst them. It is common practice for a pianist to be moving their fingers to one rhythm with their right hand whilst following another with their left. Reminded of this, the pianist will realise that he doesn’t even think about this skill. In fact, it is a mistake to think too consciously about what one is doing - that is when the blocks start preventing you from achieving. If you can block out the mind which tells you the skill is difficult then you will achieve far more.

5. Move on to some visual images which explore opposites. An example might be a tableau in which some are starving to death whilst others are feasting. Perhaps the tableau could be made more powerful still if those who are feasting are mindlessly eating the body parts of the starving. Make sure that facial expressions contrast the greed and jollity of the feasters and the agony and horror of the starving.

This could be done as a frozen picture, a tableau, or as a moving ‘moment’. Personally, I prefer the latter because then sounds can be employed and the contrasting movements of the two factions can be
explored.

Try some others too:

- guilt and innocence
- creation and destruction
- freedom and repression

Bear in mind whilst producing these that Grotowski is keen to expose the contradictions within our society - and by society I mean the society of the whole world. Is there a way of showing the ‘fatness’ of the West to put it in cruel contrast to the starving masses in the third world? This way of working is a shockingly visual way of exploring the ills in society.

Note that before attempting this work it might be a good idea to go through the short part on symbolic language in the Artaud section. Just as pertinent to Grotowski is this way of working through powerful visual imagery which leaves a lasting impression on the audience’s mind.

Working ‘dialectically’ is a very immediate theatrical way of using irony. Take for example, a scene where a politician meets his potential voters and speaks sincerely about all he is going to do for them; add someone, or a number of people, jeering and undermining everything he says, casting in doubt the sincerity of what he is saying through mockery.

We have social comment; we are offered more than one viewpoint. But Grotowski is not really like Brecht, trying to lead an audience to a particular point of view; rather we are being shown alternative viewpoints, different truths. Grotowski, just as he wants actors to strip the masks away from themselves wants them to expose the masks in the world around us and attempt to strip them away too to find whatever truths, even uncomfortable ones, lie behind the fabric of society.

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7. USING THE BODY TO CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT OF POOR THEATRE

One of the most moving moments I ever saw in the theatre was the birth of Jesus in the Cottesloe Theatre as performed by the National Theatre in their rendering of the Mystery Cycle. For this episode, Mary knelt down amongst the crowds of audience - it was a promenade production - unwound the cloth that covered her head and with painstaking precision wound the cloth into the shape of her baby. When finished, she gathered it with such pride and love to her breast that no one watching could remain unmoved. The whole incident lasted quite a long time but there was not a sound from the audience; Mary’s actions were simple, unhurried and there was no attempt at realism but the sincerity with which she performed and the love which poured from her as she tenderly made the infant caught the audience up and rendered it mute and full of belief in what she was doing.

This event was ‘poor theatre.’ The focus was on the actor and the ‘truth’ she was offering which we did not question because of her sincerity, not because we were carried along by the use of fancy effects. The baby was just a piece of cloth wound round and round; this she did slowly and rhythmically and we were entranced. What more do you need?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Try some exercises that help the students realise the potential of their own bodies to create effective theatre.

1. Create atmospheric ‘music’ for the following, using bodies, voices and anything that happens to be lying around the studio:

   the building of the Tower of Babel
Eve tempted by the snake in the garden of Eden
commuters travelling the busy streets to work

2. Next try creating the environments for these three ideas with their bodies alone e.g. creating the streets and the underground train, the tower, the snake, the tree.

3. Choosing one of these ideas allow the group to develop one in to a more complete scenario.

Can they also bring dialectics into the equation? For instance, the sincerity of those building the tower and their honest desire to reach Heaven could be contrasted with the foolishness of the idea and the impossibility of men of different races ‘getting along’ - hence the growth through the exercise of different languages and the increasing lack of understanding of each other amongst the builders of the tower.

Is it better to create the tower out of ‘things’ or bodies or a mixture of both?

Is the tower a symbol? Can this be shown in any way? Has it relevance to today’s world - that is, is it a parable that can be put to potent use in a modern day context?

With the commuters idea, can this starting point be furthered into a modern day myth? Kafka did, when he took his commuter Gregor Samsa and turned him into a dung-beetle to symbolise the mindless gathering of money and the ceaseless work to keep up with modern life’s demands.[dramatised by Berkoff in ‘Metamorphosis’]

The above is just a few examples and starting points of how the students themselves should be thinking and working.

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7. APPROACHING A TEXT - A FINAL PROJECT

The longest time would be taken at this stage of the proceedings by, having chosen a suitable text, reducing it to the essentials as Grotowski and his actors would have done. Since there is not enough time in the confines of this short course to do such a thing satisfactorily, I propose offering 'The Bacchae' by Euripides as a basis for this final exercise.

If you do have time for further exploration and have the texts to hand, try this process for yourselves; 'Macbeth' or 'Doctor Faustus', which Grotowski did himself, would be other possibilities. The essential ingredient in finding a suitable text is that it should be possible for re-interpretation in a modern context. It must be - as both Grotowski and Artaud assert - a myth for our times. In addition, it should have that room for dialectical opposites, which show us that complex vision of the world which so excites Grotowski.

'The Bacchae' is perfect for this sort of treatment. The bare bones of the story are as follows:

Pentheus, King of Thebes, tries to forbid the worship of Dionysus amongst his citizens. The followers of Dionysus, the Bacchae, revel in excess of all kinds and, when filled with the delirium of the god himself, tear animals apart and eat their flesh raw. Pentheus is anxious to stick to the old gods and their ways and to keep out this dangerous new religion.

Dionysus himself arranges Pentheus' punishment, after having been imprisoned - fruitlessly, because what prison walls can contain a god? He arranges for Pentheus to go and spy on the women during their rites on the mountain. Then he will know how...
best to get rid of them. For his own safety, Pentheus is persuaded to dress as a woman or he may be discovered and torn apart. Of course, this is precisely what Dionysus has arranged to happen. The Bacchae, led by Pentheus’ own mother, Agave, discover the imposter in their midst and in their madness tear him apart.

The interest of the piece from a Grotowski point of view is in the contradictions inherent in the main characters:

Dionysus seems at first to be a god of great power and personal attractions who is coming like a fresh wind into the stale atmosphere of a Thebes ruled by the dull and rational old gods. Yet his followers whip themselves into a frenzy in which their rational selves - their humanity - is forgotten and they behave no better than beasts, even eating the raw flesh of whatever animal - or human, as in Pentheus’ case - crosses their paths. Is Dionysus god or demon?

Pentheus could be seen as a wise ruler bent on keeping a dodgy religion out of his city but it becomes clear that he is of the same type as the Bacchae themselves: he works himself into an excitable frenzy against Dionysus, which is hardly the stance of a rational man, threatens to fall on the cult followers and kill them all, and when the prophet Tiresias advises him to take a middle way so as not to oppose madness with equally irrational behaviour, Pentheus proves his irrationality by sending soldiers to raze Tiresias’ house to the ground. It becomes clear that he too is tempted by the Dionysiac cult: though he says he wants to spy on the women so that he knows what he is up against, it is clear from the dialogue that he is in fact hoping to see an orgy for his own gratification. Is he wise ruler pushed too far or weak man subject to his own irrational desires?

The other main point of interest is the Bacchae themselves who are normal loving human beings until the madness of the god invades them when they become nothing less than monsters.

What does the play have to say to our own age? It is a myth easily translatable; human nature in this aspect is as much subject to hysteria as it ever was. New religious cults

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have no difficulty gathering followers - sometimes to extremes, such as the mass suicides witnessed in some recent ‘off-Christian’ cults. It is still easy for a charismatic leader to whip up a hysterical following: witness some Muslim leaders and their periodic calls for a Jihad; witness Hitler and the blind following of so many of the German people. I am sure that the group will think of many other examples.

You may not have time to make a full-scale Grotowskian production of this but at least talk through the potentials of this story-line and try to perform one scene at minimum.

Remember, the right space is probably one of the earliest decisions to make. How could one make a space in which a small audience is as involved as possible - or at least trapped into being uncomfortably close witnesses of events?

Stick to the ‘rules’ of poor theatre and its reliance on the actor to do all the work of setting, sound effects and so on.

Use the simplest of ‘props’ remembering a wooden pole could be a flag, a rifle, a dancing partner, an idol.

For lighting, two simple standing spotlights are all that are needed; with these as ground base, the actors can create their own effects - shadows, colours - by holding up a coloured cloth - and so on.

Have fun!