Styletasters 2
(Brecht, Boal, Brook)
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 student requirements!

2. You are allowed to photocopy whatever you need from this resource 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.

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If you have found this file of work helpful, you may be interested in the companion volume: Styletasters 1, covering Stanislavski, Artaud and Grotowski. For this and other books of practical work on practitioners, acting skills or lesson plans, apply to the above address or look for further information on the web-site.

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INTRODUCTION

With an awareness that some syllabuses require not so much a detailed knowledge of practitioners as 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. This practical work helps fix the understanding of the theory.

The grouping together of Brecht with Brook and Boal makes some good sense. All three practitioners are interested in the social function of theatre, though with Brook it is an interest that he experimented with only as part of his extensive journey into the whole range of theatre experience, past and present, Western and Eastern.

Brecht saw theatre as a tool to explore man as a social animal and to show how we are both manipulated by social conditions into behaving the way we do, and able, through recognition of these social conditions, to change them for the better. Human beings as interesting characters in their own right are not in his brief, but human beings as alterable cogs in the social machine are. Thus the actor's ability to convince an audience of the believability or reality of a character is of no interest to Brecht; instead it is the actor's task to show human behaviour under different circumstances and, more importantly, that if the circumstances can be altered then so can human behaviour. The thieves and beggars of 'The Threepenny Opera' only behave in this way because of the social inequality of the classes, the division of wealth and the corruption of those elements of society, such as the police, who should be working for the greater good of all society. Social conditions are alterable and this will cause an alteration in the behaviour of human beings.

Brook in his early experimental work used many of the tools of Brecht's epic theatre, combining them - as in 'The Marat/Sade' - with the ideas of Artaud to create a new synthesis. But his work with Brechtian theories is only a small part of his testing of world theories in his all-consuming quest for 'What is theatre?'

Boal takes the Brechtian idea of theatre as a tool to alter the human condition into logical - but ultimately non-theatrical - routes that are closer to therapy and personal self-discovery. However, his most interesting and passionate work follows the Brechtian ideal of freeing the 'Oppressed' layers of society - women, the poor, anyone who is, in fact, an underling of any kind. By exposing the mechanisms and workings of society around our daily lives and showing, through working with 'the oppressed', that they themselves can alter these things, Boal comes perhaps closest to a development of theatre in a way that Brecht might approve.

The format of the book is as follows:

1. Such biographical details as help with the 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 the text 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.

This file of work is a companion to Styletasters 1, which covers Stanislavski, Artaud and Grotowski in a similar fashion.

The approaches in both these Styletasters files is different from that of the more detailed Study programmes dealing with a single practitioner. There may be an occasional exercise found in both, but on the whole Styletasters offers a different selection of practical work. Those teachers aiming at exploring Brook or Grotowski, who already have Study Programmes on the ‘main’ practitioners can rest assured that they are not paying for ‘repeats.’
BERTOLT BRECHT [ 1898 - 1956]  CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Brecht was a colourful, charismatic character who has been the subject of many biographical studies, which I do not intend to repeat. The smoker of foul-smelling cheroots, boiler-suited style-setter - he had a following of young men involved in a range of arts who dressed identically in the ‘worker’s uniform’ of the boiler-suit - leaps off the page of any biography. His musicianship, enjoyment of pub-culture, politics, womanising, famous intolerance - all are important to building up a fiery but very human portrait of Brecht the man and perhaps should be borne in mind when students grumble about Brecht’s ‘coldness’, ‘lack of emotion’, ‘dryness’, as they will somewhere along the line. Then it is best to remember that this man made his mark through passion: passion for the theatre, for his own political beliefs, for the rights of the working classes, on top of which he had a passionately bohemian and noisy personal life. Despite his interest as a person, however, I intend to pick out only those biographical details that help the student to understand why his theories evolved as they did. Like all practitioners, Brecht’s theories are the product of the times he lived in.

1. Brecht lived through two World Wars, the First as a medical orderly [after school he began training as a doctor, though he did not complete] and the Second from the ‘safe’ distance of exile in the United States. In neither war, then, did he fight and the sights he saw as a medical orderly in the First World War confirmed him as a life-long pacifist.

The Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War One, in which Germany was forced to make expensive and humiliating reparation for the damage caused by the war provoked a deep-seated desire to rebel. Nobody likes his nose rubbed into the dirt and the constant reminders of their defeat - no armed forces; huge sums paid to all countries deemed to be damaged by Germany during the war, [e.g France on whose land much of the fighting had taken part], which were not just lump sums but crippling amounts of money paid out over years; parcels of German territory given out to nations allied to the victors, and so on - all these factors combined to keep Germany down in the dust. But the Versailles treaty paid scant attention to human nature and human nature is to grin and bear such humiliations as long as it is politically expedient, whilst nurturing bitterness and anger inside. Not surprising that a Hitler, whipping up pride in Germany, real benefits such as efficient roads, schools and the other structures of society, as well as promises of revenge for all those years of humiliation, could achieve such power.

What was Brecht’s position through all this? Like many intellectuals of the twenties and thirties, his response to the growth of fascism was to look beyond the immediate ‘benefits’ that this seemed to offer to an alarmed realisation of the lack of personal and intellectual freedom it also entailed. Fascism was sweeping through many countries and seemed unstoppable - except possibly by Communism - the only party with sufficient numbers to oppose it. Many intellectuals, like Brecht, became Communists in the 1920s and 30s.

A proof of how strong the Communist Party in Germany was at this time is Hitler's actions on being made Chancellor: almost his first act was to make membership of the Communist Party illegal and to arrest all known Communists and put them in concentration camps. Brecht himself narrowly escaped by fleeing Germany on the day after Hitler became Chancellor. A further attempt to discredit the Communist Party in the eyes of the ordinary German people was to arrange for the burning of the Reichstag Building [the German equivalent of our Houses of Parliament] and to blame the crime on the Communists. This caused an emotional charge of revulsion against Communism amongst ordinary people. By these actions, Hitler had won an unseen political skirmish and eliminated a potential threat to his new power.
These facts tell us:

a) that Brecht's starting-point, quite understandably, is a critical one of the world and society that he knew. People needed to be warned. And theatre could both show society and its faults and suggest that it is within the audience's power to alter it. In fact, the growth of Hitler and his party is a model of how people's minds can be altered through propaganda and brain-washing; Brecht's theatre seeks to keep an audience fully aware at all times and conscious of its own power to judge, to make decisions and to alter events - the opposite of brainwashing, since awareness and choice are involved.

b) It becomes understandable why Brecht embraced Communism as his creed. To the end of his life, and despite Stalin, whose tyranny, especially in the field of the Arts, must have made him uncomfortable, he held firm to the Communist ideal and recognised that society was a long way from this ideal so that sometimes extreme 'means' were justified to bring about an 'end' that is desirable and for the 'greater good.' Hence, many plays from Brecht's middle period of writing, the Lehrstücke [teaching/learning plays], are attempts to grapple with hard tests to his own natural inclination - tests posed by Communism. Many of these plays are 'what if's.' What if there was a choice between the life of a child and the lives of a whole village? ["He Who Says Yes"]. In the short term, we are betrayed by our emotional inclination to wish to save the child - in any case, the child is 'there' in front of us on stage so our emotions are engaged by that fact. Yet, unless the child is sacrificed, the others cannot cross the mountain, fetch the medicine and save the whole village. 'The whole village' are unknowns to the audience - their 'emotions' are not therefore engaged - a fact of human nature well understood by Brecht. [Don't we have more sympathy for the photograph of the one starving African child than the huge numbers of dying in a famine, numbers that we cannot comprehend and so which cannot capture our emotional interest in the same way?] This fact of human nature - our short-sighted emotional response is one that Brecht is always challenging, probably because he found this the hardest thing to conquer in himself. Intellectually, it is obvious that the 'greater good' is more important than the fate of a single individual but emotionally? Hence, we have the start of the whole emotion versus reason debate that forms so much of Brecht's theory.

The emotional hysteria of the Fascist 'message' as delivered by Hitler, which stirs up an extreme response by manipulating its audience emotionally, would be very suspect to Brecht, bypassing, as it does, the reason. Brecht's plays and methods of production always appeal to our reason and our intellectual understanding.

2. The twenties, with its seething political unrest of all kinds - unrest that spawned groups of intellectual Communists on the one hand and such as Hitler, seeking to regain national pride, on the other - was a cauldron of clubs, beer cellars and similar venues where people drank and talked heatedly, aired political poetry and songs and put on revues and cabarets where criticism and exposure of events that reached the newspapers were given a more popular slant. Berlin was full of these places, satirising the famous figures and events of the day. [Our society throws them up through such as 'Private Eye', 'Not the Nine O'Clock News', 'Spitting Image' and more recently the topical digs at celebrities and institutions from such as Graham Norton or Ali G.] The audiences at such places were more apt to join in, shouting comments and arguing with the performers than a theatre-going audience might. Brecht and his friends were habitué of such places and revelled in the to-and-fro of satirical and political exchange encouraged there.

From this background we can understand:

a) Why Brecht wants an audience of this kind rather than the formal theatre-going audience. The prevalent climate in the theatre was Opera or Stanislavski-type psychological drama. Both of these encourage the audience to be sucked into the action uncritically, to go along with the conclusions and reasoning of the play without challenging them. Such audiences, as Brecht was fond of saying 'hang up their brains
with their hats' in the theatre cloakroom. He, however, wanted an aware and a critical audience.

b) The atmosphere of the clubs and cabarets is irreverent and hard-hitting, whilst still remaining entertaining. This is a balance that Brecht realised was necessary, when writing his 'great' plays - 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle', "The Life of Galileo', 'The Good Person of Setzuan' and 'Mother Courage and Her Children.'

c) At these clubs and the boxing venues also favoured by Brecht, spectators and 'actors' are lit. Brecht used this idea as part of his Verfremdungseffekt [Distancing effect], arguing that if an audience is lit it knows it is an audience; individuals do not become isolated and immersed in the magnetic light of the stage as they do when plunged into womb-like darkness.

d) The actors at these clubs do not seek to become a character, as in the Stanislavskian theatre; their role is largely satire - quick impersonations of well-known figures, made recognisable by certain features or 'outward signs', such as voice or mannerisms. A character is adopted and dropped again and the audience share delight with the performer at his skill without ever losing realisation that they are watching a performance. This style of acting is what Brecht wanted to retain in his theatre.

3. For a short while in the late 1920's Brecht worked with the director Erwin Piscator. At the same time he began to read Karl Marx's 'Das Kapital', the basis of Communism. Both influences came at a point where Brecht was searching for a style and a creed. Piscator's style of theatre concurs with the one Brecht was feeling his way towards already in his first plays such as 'Baal' and 'Drums in the Night.' Many critics have accused him of stealing the epic style from Piscator, but it is clear from 'Baal', for instance, that certain features - short separated scenes set over a wide span of years; the inclusion of songs to break up the flow of action; the fact that the songs and titles at the beginning of a scene often tell us what is to occur in the scene - were already in place. Piscator's main legacy to Brecht was to show him:

i. that social and political concerns were proper concerns for the theatre to have
ii. that a playtext was not sacred. Piscator often manipulated texts to suit his purpose
iii. that film and other methods could be combined with live action to give greater impact to the message of a play.

This last point is also where they deviated in the end. Brecht found Piscator too inclined to submerge the actor in a welter of images, film footage and the like, diluting the actor's role. But he did like the atmosphere of participation and debate often engendered by Piscator's productions. For instance, a play about the rights and wrongs of abortion [in the 1920's remember!] ended in a fierce debate amongst members of the audience and the actors themselves at the conclusion of the piece. Here we have the barriers broken down between audience and actors and the actors participating as themselves rather than characters they had portrayed.

From the above, we can understand:

a) the stylistic features that became the hallmark of 'epic theatre.' In brief summary:

i. stage and audience lit - to promote awareness of being a member of an audience in a theatre rather than an imagined place conjured up by theatrical illusion.
ii. Lights, scene changes, sometimes costume changes, visible to remind the audience they are in a theatre
iii. the use of the half-screen, not so low as to mask the set-change occurring behind it, on which announcements could be made, slides shown, or relevance of the stage action without interfering with the action of a scene.

The vehicle for carrying the message in a Brecht production, as to a Piscatorian one, is strictly in the hands of the actors. Yet it might be necessary to make links with the real world of current events.
for the audience -for instance, showing slides of Hitler, Goebbels and so on before the relevant scenes in ‘Arturo Ui.’

iv. Most importantly, the actors are revealed as actors; they have political convictions which are their own and will inform the way they play their role. Thus the actor playing the villain demonstrates his villainy without trying to justify and understand it emotionally, as a Stanislavskian actor would do. Note that a cast playing a Brechtian play must have shared political convictions, obviously. A certain type of actor is required for Brecht - the actor with political convictions, who desires to change the world and make it a better place for ordinary working people.

[Note, that the theory section further on in the file has further detail of Verfremdung techniques.]

From the Piscatorian influence, we understand further:

b) why Brecht altered those classic plays he chose to direct [Marlowe’s ‘Edward II’, Sophocles ‘Antigone’, for instance]. His idea was to drag a text into twentieth century relevance, and if that meant altering aspects of the text, fine. He believed firmly in the need for a theatre that is relevant to the time in which it is being performed. Certainly, theatre, if it is going to be a political tool, must show the world as it is for that particular audience; they see its relevance, have a chance to observe the flaws in society as pointed out to them and are then free to act upon their discovery. Like Piscator’s abortion debate, Brecht wanted at least an audience that would discuss the revelations of the play and, better, an audience that would do something about it.

c) how instrumental both Marx and Piscator were to giving Brecht political conviction and a style that arises from it. ‘Baal’ had shown the first experiments in a type of style that discouraged an audience from empathising with the hero. But Brecht had achieved this mainly by making the character of Baal thoroughly dislikeable and no particular message is shown in the play. It just gives a picture of a sick society, full of people of all classes prepared to murder casually, to have sex with anyone, male or female - a general portrait of debasement. It does not hint at any answers, any way out; Brecht knows the world is all wrong, but he does not know how to alter it. Marx and Communism give him the answer he needs. From now on, Brecht has a mission.

4. After his discovery of Marxism, Brecht is filled with a fervour to decimate his new-found beliefs to all and sundry. He sets about re-educating himself and devises lessons in play-form to carry particularly to school-children and to the working classes. These plays are called ‘Lehrstücke’ - that is, teaching pieces or learning pieces; the verb ‘lehren’ means both to teach and to learn in German. These plays set out to explore the implications of Marxist theory.

These facts explain:

a) Why so many of the Lehrstücke are unpalatable in their message. Going straight for the jugular, Brecht confronts in them aspects of the ideas that ‘the end justifies the means’ and ‘the individual is of little importance compared with the common good of the mass of people.’ ‘He Who Says Yes’, ‘The Exception and the Rule’ and ‘The Measures Taken’ are examples of this. Taking these two ideas, in particular, and exploring them dramatically to their logical conclusion, meant that Brecht could confront problems of acceptance of Marxist doctrine within himself - and by conquering his own squeamishness, could help others to conquer their own. In ‘He Who Says Yes’, the young boy has to consent to his own death for the greater good of the whole village; in ‘The Measures Taken’, the Young Comrade must recognise that he has imperilled the spreading of Marxist principles and the readjustment of society through his constant pity for individual people’s problems on his way. He, too, has to consent to his own death, since his face as a revolutionary will be recognised and thus endanger the others in his team. Needless to say, by confronting such particularly unpalatable [but logical] consequences of the Marxist doctrine, Brecht embarrassed the Communist Party - particularly with those two plays I have mentioned! Yet the conclusions of both plays

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and the two protagonist’s acceptance of the necessity for their own deaths, is entirely logical and reasonable in the circumstances proposed by Brecht.

Exercise: Try it for yourselves - Brecht is simply dramatising the kind of ‘what-if’ situations that many people ‘play’ in group discussion: what if your home was burning and you had a chance to rescue only one item? What if a hospital was burning and you could rescue one ward only - that full of geriatrics or that full of the mentally disturbed?

Try it as a class - with a few other ‘what if’s’ too!
What if your family was drowning and you could only rescue one person?
What if you were in a nuclear shelter after the bomb had fallen, with only enough resources to keep alive eight out of the ten people sheltering there? For this one, give each person a ‘skill’ - nurse, mother, artist, etc. - Or take it one step further still - these are the ten last people alive in the whole world? Try this one in groups, where each person is a character with a skill, who has to give his own case for staying.

The important thing is to discuss afterwards which responses were emotional and which rational? Brecht was a very emotional - even passionate - man, here trying hard to subjugate this part of his character and embrace the hard but entirely rational proposals of Marxism.

You could try one of the above ‘What if’s from two standpoints - the emotional response and the rational. Are the conclusions reached different? Ask yourselves which conclusions embraced the greater good - the most people? And which benefited people in the long term rather than ‘just for now.’

The above exercise should help students understand what it is Brecht is trying to do with the Lehrstücke, which is a period of his life that most students find particularly hard to grasp. It is human nature to feel pity for the individual and the immediate problem, rather than to think logically, stand back from it, balance all the pros and cons and then come up with the ‘right’ decision - that is, the decision which benefits most people for the longest period. This decision can mean some unpalatable truths on the way - such as the sacrifice of people or long-held beliefs.

Why is it necessary to reach some understanding of the Lehrstück period? I feel that his last plays have to be appreciated through the filter of this difficult middle period of Brecht’s career; without an understanding of the principals of Marxism, how can students really understand the argument of the fruitgrowers and the goatherders in the Prologue to ‘The Caucasian Chalk Circle,’ for instance? This section of the play is too often dismissed and yet it is central to an understanding of the play as a whole. Through its friendly, rational debate, Brecht points out the difference between an emotional response to a problem - the goatherders who have always lived in the valley - it is their home, the air smells special, it is the place of their ancestors - and a rational response -the fruitgrowers who will put the valley to the best use, tailoring the land to work and produce food for the greatest possible long-term good.

4. From 1933, when he fled Germany, to 1949 when he was invited to settle in Communist East Germany, where he formed the famous Berliner Ensemble, Brecht and his family travelled, settling for some time in Switzerland, then Denmark, Sweden and finally the United States. They struggled often for existence. Brecht kept the wolf from the door by publishing his theories, putting on plays in each of the countries he settled in, dabbling in the world of film, and so on. It was during this period that he wrote his great plays, ‘The Life of Galileo,’ ‘The Good Person of Setzuan’, ‘Mother Courage
and her Children’ and ‘The Caucasian Chalk Circle.’

After the war, the political climate in the U.S. was uncomfortable for Communists. Senator McCarthy and others stirred the American people up against Communism, which they perceived as a terrifying threat to the American Way of Life. Many people from all walks of life, including the Arts, were hauled in front of the Un-American Activities Committee, accused of Communist leanings and thrown into prison. Brecht fled back to Europe - Switzerland, from where he was finally tempted back to Germany - the Communist section. Here he remained until he died in 1954.

Brecht’s history is remarkable for two main factors: his personal survival and his knack for ‘hedging his bets.’ In 1933, when many of his friends fled to Russia, he went to Scandinavia and then the United States, on the surface a place ill-equipped to make him happy. Somehow, the thought of Brecht in Hollywood has always made me smile. Most of his friends who went to Russia were caught up in the Stalin purges, imprisoned and killed. Brecht made the right choice.

When he was working in East Berlin at the Berliner Ensemble, he was often in trouble for failing to follow Stalin’s orders that theatre should be produced in the Stanislavski style. He survived by tweaking his plays and making promises, which he failed to carry through, that he offered merely to buy time. In the end his juggling between his own theatrical beliefs and the straitjacket of naturalism that the Party insisted upon failed, he was imprisoned and may well have suffered the death sentence, but Stalin died instead and Brecht once again ‘got away with it.’

His history has many such ‘compromises’ made in the name of survival. Rewriting ‘He Who Says Yes’ for a Communist party unhappy with the death of the child that play entails, he wrote ‘He Who Says No’ to please them, to be published in the Eastern block, at the same time sending the original play to be published by his Western publishers. Awarded the Stalin peace prize for his anti-war efforts, he sent the money prize to his bank in Switzerland for safe-keeping. These contradictions in his character are part of his charm and speak one main message to me: Brecht believed in survival. He wanted to practise theatre in his own style but the freedom to do so often meant compromise on the way.

These facts explain why:

a] Brecht wrote many essays extolling facets of Stanislavski in direct contrast to earlier essays in which he slates the whole naturalistic style. Obviously he was seeking to please his East German masters.

b] struggling for survival through the 30s depression years and the war, with a wife and family to keep, he wrote theories about his theatrical practices. The theories are what we study today, but they were written, as it were, largely after the event. Brecht wrote the plays, devised the style and only afterwards sought to give justification to this style.

c] Many of his plays are about survival and, particularly, the embracing of unpalatable necessities. Yes, there is always choice and Brecht never fails to point out the choices his characters make, but sometimes the choices made seem strange unless one bears in mind Brecht’s other message, borne out by his own life - to survive, to play for time by seeming to go with the flow.

Thus, Grusha chooses to take the baby - a choice which could invite personal disaster but, having made that choice, she follows through by doing the necessary things to ensure both the child's survival and her own: marrying the peasant, for instance. Mother Courage may seem to be the ultimate survivor, but she makes choices that certainly ensure her own survival though at the cost of her childrens'.

Shen Te is forced to adopt an alter ego, the nasty Shui Ta, to ensure her own survival.

Brecht seems to be telling us that this world is such, that personal survival is impossible within it without compromising personal beliefs and goodness, something he himself did all his life. Once again, we are forced to the point of all Brecht’s work: change the world; it needs it. If the good Shen Te, the poor and the downtrodden in The Threepenny Opera - who must become thieves or beggars to survive - the true
and honest Swiss Cheese or Grusha cannot survive without compromising the very virtues they hold dearest, then the world is a sorry place indeed and needs changing. Brecht’s place is to point out the faults and problems in his plays, which are microcosms or allegories of society, but it is up to us, the audience, to get out there and do something about it.

**BRECHT: THE THEORIES**

Brecht's own writing about his theories are often not helpful or easy to read. You will find that trying out the practical work for each theory given in this file will make things very clear - and the theories themselves are, surprisingly, far easier to understand than it would seem from Brecht's own essays.

The starting point needs to be extracted from the above ‘facts’ given in Causes and Effects. They are:

1. Brecht is a Marxist, who believes that the Communist creed may hold the answers for a horribly flawed and class-ridden society, where the poor are kept poor by the uncaring rich who exploit them.

2. Having discovered this creed, Brecht is keen to expose the faults in society and show that there are choices to make and that the world as it is is alterable.

3. For this to be evident, Brecht needs a thinking and aware audience, who can see what a play is getting at and will at least debate the issues and at best try to alter injustices.

4. To keep the audience thinking and aware, the actor needs to be conscious at all times of what he is doing and why. The Brechtian actor is acting from his reason, his intellect and not from his heart, his emotions.

**ALL THE THEORIES HANG ON THE ABOVE.** Most of the theories are either about:

a) keeping an actor at one remove from his character, so that he can himself point out that character's faults and identify what choices he has along the way. To do this properly, the actor cannot be 'in character' - that is absorbed in the skin of the part, as in Stanislavski.

b) keeping an audience aware of his surroundings - that he is just in a theatre - so that he can watch for the messages being shown him, realise that the world is alterable and act on this realisation.

1. THE WORLD IS ALTERABLE. THE FAULTS OF NATURALISM. BRECHT PROPOSES PLAYS APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR TIME.

Brecht is aware of the power and temptation of Stanislavski. Many actors do not feel they are acting unless they become totally immersed in their character and achieve, if possible, the state of 'I am.' "I am' Hamlet, who had a mucked-up childhood losing his father, felt emotionally betrayed by his mother ... and so on. Naturalistic acting is dependent on the whys and wherefores of the emotional state of the character - the psychology, the motives - and every one of the actor's moves have to be justified by being tied into the inner emotional state of the character: I sink to the floor, because I am so gutted by the news of my mother's betrayal that my legs won't support me ... etc.

Frustrated by working with actors trained in Stanislavski, Brecht set out first to 'debunk' the System and then to put something in its place - a new set of possibilities for an actor to follow, to achieve a different effect.

Debunking the System consisted of pointing out the absurdities of believing that man and society is unalterable. Naturalism shows a state of mind that is just so 'because it is.' The audience are invited to feel along with the characters, to laugh or weep with them, to nod or shake their heads sadly, to see Hamlet's or Juliet's deaths as inevitable, to make links with their own lives. Love in the Fifteenth century is just like it is today - how wise of Shakespeare - how well he understands the world. Hamlet is a
portrait of any ditherer; again and again he is given the opportunity to right a wrong, but it is his destiny to dither - that is just the way things are; his tragedy is inevitable and unchangeable; there are people just like him today.

What good is such an attitude, says Brecht? What does it do to theatre and the world it should portray, ultimately, to say that mankind is the same wherever and whenever - to look for the similarities in people and events over the centuries rather than to recognise that this needn’t be so. If Hamlet is a victim of political chicanery, Juliet a victim of a society oppressive to young women, what good is it to say that things haven’t changed? To look for links with our society, rather than pointing out the differences - young girls of fourteen are not forced into marriages any more in the West - is a waste of time. Instead of celebrating a defunct social tradition and shaking our heads over the sadness of it, we should be turning our minds to areas of our own society that are oppressive or wrong. Re-interpreting ‘Romeo and Juliet’s’ story as in West Side Story, for instance, which shows the evils of gang warfare and the oppressive nature of some Hispanic cultures to their own womenfolk in the 50’s, was a legitimate use of the original story because it was made relevant to the sub-culture of New York.

To clarify: Brecht was not interested in plays that have no relevance to our time. Each society is different, living in different conditions and with different problems; the plays written and performed should be relevant to that society and not showing things as they are, inviting the ‘oh dear, what a shame - shaking of the head sadly’ approach, but rather showing how things could be altered. His plays tend to expose a problem - sometimes many problems. The main characters in the play make decisions that we are made aware of which alter the circumstances. Often answers are not given; the audience is simply shown the problem and it is left to them to decide what would be the best way of dealing with it. For instance, in ‘The Caucasian Chalk Circle’ we are given a judge who is not really a judge at all, who allows Grusha the baby because she will be ‘good for it.’ Yet in the real world - our world - where judges abide by laws set in stone, that outcome could never have happened. It is part of Brecht’s charm [and possibly naivety] that he leaves the working out and connections with our own society up to us, the audience. He does not rub our noses in it. Even the referral back to the valley and how it should be used - i.e. the part that was relevant to Brecht’s post-war world, where land was being re-allocated everywhere and traditional ways challenged - is dealt with in one line at the end of the play. An audience that is not listening - that is ‘carried away’ by the story could miss the connection altogether. And yet it is crucial.

Thus, given the problems Brecht poses for us with his own legacy of plays, an actor taking part in one of his plays must be very aware of the point of the production at every moment. Never should he drift out of his own ‘head’ in to the ‘head’ of the character. The two must never be confused. How is this done? Through a clear ‘demonstrative’ style of acting, through the use of ‘gest’ and through distancing exercises designed to keep the actor at one remove from his part.

2. ACTING STYLE: A BLEND OF EXAGGERATION AND REALISM. ‘WEIGHTED’ STEREO-TYPING THROUGH EXAGGERATION OF SELECTED FEATURES. GEST.

This type of acting starts from the premise that the actor is not ‘being’ a character but adopting enough of the outward signs of a real person to make him instantly recognisable to an audience. Thus shifty eyes, hand-rubbing, an insincere smile will be the outside signs for dishonesty; a puffed-out chest, nose in the air, a bombastic voice will be the outward signs of pomposity. And so on.

This is ‘stereo-typing’ - but not quite as we normally use it. The type of stereotyping Brecht proposes is always weighted in such a way that an audience sees the political point the actor is making about his character. It is not the simple form of stere-
typing as used in, for example, pantomime.

Because Brecht wants the audience to come to certain political and social conclusions, this style of acting will exaggerate features to make the 'right' interpretation unavoidable. Thus, because Brecht is Communist, the aristocracy may be exaggeratedly pompous, uncaring, stupid and selfish with their money and uselessly impractical, having to rely on servants for their every need. The actor needs to pick out all these features and exaggerate them.

The outward signs decided upon to portray the aspects of a character relevant to the story are what Brecht calls ‘gest’, that is gesture plus attitude. A gest is always conscious - that is, the actor has come up with it as an outward sign that tells the audience something significant about the character. For instance, the holding of the hands up in the air, loosely flopped over at the wrists for an aristocrat tells an audience that he is impractical, that he does not know what to do with his hands.

All the ‘baddies’ in Brecht’s world view will be exaggerated similarly, often made humorous in consequence, though without ever losing the social criticism that lies behind that humour. Brecht was well aware of the anarchic power of laughter.

The ‘goodies’ in this world view will tend to be down-to-earth, practical, working people. The style of acting used for them is not exaggerated - the audience needs to recognise that these are individuals ‘like’ them. That is not to fall into the naturalistic trap - quite. The actor does not become the character, though because the temptation is greater, Brecht had to devise many ways for the actor to break through his natural empathy with his role - direct address to the audience; song; the non-linear writing of the play which does not allow for the ‘development’ of a character, scene by scene, as naturalism does. Other ‘distancing’ techniques [the actor being ‘distanced’ from empathising with his role] were devised for rehearsal too. These will be explored in the practical section to follow.

Why was it so important that the actor taking any role should be ‘distanced’ from his part? Because only if he is, will he be consciously putting over the social messages of the play. To do this properly, the actor has to be aware at all times of what he is doing and why.

3. GEST/ GESTUS= THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE OUTWARD SIGNS WHICH ENABLE RECOGNITION OF A SOCIAL TYPE OF PERSON OR A SOCIAL PHENOMENON.

I have briefly mentioned gest in the above section. Indeed, it is hard not to do so, since gest is so intrinsic to Brechtian performance as to be used the whole time. Since it is the one area which seems to confuse students more than any other of Brecht’s theories, it needs a little bit of careful explanation. However, ‘gest’ is one of those theories that is far easier to prove through practical work. Working through the practical exercises should help identify what it is and clarify it for the student. Nonetheless, students have to write about it in examinations, so some sort of clear written explanation is also needed. And, by the way, it is worth noting that Brecht used ‘gest’ and ‘gestus’ fairly indiscriminately. They are not separate ideas but the same idea under two different names.

Brecht defines Gest as ‘gesture plus attitude’. Most stage gestures are empty of particular meaning, arising out of a character’s inner feelings. A Gest, by contrast, is a gesture made with a particular intention - a consciously planned gesture - to show something about a character or a scene. A gest might be the rubbing together of the hands of the dodgy car salesman or the large insincere smile - anything that helps the audience recognise the outward signs - the give-away signals - of a social type in a social situation. [For ‘social situation’ I do not mean a party or social gathering of that nature but ‘anything that happens between one person and another.’ Brecht saw
people as social creatures, influenced by and changing in accordance with different social circumstances; he did not see them - as Stanislavski does - as 'constant'.

Gests must be carefully planned by the actors, consequently, in order to clarify what is going on for an audience. The 'right' gest will lead the audience to the 'right' conclusions and will expose the faults in society or in man as society has made him.

Actors on stage will be using gest at all times; that is, every action made by their character will be planned in order to expose what is relevant to the play about the character. Gest is also used to describe a whole scene - making sure that in a crowd of people, we can see the social message. An example would be at the opening of the story of 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' - the Governor's family and aristocrats are seen going to church, surrounded by beggars. The contrasting individual 'gests' of the uncaring aristocrats and the desperate poverty of their subjects will make a whole-scene 'social gest' depicting the outrageous neglect of the rich towards the poor.

4. NARRATIVE THEATRE. THE STREET SCENE AS MODEL OF DEMONSTRATIVE ACTING.

Brechtian theatre is narrative theatre. It tells a story. The story-telling features of narration, past tense and third person are often deployed. Sometimes the narration is from the outside - like the Singer in 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' whose role is to comment on the action, to point out the choices the main characters are making and to break up the emotional flow of Grusha's journey, allowing us to reflect on her reasons rather than being carried along by the emotional excitement of the events. Often, too, he tells us what to watch out for in a scene before it happens - thus taking away the element of surprise and leading an audience to watch why something occurs rather than wondering what will occur next. Always the emphasis is on the reason rather than emotion.

Narration can happen in other ways too. A character can suddenly drop out of role, to comment on his own actions as if from the outside. He can do this in the first person, or in the third. The latter will distance him and the audience more from identification with his role - reminding them [and the actor] that he is merely an actor demonstrating the actions and feelings of a character. The actor playing 'Arturo Ui' in the play of that name, commonly is the one who speaks the epilogue, which comments on the evil of Ui - his own character throughout the play - and warns the audience that there are other examples of tyranny and despotic rule in their own society. By dropping role like this, the audience is quickly reminded that the actor is' not 'Ui', but just an actor demonstrating the role.

This quick adoption of characters - and minute, often comical adjustments of the role made in front of the audience - are all aspects of the model that Brecht quotes: 'The Street Scene.' The point of the Street Scene, which briefly describes an accident perpetrated by the driver of a car as seen by witnesses, is that the events of the accident are not described by the participants - nor do we see the accident happening in front of our eyes.

Both of these approaches would be the province of Stanislavskian naturalistic theatre - which seeks to

a) encourage actors and audience to become emotionally involved in the characters [the driver, the victim] seeking to understand what in their outer lives might have caused the event [driver worried by quarrel with wife or whatever, for instance] and

b) wants the audience to experience the action as something real, happening in front of their eyes and surprising. Our hearts should be in our mouths as we are 'caught up' in the events.
The Brechtian actor is at one remove - like a witness of the accident. In describing the events to the audience, he does not pretend to be the driver or the victim; instead he demonstrates the most important things about them that will explain his [the actor's] understanding of the event, as if he had observed the accident from the outside. Thus, by adjusting his cap to a rakish angle and tilting his head in just such a way - he can show an audience that, in his opinion, the driver was not concentrating - he was maybe a little drunk... and so on. The selection of the gestures to 'interpret' the events for the audience is another example of 'gest.'

It is also clear from the Street Scene model, that the Brechtian actor is telling a story. He is describing events that have happened in the past and repeating them for an audience, with his own interpretations. He may say: 'Watch this closely... the driver is about to knock down the old lady ...' and by so doing, he is taking away the element of surprise, essential to naturalistic acting. The audience, knowing what is about to happen, watch the reasons for it happening rather than being carried along with the tension or excitement of the events.

Correct understanding of Brecht's essay entitled 'The Street Scene' gives the clearest model of Brechtian theatre and its intentions as well as a model of what is expected of the Brechtian actor.

5. EMOTION VERSUS REASON. EMOTION IS NOT AVOIDED, BUT DEMONSTRATED AND THUS SUBJECTED TO REASON. MAN'S FATE IS IN HIS OWN HANDS: THE IDENTIFICATION OF CHOICE.

It is a fallacy to say that Brechtian acting is unemotional acting. I have been into schools where they are so caught up with this idea that what they are producing in the name of Brecht is devoid of any life and interest.

Brechtian theatre takes as its subject-matter people as influenced by social situations and events: people during a war ['Mother Courage']; people under a tyrannical regime or in a country torn by political strife [The Caucasian Chalk Circle]; people whose good fortune are preyed upon by their relatives - themselves forced into poverty by the society they live in [The Good Person of Setzuan]; people forced into street crime by the injustices in the social system [The Threepenny Opera]. Though the emphasis of the narration and story-telling is on the events and how individuals react to these events, Brecht is still in the realm of people - not automatons. People' reactions to things are often emotional; often, too, it is the emotional reaction that can lead them astray - hence the comment from the Singer in 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' - 'Terrible is the temptation to do good' when describing the pull of emotional responses that Grusha has towards the abandoned baby and her own realisation of the danger into which taking the baby will lead her.

Thus it is clear that emotions cannot be avoided; people are emotional beings. Instead, the reasons for their emotional reactions must be studied and identified. This is the task of the actor: to 'demonstrate' emotion - not to be carried along with it. Emotion is put under the scientific microscope of the actor's reason - and shown to the audience, inviting their rational response to it. It should be as if the actor playing Grusha is saying - 'Look, we all understand the response of Grusha to the abandoned baby... she hesitates; her maternal instincts are aroused ... but she is aware that this baby could not be more dangerous for her; she has overheard the Fat Prince telling his soldiers to find the little heir and to kill him ... her reason tells her that to take the baby would be foolish ... and yet .... The skill of the actor is to show the choices going through Grusha's head. A series of carefully planned 'gests' - hesitation - movement towards the baby [the maternal pull] - movement away [the impulse to save herself and leave him to his fate] - this will demonstrate the emotional choices open to the character, as revealed by the actor.

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As described in the above example, Brecht is keen to show that we are all masters of our own fate. Through focusing on characters who, in extreme social situations all have choices as to how they behave, Brecht hopes to open the audience to realisations about their own behaviour and thus to changing it. For this reason, he wanted actors to emphasise the moments of choice within a play, to show that they can change their own lives - as Grusha does - though not always for the best. In fact, Grusha - who listens to her voice of emotion rather than her reason - is one of the few people in Brecht’s plays to be rewarded for this - by being granted the boy at the end of the play. An earlier Brecht, the writer of the Lehrstücke, would have admired and rewarded the rational response.

6. VERFREMUNGSEFFEKT - THE IMPORTANCE OF DISTANCING AND BEING DISTANCED FOR AUDIENCE AS WELL AS ACTOR.

Hopefully, everything I have said to date will help you to the realisation that Brecht’s theories are all ‘of a piece’, intertwined and, above all, logical. The discussion of ‘gest’ ended with the observation that an actor needs to be intellectually aware at all times of what he is doing and why. Without being ‘in his head’, he cannot remain outside his character enough to calculate the ‘right’ outward signs - gists - for the clear exposition of his character. Without being at all times aware of the social messages implicit in any moment of the play, he will not be making clear what the audience should be receiving.

Brecht talked about creating a theatre for the Twentieth century - a theatre for the ‘scientific age.’ He imagined that all his audiences would be made up of rational men and women, willing to be led into a greater understanding of the world and ready to change it. There is a rather endearing naivete here; one of the qualities I most like about Brecht is that he never patronises his audience; he always assumes their intelligence. All that is needed, in Brecht’s view, is the right kind of play to enlist that intelligence - and the right kind of demonstrator-actors to lead them away from the emotional response they have been used to giving when watching naturalistic plays.

So Brecht wanted an atmosphere of reason, where the audience’s critical faculties are alerted. The actor’s attitude to the play and his role in it is only one of the ways in which Brecht tried for this atmosphere. And we have already discussed how the actor must be ‘in his head’; if the actor is not carried away by the role, then the audience won’t be either. Brecht devised a whole load of exercises, mainly for the rehearsal process, to help the actor keep distanced from ‘being’ his character. Some of these are in the next section, which explores the theories through practice.

In addition, Brecht came up with a number of other distancing techniques, to keep the audience aware that they are in a theatre, watching a play put on by a bunch of actors. Every effort is made to prevent the audience from being sucked into the illusionary world created by the naturalistic theatre. Thus, lights are left on in the auditorium - which may be as brightly lit as the stage - both areas using bright white light, which leaves no shadows, creates no illusions, and exposes the mechanical and technical devices in every theatre building. An audience left in the light is aware that it is an audience; they are conscious of their neighbours; they are not isolated in darkness.

Lighting bars are left visible; sets are changed openly - or partly visible under a half-curtain; sometimes costumes are added to on stage in open view. Settings will not be detailed as in the naturalistic theatre; there is no attempt to create a ‘real’ room, for instance. Instead, only those items actually used in the scene are brought on - a chair, a table, a door-frame, for instance. Note, though, that if a chair is used it must be appropriate for the scene. It must not be just any old plastic school chair, but a peasant’s hut will require a wooden chair, lovingly made, as it would be by the peasant himself - Brecht is not slapdash about such props as are used. This attention to detail is all part of over-all ‘gest.’ A lovingly made chair is a ‘gest’ which extolls the craft of the
worker; the haphazard collection of weapons used in ‘Mother Courage’ may be a visible
gest which, by using some anachronistic modern weaponry and costuming opens out
our response from one specific to the Thirty years War to one which embraces all wars.

So, what does ‘Verfremdungseffekt’ actually mean? It is the word that Brecht

uses to suggest that, in order to keep intellectually aware, the actors and the audience
need to be ‘distanced’ enough from the emotion of the piece to make a measured and
rational response to what is going on. Nowadays, it is usually translated as ‘distancing’;
previously, it was translated as ‘alienation’ - a term which has unfortunate connotations of
‘repelling’ - something that Brecht certainly did not mean. The literal meaning, however,
is ‘making strange’: the ‘making strange effect.’ This is the translation I prefer to use since I
believe it is closest to what Brecht really intended.

When something is ‘made strange’, we look at it afresh, as if for the first time. Brecht intended us to reassess every aspect of the world around us; to do this, we have
to ‘make it strange’, look at it from new angles. It really is the attitude of the scientist
looking at things under the microscope - as suggested when Brecht extolls a theatre for
a scientific age.

By keeping away from emotional involvement with his character, the actor has
had to put his character under the microscope: what has made this man react in this way?
Why? Is it logical? What aspects of it do I need to point out to an audience for the
caracter to be re-assessed and understood? Having understood all these things, the
actor is able to come up with the right ‘gests’, the correct outward signs, to expose his
character to the audience’s critical understanding.

By keeping away from emotional involvement with the play, through all the
distancing techniques practised in the performance, the audience maintains the attitude of
the scientist - interested and aware. His reason is appealed to and is uppermost. He has been encouraged to look at the world from the different angles offered by the cast
and the playwright.

7. BREAKING THE ILLUSION. THE DEVICES WITHIN THE PLAY USED TO
KEEP THE AUDIENCE AWARE. THE MAIN FEATURES OF ‘EPIC THEATRE.’

The main legacy of Brecht’s theatre for the twentieth century is the breaking
down of the ‘fourth wall.’ Stanislavski’s System had been in part about creating an
imaginary fourth wall between the audience and the actors, beyond which the actor’s
attention never strayed. In fact, in Stanislavskian theatre, every effort was made to
pretend that the audience were not there at all - that the characters in the play were real
people sitting in, for instance, their real dining room, making conversation, suffering in front
of us - living their lives with the audience as privileged flies on the wall who observed
with bated breath and wondered what would happen next. The darkness of the
auditorium, the reality of the sets, props and costumes all helped contribute to the sense
of reality, building up an illusion. Much of the System concentrates on the importance of
maintaining that illusion, by the actor building up a character so complete and detailed,
with a history over and above the immediate needs of the play, so that through the
actor’s belief in his character - ‘becoming’ the character - the audience believes too, is
swep along with the illusion.

Brecht found this ‘kidding’ of an audience, this tricking them into believing that
something illusory is ‘real’, literally disgusting. How could it be that a whole art form is
devoted to convincing an audience that a lie is actually the truth? How can rational human
beings, members of the modern scientific age, want to be tricked so? Better by far, in
his view, not to conceal the mechanics of the stage, in fact to expose the lights, props
and other devices as mere tools for another purpose entirely - to tell a story, to expose
a problem in society, to entertain, to satirise, to promote thinking, debate, criticism and
action. Instead of characters locked into their own unchangeable patterns, he offers a view of people as alterable. And because this is where his interest lies, he needs to break down the ultimate illusion - that of the fourth wall.

Brechtian actors use direct address, make eye contact with individuals in the audience, appeal constantly to the audience’s own sense of reason. It is strange that he never went so far as to use a different stage shape than the proscenium arch which he inherited from Stanislavski. But he does point the way for a whole new throng of practitioners after him to do just that - to take it one stage further from the Brechtian actors who cross over the barrier with their eyes and verbal direct address, to actors who challenge the audience-actor relationship by touching, surrounding them and so on.

The productions offer a variety of other ways in which Brecht worked at breaking that naturalistic illusion - or rather, not allowing it to occur. The bright non-naturalistic light, the simplified settings and costumes helped too. Written into the plays are other features of what became known as the ‘epic’ style:

1. Songs, often delivered in a harsh satirical style, in itself not conducive to an audience being carried along, broke up the scenes - particularly at potentially emotional moments.

2. Placards, or headings projected on the half-curtain, told an audience what to expect of a scene. This took away the element of surprise - surprise being dangerous, since it keeps audiences emotionally involved rather than using their brains. Knowing that, say, a murder is going to occur in a scene makes the audience look for the reasons for it; they analyse the situation rather than being horrified emotionally by the deed itself.

3. The scenes themselves were non-linear, or took great leaps in time; they were episodic. This prevents an audience being carried along with the unravelling of a story or the development of a character. We move from one essential episode to another and can concentrate on that and the lessons to be learned from it; different situations are focused on and we see how characters react to them. This is a different way of viewing character, showing that people are different in different sets of circumstances [with the potential to do things differently and alter events], not carried along with events, not caught up, as so many older plays suggest, with the idea of an unalterable tragic destiny or ‘Fate.’

4. Many Brecht plays have huge casts, though because of the episodic style of ‘epic theatre’ many characters will appear once and not again. This encourages the idea of doubling or even trebling roles for many of the actors, further breaking the illusion. Actors cannot ‘be’ a character with such quick changes from one to another. Actors sometimes change roles one after the other, in quick succession [I once saw a highly successful version of ‘The Good Person of Setzuan’ performed by five very busy actors]. This obviously encourages further the idea of identifying characters by clear outward ‘signs’ or gestic.
BRECHT: THE THEORIES EXPLORED THROUGH PRACTICE

1. FINDING THE OUTWARD SIGNS - GEST.

a. Find identifying ways of moving and talking for the following:

- a car salesman with an obviously dodgy motor to get rid of.
- a telephone sales person on commission, desperate to fulfil his quota of sales
- a politician on a walk-about in his constituency
- a wealthy business-man making a bid to buy a failing business
- a lawyer defending a murderer; though obviously guilty the lawyer has found a 'loophole' in the prosecution's evidence

b. Having tried out each of these characters, seek to cut out all but the most necessary identifying gestures, facial expressions, voice tones. Is there one repeated gesture, perhaps, that can be identified as the most 'telling' - clearly exposing what is going on to an audience? Try these out in groups, - each taking one of these characters - and testing their character out on the others.

If the rest of the group’s - the audience’s - reaction to a character is that of recognition and, even better, the stirrings of anger or outrage, then the 'gest' has been successful.

Gest requires an actor conscious of what he is doing at all times. The selection of the right detail to make the character clear and to elicit a response from the audience is what gest is all about.

c. A group of actors seeking to expose the faults of, say, the aristocracy might come up with the following criticisms:

- pompous
- uncaring
- stupid
- selfish with money
- uselessly impractical

Find a gesture or mannerism for each of the above that shows this point clearly. Add the right voice to help the ‘gest.’

It may be that the above list contains too many criticisms to be effective in practice. In a play like 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle', where Brecht criticises the aristocracy, it would probably be better for a group of actors to whittle the gests down from all of the above to only one or two of the most important - perhaps uncaring [of the lower classes] and uselessly impractical - as when the Governor’s Wife cannot pack her belongings even in a crisis, or the Fugitive prince cannot cut his food.

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d. Working in small groups, make a list of criticisms you might want to level at:

- politicians
- journalists
- the army top-brass
- the owners of big businesses

Having developed a list, try to find a ‘gest’ for each item on your list - a voice, mannerism or any other outward sign that will clarify the point you want to make.

An example to help you is from ‘Mother Courage.’ To show how Mother Courage herself is motivated by her need for financial security [at the cost even of her children] she could have a repeated gesture, when threatened, of gripping and kneading the top of her money bag attached to her belt.

e. Gest often works by contrast. In ‘The Caucasian Chalk Circle’ the Governor’s Wife is criticised partly by contrasting her to the more practical and caring Grusha. Where the Governor’s Wife relies on a nurse to hold her child and care for him, Grusha holds the baby herself and deals with changing nappies and finding food personally. This could be emphasised gestically by the Governor’s Wife holding her hands high in the air and flapping them uselessly, or fluttering her fingers, whereas Grusha rolls her sleeves up and uses her hands in an obvious and practical way.

Look back at the list in Exercise a. Find a character that contrasts with each one suggested here - either the ‘victim’ of that person or simply, say, a lawyer with a different approach and, consequently, different gestic language.

For example, contrast the dodgy car salesman with either a very naive customer who is being successfully duped or with another salesperson who is honest - or with a streetwise customer who is aware of the tricks. In each case, make the outer signs clear to an audience.
2. DEMONSTRATION, NARRATION, BREAKING THE FOURTH WALL

In order to make clear how an audience should respond to a character or a situation, it is often necessary to break that fourth wall - the imaginary boundary between audience and actors put so firmly into place by Stanislavski and his followers.

Taking the last example from the previous section on 'gest', the dodgy car salesman and the streetwise customer, the latter may well have to break that barrier and tell the audience his reactions: 'Does he really think I'm taken in? Look at his toothy smile; look at the way he steers me away from looking underneath the car - so that I don't see the rust... etc.'

This kind of explanation would be a legitimate - and often amusing - way of exposing the faults in a social situation, keeping an audience aware both of what is going on in the scene and also showing them the 'outward signs' of duplicity for themselves to guard against.

a. Take any of the scenarios suggested in the gest exercise above, this time clarifying the reaction the audience should have by having one or more of the characters in the scene pointing things out to them. Note that it would be just as legitimate for either of the two characters in the dodgy salesman and the streetwise customer scenario to explain what they are doing or feeling to the audience. E.g. the salesman could warn: 'Look at my toothy smile; listen to my unctuous tones. I am trying to put this customer at ease.'

Try expanding one of the pair scenes you have attempted before in this way: explaining to an audience why you are gesturing in such a way, using a particular tone of voice, and so on. Try it with both characters explaining in this way. This will have the double benefit of showing how actors can include the audience and making them justify each gest - each outward sign of voice or gesture.

Doing this should make them realise how effective their chosen gest is - or show them the need to reassess their gest and come up with a better one.

b. In order to help the students understand the meaning of demonstrative acting - demonstrating a character rather than 'being' it - try an exercise that is based on the acting style imposed on performers by Brecht's play 'The Measures Taken.'

This should be done in small groups.

The scenario is that a burglary has taken place in a small corner shop, selling food and general supplies. The alarm went off and the police arrived, arresting the burglars before they could escape. Now the police have been accused of unnecessary force. One of the burglars suffered quite severe injury - or says he did. The trial takes place some months after the events described.

i. Two students act as if they were the two burglars. As if relating the events to the jury - the audience - they describe what happened on that night.

ii. Having been asked by the jury to re-enact the events of that night, the two first of all act out their version of events - switching into other roles as necessary - e.g. one of them may demonstrate the policeman who beats him up.

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iii. Two policemen give their version of the events of that night. The burglary itself will be told second-hand - as told them by the shopkeeper, perhaps, since they were not there until after the alarm called them to the scene. Use a mixture of re-enactment and explanation/narration.

Note: it might be useful to use the words used in 'The Measures Taken' for introducing the idea of re-enacting events - 'We will show you...' The audience thus knows that the events are merely a re-enactment and that the actors are not playing themselves but other characters in the scenario; the policemen give their version of the burglary playing the burglars in such a way that they are obviously guilty [and the police violence - if there was any - is justifiable]; the burglars will obviously colour the story to present themselves in a better light and the police in the worst light.

Obviously, both the sets of characters in the above scenario have their own viewpoints - and will select a gestic language accordingly - to sway audience opinion. Now try the following:

iv. a passer-by was a witness to the whole thing, though not seen by either burglars or police. He gives his version of the events, mixing narration - a clear exposition of the facts - and demonstration of the actions and speech of a character where necessary.

It is this last version which is the clearest example of the Brechtian style of acting. The actor is not directly concerned in the story. He does, however, want to convince the jury - the audience - of the truth of the matter, so that justice is done. He therefore selects the appropriate gest for his portrayal of each of the characters involved, to make certain the audience will understand and come to the right conclusions. If the policeman is guilty of using too much violence, then the witness may portray him as a bit of a brute perhaps, selecting the appropriate body language and rough way of speaking accordingly. If the burglar is trying to steer the jury away from his own crime to focusing instead on supposed police brutality, then the shiftyn and over-exaggerated opportunistic writhing on the floor when hardly touched needs to be shown. It is this selection of detail and exaggeration of it, to create 'gest', which is the Brechtian acting style.

c. The above exercise has included narration as well. Each of the characters narrated as well as showing their version of events.

One further quick exercise, helps to point out the different types of narration used often in this style of acting.

Sit the class down as audience and ask for two volunteers. One is to be an estate agent, the other a potential customer, who is being shown by the agent around a house.

Each person enters from the opposite side and introduces himself to the audience in the first person. 'I am an estate agent. My name is ...I have come to show this customer around ...' etc. The customer then enters and does a similar style of introduction. They then play a short scene, moving in and out of direct speech:

e.g. Estate Agent: Note the private swimming pool and jacusi. A beautiful feature of the place...

Customer: Yes, I've always wanted one of those. My children will love it ...' etc.

In between these bits of dialogue, each character needs to turn to the audience and tell them what they are really thinking. e.g.

It's true, I did like the swimming pool, but I had begun to realise the whole thing was far too much money.

I began to wonder how serious this customer was. Was I wasting my

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time?....

Then back to dialogue - and so on.

As the scene progresses, the tones of voice used in the dialogue - the facial expressions and body language - will start to become more 'gestic' - coloured by the opinions they have shared with the audience. For instance, the estate agent, having begun to suspect that the customer is wasting his time, will start to become more abrupt, careless - and so on.

Now, either using the same two volunteers or two further ones, repeat the scene, this time with each character using the third person and past tense to describe the events.

Thus, 'I' becomes 'he' or 'she' or even the name 'Ewan' or 'the estate agent.' And the past tense is used to remind the audience that what they are seeing is merely a depiction of events - a story. The past tense is the narrative tense.

The beginning, then, begins to look like this:

ESTATE AGENT: The estate agent came in. He viewed the customer with hope. It would be a feather in his cap to shift this over-priced property...'  
CUSTOMER: Ewan followed the estate agent in. He was a little over-awed by his surroundings. Maybe, if they were all careful, they could afford it. The children would certainly be pleased. 
ESTATE AGENT: What do you think then? The swimming-pool makes a wonderful feature, don't you think?  
CUSTOMER: Oh, my children would love that. 
ESTATE AGENT: His reaction made the estate agent realise that he was probably wasting his time. He viewed the customer with distaste.... He walked rapidly towards the kitchen, flinging the door open carelessly ... etc.

As before, the dialogue moves between narration - this time at further remove - and dialogue.

Finish the examples with a last repeat of the scene, this time with another volunteer to be a narrator, who stands outside the events. The narrator now describes what is happening without playing any of the characters: the estate agent entered, followed by the customer ... etc. Dialogue happens as before, between the two actors.

Make sure that the effect on the audience of all three methods of narration is discussed in the group. Which is the most effective in Brechtian terms? That is, which allows the audience to stand most outside from the events? Which helps the audience most effectively make their own judgements or leads them most clearly to an opinion or conclusion about what is happening?

All three methods of narration are used at times in this style of acting.

d. If you have a courageous group, try the third version - the narrator who does not directly participate - but this time with him singing his speech. Then try the estate agent and the customer each singing one of their 'key' speeches where their thoughts are shared with the audience - the moment when the estate agent realises his time is being wasted - the moment when the customer realises he cannot afford it, perhaps.

Singing parts of the narration - particularly where moments of decision are made, or
where an observation about society needs to be pointed out - is a key feature of Brecht’s plays - though of course his songs had music composed for them - by Kurt Weill or, later, Hans Eisler - and others. Discuss: how does it further distance audience and actors from being swept up in the action?

3. VERFREMUDUNGSEFFEKT; THE ACTOR DISTANCED FROM HIS PART

In the theory section, I relate the many ways that Brecht tries to distance an audience from being swept up in the events taking place on the stage. To be totally successful in bringing about a ‘scientific’ audience, capable of judging events and coming to informed opinions, the actor needs to be part of this process - sufficiently distanced from his part to select the ‘right’ gests, so as to lead the audience towards such proper conclusions. Great is the temptation for an actor to ‘become’ the character. The following exercises should help the actor avoid this temptation and keep him ‘in his head’.

a. Have the whole class moving from one end of the room to another and back again - to and fro - randomly, i.e. not all reaching the end and turning at the same time. Each one starts off by adopting the walk and body posture of a particular type of person. Every time he reaches the end of the room and turns, he must adopt a different, instantly recognisable, character-type.

Having done this two or three times, encourage interaction between the participants - to explore the voices of these character-types.

b. Sit the group down and ask for a volunteer. The volunteer starts to address the group on a subject that they are given. Examples of suitable ‘broad’ subjects are as follows:

food; school; music; money; possessions; work.

Each time you clap your hands, or tap a drum, the volunteer has to change character type according to attitude. This is important, as it reminds them that they are in the realm of ‘gest’, which is dependent on attitude. In this part of the exercise, the attitude given is that of the character to the subject. An anorexic is going to have a different attitude to food from a gourmet, for instance.

Try this first with a number of volunteers.

Now, ask the volunteers to rethink their characters and how they were portrayed - this time according to their own opinion of them. Do they as actors or as people have an opinion about any of the types they showed? How can they stand back enough from their character to show their own opinion of it, whilst they act it? Do they need to select different gestures - or ‘load’ the mannerisms they have given the character in some way - so as to put over an opinion about the character [disapproval, or approval may be enough], which an audience can pick up?

Try repeating some of their previous character-types in this way. Discuss the difference and any changes made.

c. Divide the group into pairs. Give them each a character and a situation. Here are some examples:

i. a husband and wife talking about whether her infirm mother should go into a home.

ii. two teachers at a conference comparing notes about their exam successes. One of the teachers is at an Independent
School, the other at a Comprehensive.

iii. a parent talking with a teenager about whether to be allowed back after midnight.
iv. a parent talking to a teenager about whether to go into further education or not.
v. two teenagers discussing whether to go joy-riding
vi. two teenagers discussing whether to take a drug or not.
vii. any other issue between two people which can be turned into a kind of debate: fox-hunting; immigration; American or British interference in Iraq or elsewhere; euthanasia .... etc.

The important thing about the exercise, is that the two characters have different opinions, which they communicate strongly.

Once each pair has had a chance to argue and listen - stress this - to the other’s viewpoint, have a few showing their arguments to the rest of the group. Only this time, when the hand clap or drum beat comes, they must swap characters. Swapping to and fro between the characters a couple of times, will prevent them being so swept along by their own point of view that they forget they are supposed to be acting - displaying the outward signs of an attitude.

d. Further the above exercise by asking the students now to put their original characters and viewpoints into a particular situation, which involves an activity that they must be doing whilst holding their argument.

For instance, the mother and father could be getting dressed up for going out whilst talking about her mother. A parent could be cooking whilst the teenager is eating, or laying the table, whilst they both talk about further education. Concentrating on a task will start to remind them they are actors and the attitudes they are displaying are merely those of their character.

After they have tried this for a little, ask them to repeat a part of their scene, describing every move they make in the third person and past tense. That is, they are narrating the actions of their character - though what they actually say is kept as they have always done it. Thus, a part of a scene might go something like this, with both stage directions in the narrative tense and direct speech, spoken aloud:

A: ‘She banged the coffee mug down hard. “I can’t believe you said that. You’re so unreasonable.” She pushed her chair back angrily.’
B: ‘He turned to face her. “Where do you think you’re going? We haven’t finished.” He walked towards her.’

And so on.

This is a difficult exercise - but probably the closest thing to true ‘Verfremdungseffekt’ that they will achieve, so it is really worth trying and persisting. It forces each actor to look at their characters from the outside. It keeps them in their head - they cannot become carried away if they are constantly analysing what they are doing whilst they are speaking.

For this reason, it is imperative that you are strict with them for the duration of this exercise: they must not make a single movement without stopping to describe it in the third person and the past tense.

The tense too is important, since it removes what is happening into the past, reminding us that the actor is merely repeating something already rehearsed or that has already occurred.

A useful by-product of this exercise is that it helps actors clarify their gestures: it is so tedious describing every movement, that the actors will whittle down the
movements to the bare minimum - only the ones that really are essential to communicate the character or the situation.

4. CHOICE. BECAUSE BRECHT WANTS PEOPLE TO REALISE THAT MAN IS IN CONTROL OF HIS OWN DESTINY, MOMENTS OF CHOICE IN A PLAY NEED TO BE POINTED OUT.

This, in acting terms, is really as simple as showing the thought processes - the decision to do one thing rather than another - as openly as possible, so that an audience can understand that there was more than one option for the character at this point.

In a play like ‘The Caucasian Chalk Circle’ it is the moment where Grusha decides to take the baby; later on, where she decides to adopt him as her own; later still, where she decides to marry the Peasant, despite her love for Simon, so as to protect the child by giving him a legitimate name. The choices in a play will centre around the main character, though in this play, Azdak, too, is shown as having moments of decision - such as when he decides not to give the fugitive prince up to the police.

Brecht underlines these moments of decision by other means as well as the acting: by songs, narration and placards, for instance.

For the purpose of the students’ understanding, have them do the following exercise:

In small groups, they should discuss a situation in which one of the characters could choose to do one thing or another. For instance, a suitable situation might be: cheating in an exam, or shop-lifting.

They should then discuss ALL the possible outcomes of both [or more] decisions, e.g:

- the shoplifter could be caught;
- get-away with it but feel guilty;
- get away with it and be tempted into further crimes;
- decide not to shop-lift and pay for the item;
- decide not to shop-lift and do without it, being too poor to pay for it.

Having decided and written down all the possible outcomes of their decision, they should then write down a further list of circumstances in which the main character could be, e.g:

- very poor and unable to buy essential equipment for a compulsory course;
- quite able to pay and shop-lifting for a dare etc. Think of as many more as you can

There will be a number for any scenario.

This second list of circumstances is to move the group on from the traditional ‘right/ wrong’ reactions to assessing actions according to different social factors. They

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should recognise that actions should always be judged freshly according to the social circumstances in which the characters exist.

To give an example:

A peasant in medieval times is caught poaching a rabbit from the absent lord of the manor’s land.
The peasant lives on the land; the lord does not, though he will come there once in a while for the hunting.
The law states that poaching is wrong under any circumstances; the rabbit belongs to the lord who owns the land.
The penalty for poaching is death.
The peasant has a number of children and is unable to feed them adequately.
He already pays rent to the lord for a field on which he can grow his own food, but it is not enough land for his needs.
He is well aware of the law about poaching and the penalty he could incur.

In this particular set of circumstances it is clear that the law is unjust and that it needs to be re-assessed.
The peasant chose to poach, knowing the penalty of being caught but judging that the risk was outweighed by the short-term benefit of feeding his family.
An actor playing this scene would centre on the peasant’s informed choice showing the thought process he goes through.

Balance the above against a scene in which a couple of youths today, with guns, trespass in a farmer’s field to shoot rabbits. Perhaps in this scenario, the farmer would be delighted, rabbits being a pest - but the trespassing and the lack of permission worries him. What other acts of trespass might they not commit if allowed to get away with this one?

Remember to discuss different social circumstances for both the two youths and the farmer. What difference does it make to the scene if the youths are very well-off and the farmer is not? Perhaps one of the youth’s fathers rents out some of the land from his stately home to the farmer. Contrast this with a farmer who is doing well and sees himself as a cut above two local lads from the council estate.

Now ask them to improvise one of these scenes in a number of different ways:

a. showing one set of social circumstances
b. showing a very different set of social circumstances
c. showing, through action, hesitation, and/or narration, the moment of decision when a character chooses to take one course of action rather than another.
USING THE THEORIES: A FINAL GROUP PROJECT

Take a well-known folk-tale such as ‘Red Riding Hood’ or ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears.’

Having chosen a tale, break down the elements of the story till the bare bones of it are laid bare. For instance, with this treatment, the story of Goldilocks might look like this:

A family of bears own a house, set a little apart from human habitation in a forest. Goldilocks finds the house and is consumed by curiosity over it. How do the bears live? She spies on them until she sees them all go out together. Then she enters their house, tries their food and enters every room. Not content with testing out all their downstairs furniture she goes upstairs and tries out all their beds too. Overcome by tiredness, she inadvertently falls asleep in one of the beds. The bears return from their outing, are devastated by the encroachment on their privacy and finally find her in one of their beds. Goldilocks wakes up, sees the bears and runs away.

Having broken down the story, it is easy to see how it can be made relevant to elements in modern society:

The bears are ‘different’ in some way: social misfits? or ethnic minorities? They keep themselves to themselves. Goldilocks is an encroacher on their privacy. She has no respect for their privacy or their possessions - she clearly has no respect or understanding of them either.

The bears’ reaction to the break-in is horror and fear. They do not threaten or chase Goldilocks; in most versions of the story Goldilocks runs away - only in one or two versions is she chased. Is this because Goldilocks [as indicated by her name - white, Aryan by implication] is considered unimpeachable by the bears? What will the bears do now that their private place has been invaded?

The group need to discuss what social relevance the story can be made to contain which is appropriate to the times we live in - one of the main concerns of Brecht. Then translate the story to the modern times. Care should be taken to allow an audience to realise the source of the story in some way - perhaps through the narrator, or through placards - in order for them to appreciate the relevance it has today. This fulfills another of Brecht’s criteria, which is to look at things afresh - to question old traditions and ideas, looking at them from different angles.

The story of Goldilocks is so well-known that the invasiveness of Goldilocks and the ‘difference’ of the bears has become sanitised and accepted - not seen for the warning tale it may originally have been. And in any case, that warning tale originally might have been that nice little pretty white girls shouldn’t let their curiosity about the
unknown get the better of them; the unknown might turn out to be threatening and she could be hurt. The original tale is on the side of the girl, not the bears. But perhaps a modern interpretation see things another way.

The group can use this story or another, seeking to expose the message of the story and then twisting it or modernising it to make it relevant to themselves and the modern age. They should seek to use as many Brechtian devices as possible from the following list:

A. To take away the Stanislavskian element of surprise and keep an audience aware of what is going to happen in a scene before it occurs:

- narration
- placards or other means to give scenes a heading
- narrative song

B. The use of Verfremdungseffekt to distance an audience and keep them intellectually aware as well as reminding them that they are in a theatre and watching a performance rather than a real event:

- narration
- actors dropping character to narrate or explain
- use of demonstration techniques such as repeating events, replaying parts of the story with different interpretations, and so on.
- bright white light in audience and on stage
- changing of scenery and costume openly
- song - used to break emotion rather than to add to it

C. To put over a message as clearly as possible:

- Gestic language - the clear outward signs that expose a character’s intentions or attitude, through gesture, facial expression and vocal tones
- Explanatory narration
- Signs, placards, photographs and captions from today’s newspapers to add authenticity and relevance. These can be projected onto a screen on the stage.
- Key actors showing clearly the choices they made - so that the audience may understand the consequences of their actions. This can be emphasised through narration and other means as well. Every means should be used to emphasise that people are not ruled by fate but by their own decisions.

The Brechtian elements in italics are the bare minimum that must be used - in my opinion. Other elements are up to the actors and will depend on time constraints within individual schools or colleges.

Note that this model is useful for political theatre in general, of which Brecht is the main source and inspiration.
If you are interested in further work on Brecht, the publication ‘Brecht Through Practice’, is packed with practical work - none of which are repeats of the above - and includes work on a number of Brecht’s plays. Log on to the web-site for further information and order by phone, e-mail or by downloading a form. See front page for details.

AUGUSTO BOAL

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Augusto Boal, the inventor of ‘Forum Theatre’, ‘Image Theatre’, ‘Invisible Theatre’ and other such tools of the ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ has challenged many preconceptions of what theatre is about.

He has taken the Brechtian ideal of theatre as relevant to the social context of the times and as a tool for change to a very logical conclusion - moving the focus of the play into the hands of the audience, who alone can understand the reality of their predicaments - their lives, the pressures they have to bear whether from bosses, the government or members of their own family. Each individual in an audience is called for that reason a ‘spect-actor.’ The spect-actor can voice his own oppressions and seek to overcome them through a variety of means developed by Boal.

Perhaps, too, it is relevant to remind ourselves of another practitioner’s beliefs: Antonin Artaud. Though not an exponent of political theatre, Artaud did believe that theatre should be life - the two should not be separate. By living, beat by beat and pulse by pulse, the life of the event taking place on the stage - by identifying with it totally, the audience’s breathing coinciding with that of the actors, carried along with them - Artaud’s purpose was to purge an audience of its hidden desires to commit atrocities and upset social taboos. In effect, if horrified by a murder on stage, the audience should have purged themselves of any desire to commit a similar act themselves. Boal does not at all go about things in the same way - his way is always as rational as Brecht's ideal - but he has taken the idea of theatre as life to its logical conclusion. The spect-actors literally take the play into their own hands and live it. They form their own play, mirroring their own lives and then seeking to change their lives through the medium of the play.

Even closer to Artaud’s theories, in such models as ‘Invisible Theatre’ the ‘audience’ never know that they have witnessed a ‘play’. They participate, believing it is an incident that occurs and involves them as they live their own lives - going home on the tube, eating out in a restaurant or similar.
BOAL [1934 - ]: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

1. From 1956 - 1971, Boal, a Brazilian, was the director of the Arena Theatre in Sao Paulo. He was motivated from the first by the desire to break away from the European models, rooted in Stanislavskian naturalism, that other Brazilian theatre directors followed and imitated. Instead, he wanted a theatre that was relevant to the Brazilian people and reflected the society within which they lived.

From these facts we can understand why:

Boal began using his position as director of an important theatre to implement change from naturalism to the development of a style of theatre which concentrated more on the social attitudes prevalent in Brazilian social structures. To make this clear he used ritualised masks of clear social types - landowner, peasant, and so on. To break from naturalism, his actors also openly swapped roles so that often all actors ended up having taken turns playing all the characters in the play.

2. In 1964 and 1968, Brazil underwent two separate military coups, the second even more repressive than the first. Boal's response was to try, through his theatre group, to teach the ordinary people survival tactics under such a regime and even how to instigate political change. This eventually got him into real trouble with the authorities and in 1971 he was arrested, imprisoned and tortured. Though released, three months later, he was told that if they had to arrest him again he would die. He left the country to take up residence in Argentina.

These facts help us understand:

The repression of these military coups caused Boal to consider even further the plight of the ordinary people of Brazil. He began to go out amongst the villages with groups of actors agitating for political change. It would be fair to say that it was the real horror of life under such oppression that sparked off Boal's whole innovative thought process.

3. Up to the middle 1960s, Boal was a political activist of the Brechtian school. But it is as he observed the people who were his audiences - the villagers, the farm workers and the like - that he began to realise that it was all very well putting on plays demanding political change but actually these plays really solved nothing. His actors were themselves intellectual middle-class people who had no real understanding of what it was like to be a peasant or a member of the working class. The plays they conceived within their group did not begin to touch on the real problems of the working classes. Out of this realisation, Boal began to develop Forum Theatre, his most famous tool in the armoury of what was now to become 'The Theatre of the Oppressed,' often abbreviated to 'TO.'

These facts help us realise:

That Boal now begins to move away from the Brechtian model of political theatre. The movement towards empowering the audience - which is what Forum
Theatre’ seeks to do - is also arguably a movement away from theatre proper towards drama as a therapeutic social tool. By moving the focus away from actors showing something to an audience to the audience themselves doing the ‘showing’ is a step away from the traditional view of theatre as performance.

4. Exiled in Argentina, it wasn’t long before Boal’s activities began to upset the Argentinian government, a repressive government like the Brazilian one he had left. Forbidden from practising theatre, Boal came up with a new kind of activity which he called ‘Invisible Theatre.’ Invisible Theatre pretends not to be theatre at all. Actors ‘perform’ in public places to people who are unaware they are watching actors. The public thinks it is seeing something real. What they witness will involve some kind of active participation for them - in the form of debate most probably - sparked off by the activity they have witnessed. An example might be a man molests a woman on a bus. She protests loudly and enlists the opinions of those on the bus. Have other women experienced this? What do they feel? The ‘molester’ and the woman are actors - but the others on the bus will never realise this. In that way, the theatre is truly ‘invisible.’

From these facts we can see:

That Boal’s commitment to theatre as an instrument of social change, capable of offering practical help to ‘the oppressed,’ goes beyond any need for personal safety. He is constantly putting himself in danger, to be of help to others. His active mind, when faced with authorities that want to shut him up, merely searches for new ways to develop his form of theatre. Forced to stop ‘Forum Theatre’ performances, he comes up with something else - ‘Invisible Theatre.’

5. Finally, Boal was forced by the Argentinian Government to desist from any form of theatrical activity, including the public debates caused by Invisible Theatre. Instead, Boal sat down and wrote three books about his theatre. His book ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ rapidly spread his name around the world.

This tells us that:

Out of the ‘dead’ years of being unable to practice his form of theatre came the very thing that was to make his name world-wide: his books. Once again, his own positivity beat the system and the discipline of writing his ideas down into book-form clarified his thinking and methodology.

6. Europe quickly lapped up ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ and many practitioners were excited by the enormous potentials they saw within his style of work. From 1976 - 1986, Boal settled in Europe, now exiled from both Argentina and Brazil. In Paris, he founded in 1979 the ‘Parisian Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed’ which is still active today. Boal began to develop his work according to a new set of needs: that of the largely middle- class European. Not oppressed in the straight-forward way of the South American continent he had grown up in with its poverty, its feudal two-class system [working class and upperclass], its undemocratic oppressive governments and the police who administered harsh laws to the ordinary people. Europe seemed at first to Boal not in need of his methods. But gradually, he became aware that social pressures cast down these people too: not so much outside forces - governments, police, unfair employers, and so on, as in his country - but instead the inner forces of guilt, social taboos, moral rules imposed by teachers, parents and such-like. These, he began to realise, were just as inhibiting to a person as the more overt oppression undergone by someone in, say, Brazil. He began to realise that a person inhibited by ANY form of oppression, inward or outward, is in a state of paralysis in which he cannot act; he cannot
change his condition. Boal seeks to change these perceptions and offer just as real ways of self-empowerment to the middle-class European as he offered to a Brazilian peasant.

The move into Europe and his work there shows us that:

Boal has completed the move from theatre as we know it to what is really a form of therapy. It is as therapy that he is now widely practised throughout the world, seeking to empower the oppressed individual and free each from the social chains with which he has weighed himself down. Many followers of Boal now practice as teachers of his methods, often working closely with therapists and psycho-analysts.

Boal continues to practise and, though Forum Theatre and other forms of theatre and self-empowering games are familiar to most people for their therapeutic uses, he is still invited to third-world countries and to areas of poverty and political unrest to practise the type of Theatre of the Oppressed which was his first love and which he felt answered a real need amongst the under-privileged classes of his own country.

In 1986, Brazil had a change of government and Boal was invited back to lead a theatre programme designed to reach children in poverty-stricken areas. He founded a centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, to mirror that in Paris, in Rio de Janeiro. Both centres still flourish and are manned by a large number of teachers, practitioners and therapists who have learned through Boal's techniques and developed his ideas further into their own practice.
BOAL: THE THEORIES

1. OPPRESSED PEOPLES NEED A NEW TYPE OF THEATRE WHICH OFFERS THEM THE HOPE OF CHANGE.

Boal sees traditional theatre and the plays that are performed as part of it as stultifying to the audience. Such plays only offer images of the world as unchanging - and by inference unchangeable. A play is a finished artefact, leaving no room for argument or for other options. Oedipus, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet die; each performance of such plays carries an audience into acceptance of a fait accompli - an act that is finished.

In this respect, his beliefs are very similar to those of Brecht, who continually wanted to show that the world was changeable and that human beings had a duty to change it. People have free will - choice - and they must be galvanised into exercising that ability. What good are visions of the world showing the fate of individuals as unalterable? How depressing that is for ordinary people in terrible social circumstances - the people Boal calls the ‘oppressed.’

Brecht answered this problem by writing plays himself that focused on individuals and the ways they can change the wrongs in society. Mainly his solutions were simple: Communism seemed to him to contain all the obvious answers.

Boal opens this idea out much further. ANY finished piece of theatre is too hide-bound. It may offer solutions for some, but others will be left disappointed. If bourgeois theatre - which is all established theatre that appeals mostly to the upper stratas of society - offers only images of the world as it is and gives no room for change, then meaningful theatre for the working classes - for the oppressed - must show ‘images of transition.’

At what point is a play in transition? When it is in rehearsal. Therefore the plays Boal would offer his audiences would be plays in rehearsal - plays that could be altered. This idea was further fuelled by Boal’s observation of how the ordinary people of his country, not trained to go to theatre, received plays. Boal had already taken plays out to villages and poor areas of Brazil away from the big cities. There his actors performed and he noticed that these untrained audiences liked to participate - heckling, interrupting, seeking to engage actors in conversation or argument - much like the groundlings in Shakespeare’s time, perhaps - with whom, particularly the stage ‘fools’ often engaged. [A habit which Shakespeare comments on when Hamlet asks the players to perform only what is written for them.] Actors of ‘popular’ theatre - from travelling players in ancient times, through the medieval period and beyond - encompassing the Commedia dell Arte and others - have always ad libbed, allowing parts of the play to go where a particular audience wants. In those times, a play was a living and changeable organism. It is only with the birth of the idea that the playwright and his text is sacred [something Stanislavski earnestly fought to bring about] that theatre becomes formalised and audiences become, as Boal puts it, ‘passive spectators.’

Boal began to take his actors into these areas with a play which was a starting-point only. The actors then improvised according to suggestions thrown out by their active participatory audience.

2. THE ‘SPECT-ACTOR.’ ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS OF AN ‘AUDIENCE’.

Boal took the ideas begun above further once he realised that as soon as people
perceived themselves as members of an audience, they became passive. The separation of actors and audience instantly causes this passivity; the spectator is incapable of action. He is impotent.

How could individuals within an audience be made 'potent'? By making them actors. Boal observed that persons without the ability to act have become 'less than men.' Again, this is similar to Brecht's scathing comments on Stanislavskian audiences who 'hang up their brains with their hats' in the theatre cloakrooms and watch the play they have come to see without questioning it or criticising its view of the world in any way. Boal simply takes this idea further, to a logical solution. He changes the unthinking members of an audience into individual 'spect-actors', with the power to interrupt or to take the place of any of the actors in a piece, to show how things could be altered.

Boal takes the verb 'to act' and restores it to its original meaning. There is no mystery in acting - anyone can do it. 'Acting', in his terminology, is quite different from 'performing', which remains in the realm of professional actors and which no longer really interests him as something for its own sake.

3. FORUM THEATRE, AN ANSWER TO OPPRESSION. THE VARIOUS ROLES OF THE JOKER.

Forum Theatre is the most famous form of Boal's ideas in practice. Its origins are in the form of theatre described above where a group of actors took an idea, only partly rehearsed, to some location and then improvised alternative ways of completing the play according to the ideas proposed by their audience.

In the form it is now, Forum Theatre has become formalised as a kind of theatre activity with its own set of rules, like a game - though a game with a very serious intent.

A group of actors take a particular problem which deals with some form of oppression, let us say, for example, a factory owner who is working his men too hard and for too little pay. First of all, the actors go in with a rehearsed piece which is called 'the model.' If possible, the actors should all have experienced the type of oppression they are exposing; it should be 'real' for them.

Having seen the action once, the model is repeated in a somewhat speeded-up version. At any point, any member of the audience can shout, 'Stop.' The actors then freeze and the member of the audience steps into the place of the main person - who is the oppressed one in the play, in this case the over-worked, underpaid employee. Perhaps in this, our imaginary scenario, there are two other actors in the scene - the factory owner and the manager in over-all charge of the workers. These two actors will try their best to impose the same ending as before on the scene - with the employee meekly accepting his oppression. But the new protagonist - the 'spect-actor' who has stepped in - will try to find a different solution, one that gains him some freedom from his oppression. It becomes a kind of game - the oppressors seeking to uphold their oppression and the oppressed seeking to free himself by changing something about his working conditions, or the way he is perceived by the bosses.

If it all starts to go wrong again, or another member of the audience thinks he can see another way, then he can shout 'Stop,' step in, and the scene begins again from that point. In this way, a variety of solutions can be explored.

Because this kind of theatre could easily relapse into anarchy, the Forum Theatre exercise is presided over by 'the Joker.' The idea of the Joker becomes very important in all forms of Boal theatre and therapy. In Forum Theatre he is a kind of referee who teaches the rules of the 'game' to the audience and ensures that audience debate does not become chaotic; otherwise it could so easily become another form of 'oppression' for those quieter ones who want to speak but are easily defeated into silence. At other times, the Joker is the title of the director, the workshop leader or the facilitator of a major Boal techniques project. His role is to be quietly in charge, without imposing his will on the proceedings. In Forum Theatre, if the audience think that the Joker's ruling has been unfair in any way, they can debate the issue and replace him by majority consent.

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Rules too can be changed, through debate and consent. In fact, the whole basis of Forum Theatre is to invite audience debate in every area - so long as the outcome is satisfactorily explored and a variety of ways of changing the form of oppression under scrutiny are exposed. It is the Joker's job to ensure this happens and to see that the debate sticks to the point.

Rules will mainly be free but sensible, such as allowing people to finish what they have to say, and so on. One other rule that is of interest and worth mentioning is this: if a spect-actor tries to alter the outcome of a scene through unrealistic means, through resorting to fantasy, the audience can shout out the word 'Magic.' An example would be if a spect-actor says to his boss 'Actually, you can stuff your job because I've just won the lottery.' This solution might be seen as a cop-out - not likely to happen - therefore not a 'real' solution to the problem. Someone could call 'Magic' and that solution would then be debated by the audience as to whether it should be allowed.

From this, you can see how the Brechtian ideal of promoting an intellectually aware audience and the Piscatorian idea of a play about a moral problem [such as his one about abortion] leading to a debate between actors and audience have been taken to very logical conclusions by Boal.

4. INVISIBLE THEATRE - THE SPECT-ACTOR TAKEN TO ITS LOGICAL CONCLUSION, KEPT UNAWARE THAT HE IS 'SPECTATING' AT ALL.

Invisible Theatre is literally what it sounds: a form of 'theatre' where the audience is encouraged to take part in something - usually through engaging them in conversation or debate - but without this audience ever knowing that what they have participated in has all been 'set up.'

A famous example is as follows. Boal and his actors were incensed at the terrible wages and conditions which waiters had to put up with. They devised a piece of Invisible Theatre designed to bring this to the attention of as many others as were dining out on a particular evening. This is what happened.

An actor posed as a customer and ate a meal in a restaurant. One or two other actors were also customers in the restaurant, used as plants to get a debate going if necessary. When the first actor received his bill he told the waiter he could not pay it. The waiter was alarmed - no, it was not possible to wash-up and pay for the bill that way. Eventually, through probing from the actor-customer, the waiter admitted that he would have to pay for the meal out of his own wages. This was the ruling of the management of the restaurant [and the unfair fact that Boal and his actors wanted to make known to their 'audience' of diners].

By this time, a number of other diners were beginning to listen, aware that something unusual was going on. It must be stressed that they had no idea that the customer who could not pay was an actor - nor would they ever have. The actor-customer, with the support of the other 'plants' who now joined in, asked questions designed to stir up feeling amongst the diners about the unfairness of the predicament in which the waiter was now placed. More and more of the customers joined in, asking the waiter how much he earned, exclaiming over the low wage - how could he afford to pay this bill out of it? What a system! And so on.

Finally, they all clubbed together to give the waiter as much as they could - not only paying for the meal in question, but also giving a substantial extra sum to all the waiters, who they agreed were their 'brothers' and should not be made to suffer such poor working conditions.

The important outcome of this and other forms of Invisible Theatre is that people are made aware of situations they might otherwise never know about. It is a way of educating them in problems that are all around them but which they do not know about - or only know about in theory. They participate in debate and have a chance to form opinions for themselves about social injustices of all kinds. And they never will know that they have participated in a theatre activity.

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Invisible Theatre contains some elements of similarity with Happenings and more still with Artaud’s ideas of Theatre as Life, which was the inspiration of many Happenings. Boal, however, is adamant that Invisible Theatre is not a Happening. Happenings tend to be self-conscious acts where ‘things’ are done to, or to attract the attention of, an audience. As soon as people are aware that they are an audience watching actors or artists, then they are ‘reduced to impotence.’ ‘A spectator is ‘less than a man’, because a spectator is not actively involved. Nonetheless, some Happenings in the Fifties and Sixties did involve the active participation of passers-by, notably similar events to the smashing up of a grand piano in the street where passers-by were invited to join in and when they did experienced a great sense of release from being allowed to participate in a normally ‘taboo’ activity. The ‘meaning’ of the Happening - the symbolic destruction of formal ‘art’ in the form of the piano, a comment on the throw-away society of the Sixties - probably passed most participants by, but the therapeutic feeling of release would be something that Boal recognises.

5. THEATRE AS AN EDUCATIVE TOOL. DIFFERENT FORMS OF BOALIAN THEATRE USED FOR THIS PURPOSE.

Invisible Theatre seeks to educate people, or bring them face to face with problems in existence in society which they might otherwise ignore. Boal also invented many other forms of theatre designed to educate. Here are a few:

i. Photo-Romance. This was designed to help people realise how the lowest forms of literature, written to appeal to the working classes as light relief, upholds the class-system and ideology of the ruling classes. By being invited to act out these stories, using the kind of cartoon-strip style lines as the actor’s speeches, the participants discover for themselves the trashiness of the art-form. Further, through discussion of the differences between the stories and real life situations, the spect-actor’s eyes are opened to how insidiously opinions and acceptance of the status quo are fed to the masses.

ii. Newspaper Theatre. Stories from newspapers are analysed, acted out and taken apart to expose the truths behind them. Events are put in different contexts, or linked with similar events in other societies or in history. The idea is to teach people:
   a.] how certain events happen again and again without change - unless something is done to recognise what lies behind the events and to discuss how they can be changed for the future and
   b.] how governments seek to divert the public from knowing what is really going on. Deconstructing newspaper stories, acting them out and changing their context often exposes the truth behind the story.

iii. Myth Theatre. Spect-actors are encouraged to look for the real messages that lie hidden in local myths and legends. Often, behind what seems to be a charming fairy story a repressive message, which upholds a system that ought to be questioned, will be discovered.

iv. Analytical theatre. Spect-actors are encouraged to see that most human actions are less a product of human psychology than the accident of whatever class they are born into. To explore this idea, a simple two-handed story is told - perhaps of a policeman arresting a thief. Then each character is ‘de-constructed’ to see what social roles may influence their actions. For instance, the policeman may be working-class or he may be from the bourgeois class. He may be a father, a family man. He may be an agent of a repressive government. Each one of these four roles is given a ‘symbol’ - a prop or costume addition that stands for the social role he is fulfilling. For example, policeman as repressive agent might be symbolised by a gun; a working-class policeman might be represented by overalls, a bourgeois one could be represented

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by a tophat. It is important to find a symbol that helps all spect-actors to make the right social recognition and response. The symbols are 'right' for the class - not for realism; the policeman would not wear a tophat, in fact - but the spect-actor playing him top-hatted will play him in a certain way and responses by other spect-actors will be to the perceived class of the tophat - not just the general idea of a 'policeman.'

All the possible permutations of the story, with the different symbols played at different times by both performers, are then acted out and the different results discussed and analysed. For instance, the story may be perceived differently if the policeman is a family man and the thief has the instrument of repression, the revolver. And what if the thief is wearing the tophat? or the overalls? What differences in perception amongst those watching, what differences in actions from the spect-actors? All would be analysed and debated, with a view to understanding our perceptions of society.

These examples are enough to show the general slant of Boal's work to educate the people of Brazil and Argentina. It is clear that the aim is to empower them, through recognition of the social fabric that keeps them 'under' in the system, to taking more control of their society and their lives. Teaching people how to create their own freedom is an admirable thing and explains how from social models, which were his starting point, more general points about personal freedom from repression were a natural progression.

6. THEATRE AS THERAPY, SEEKING TO DISCOVER AND FREE OUR REPRESES SELVES. RECOGNISING AND BREAKING OUR RITUALS.

As I have tried to point out above, the move into therapy was almost an inevitability. It is not such a big shift from freedom of the oppressed working classes to freedom of the oppressed individual. Only the forms of oppression are very different.

For a European, many of the forms of oppression are products of our upbringing - parents, religion, school, the 'rules' of society. Boal designed or adapted many exercises and games which help individuals free themselves first of all from the bad physical habits our bodies are prone to and secondly from the restrictions, often self-imposed, that cage in our lives.

Often, we are oppressed by the rituals we create for ourselves and the social masks we wear. Boal seeks to train people into an awareness of these masks and rituals, so that we can free ourselves.

In this idea, he is similar to such as Grotowski, who sought to free the actor from the masks and blocks he puts up. The actor, in this case, can only discover purity of action and expression by stripping himself bare of all his masks; often this will come through strenuous physical exertion, which will break down the blocks of 'I can't' to finding that the body is capable of extraordinary feats of expression and control. The difference is that Boal is talking about all people when he refers to the 'spect-actor', whereas Grotowski is merely referring to the specialised individuals who work as actors.

For Boal, first must come recognition of the masks we wear out of which comes the potential for freedom. To do this, groups start with many games and exercises which help build up trust as well as trying to unblock the patterns of movement in which our bodies, through repetitious daily use, become hardened.

Then the group are invited to propose the area in which they want to work - whatever oppressions they perceive around them, male-female relationships, family relationships, or whatever - before, by general concensus deciding on the most useful area. This is then explored through 'Image Theatre.'

For Image Theatre, some participants sculpt the others into still images of whatever form of repression is under discussion. For instance, there might be a still image made of a husband dominating his family, perhaps through force. The spect-actors in the still image can propose adjustments to the image until all are satisfied that the image is as true a representation of that particular form of oppression as it can be.

Then the group work together to form an ideal image, one which everyone wishes was how things were - how they should be. The final stage is to suggest ways
of getting from the ‘Real Image’ to the ‘Ideal Image.’ Each of these intermediary stages is also shown through a still image. The group discuss and work together to create these ‘Images of Transition’ and it is these images of transition which are the basis for a way of working - of changing the state of things as they are and working instead towards things as they should be.

Having gone through the ‘Image Theatre’ stage - a necessary one, Boal says, because it allows those who are not vocally confident to have their say - by sculpting their own image of transition, that is showing their own idea of how things can be altered without feeling threatened by shyness or inability to communicate through language. Shy people will often physicalise in a non-threatening environment when they would be tongue-tied if they had to put over a viewpoint orally.

The third phase of a typical session would be Forum Theatre - again using the subject-area that has been proposed. The format of Forum Theatre is described above. In this way, people are encouraged both to recognise and address a social problem, common to themselves and a number of other people who have been brought up in the same social system, as well as recognising and seeking to alter certain personal blocks within their own bodies and minds. This is the type of work that is described in Boal’s later work, called ‘The Rainbow of Desire.’

The Boal model as described above has been adopted and altered by a number of practitioners all over the world. I do not propose to go into these here. Interested parties can find much out from the useful book, ‘Playing Boal’ edited by Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz, published by Routledge, which is full of contributions from a number of different practitioners.

7. IS BOAL THEATRE AT ALL? ROOTED IN TRADITIONAL THEATRE PRACTICE, HE MAKES US REDEFINE THE BOUNDARIES AND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THEATRE.

It seems that Boal’s theories are taking us away from theatre and towards therapy. Yet every one of his theories is rooted in traditional theatre practices and each theory carries to a conclusion some practice begun by other twentieth century practitioners. In that respect, he deserves to be taken seriously as a theatre practitioner.

To sum up: Boal’s starting point was Aristotelian theatre with its emphasis on catharsis, fate and unalterable tragic heroes. I have already discussed the problem with plays that offer unalterable images of the world - such images reduce the audience to inaction. Further, Boal says that catharsis - that so-to-be-desired audience state of being [according to Aristotle] - literally drains the spectator of his ability to act. Catharsis, seen by many practitioners, as a transcendent feeling of cleansing - a purging through identification with the plight of the hero - carries the audience, at best to a state of ecstasy or at least to a state of satisfied recognition, through pity for the hero's plight and fear that life, fate, the gods, might treat us the same way. This cathartic ecstasy is a kind of super-identification with what is happening on the stage. The danger is that, far from spurring an audience into action, this feeling literally incapacitates an audience. Any action that occurs, occurs only on stage - the actors think and act for us. The spectators resign their ability to act and think for themselves, living at second-hand through cathartic identification with the ‘characters’ in the play. As Boal says: ‘Dramatic action substitutes for real action.’

Boal as an actor started off by studying Stanislavski. It was while experimenting with many of Stanislavski’s physical exercises that he began to realise how our bodies are trapped in mechanical ‘rituals’. Our bodies become so hardened that we are often prisoners of our pasts. He acknowledges, too, the links between our inner emotions and outward actions, which are often reactions to those hidden ‘captive’ emotions. He concentrated particularly on Stanislavski’s ideas about ‘emotion memory’, differing from Stanislavski by insisting that emotion memories must be tapped but not allowed to take the actor over completely. Emotion must be subject to reason - [Brecht would applaud!] - and he declares this is perfectly possible for an actor, without losing the essential ‘truth’.
of the inner emotion. [More detail on Boal’s ideas on Stanislavski’s System is in the next section on Actor’s Training.]

The actor Frederick Alexander, founder of the Alexander Technique, and Feldenkrais, who has so inspired Peter Brook, have also recognised how our body creates its own patterns, through habit and repetitive movements, which must be identified, worked through and changed. Only through such change is the body liberated from those set patterns which inhibit it and reduce its capacity for free action. Grotowski recognised this and took it further to seek to identify the emotional blocks that he saw as lying behind the physical resistances thrown up as protection by the body. He worked with actors in an individual way to identify their own personal blocks or ‘masks’ so that through recognition of them they could be liberated from them.

Boal seems to have taken these ideas up to a point - he certainly recognises that physical exercises can be the key to the emotions and vice versa - but his Brechtian insistence on the ‘reason’ is at odds with the kind of conclusions that Grotowski reached. Grotowski will allow an actor to find and liberate his inner self through often extreme physical means, without the need for analysis. The response for the individual actor is emotional and transcendent, almost a religious uplifting experience. The actor is freed to accomplish extraordinary acts and the audience is carried along with the emotional surge. Boal certainly wants to free the body, but this liberation is a mirror of what he really wants, which is to free the mind - the will. It is as if he is saying - look, in just a few hours of exercise we can impose our wills on our bodies to change the patterns we thought were a set part of us. If we can do that with our physical selves - the immediate environment in which we live - can we not do it also in the larger environment of the world? And conversely: if our bodies are influenced by the conditions in which we live; if we perceive ourselves as not free, as oppressed, then we cannot function on any level - not even in the way we walk, or sit, or stand. Some reflection of our oppression will influence our simplest actions.

In this last paragraph I find myself using the word ‘actor’ for talking about Grotowski and using the more universal ‘our’, ‘us’, ‘we’ for talking about Boal. This underlines the main difference between Boal and the other practitioners in this series. Most of the practitioners are concerned with training or liberating the actor in order to make him better at his job. Boal is interested in training all oppressed peoples; he goes beyond actors and theatre - seeing them only as ways in to liberating the actor-inside-everyone, that is - the spect-actor.

Nonetheless, the words Boal uses are theatre words: theatre, play, act, spectate changed to spect-act. His starting-point is theatre and even if he opens out the parameters of our ideas about theatre, isn’t that what every one of these practitioners has done? What he does is to cause us to re-assess the theatre jargon we use and take for granted, often taking us back to a purer and older form altogether - closer to Greek Comedy than Aristotelian Greek tragedy. It was the early Greek Comedy where the lines between audience and actor are hazy and ill-defined, where there was interchange between the performers processing down the middle and the spectators lining the side of the street - heckling, inter-acting, participating in dialogue and jovial or obscene comment. Like this early popular form, Boal’s theatre challenges our preconceptions and melts down the formal delineations of ‘theatre’. Any such challenge to our preconceptions causes debate and forces us to re-evaluate what theatre is all about - and that is all to the good.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTORS. THE PARTICULAR KIND OF SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE ACTORS [AS OPPOSED TO THE SPECT-ACTORS] USED IN BOALIAN METHODS

In all the above, one thing has been largely ignored and that is that in all types of Boalian Theatre forms, even though the end result involves spect-actors whether they know they are or not, real actors take part. These actors are often the initiators of ideas. In many of the theatre forms, they will have rehearsed a play to show a certain aspect of
society. Then they must be flexible enough to respond to whatever the spect-actors throw up at the final showings.

It is this flexibility that demands enormous skills from the actors. They are always thinking on their feet; their spontaneous improvisatory techniques must be extraordinary. They need to be able to home in on the 'outward signs' [what Brecht calls 'gests' and what Boal calls 'masks'] of social types, using the principles of exaggeration - though not to the point where the character becomes unreal - and clear broad outlines as with the Brechtian actor. To achieve this - and then to be able to 'play' with their character in, say, a Forum Theatre setting requires plenty of practice in improvisation skills in general.

Boal, in rehearsal, has his actors explore every possible permutation of a scene. Certainly many scenarios can be planned for - but the lines the spect-actor uses when he steps into the scene can not, nor can the actual direction that the spect-actor tries to push the outcome of the scene towards be always predicted.

The 'Models' that are taken into a Forum Theatre session are rehearsed in wildly different styles and with the actors performing their characters in entirely different ways a) according to emotion and b) according to motivation. All of this is to force an analytical approach at all times on the actors - keeping them separated from their characters, as Brecht also demands. The scene is thus de-constructed over and over again, allowing the actors to practice how their characters might react given as many sets of possibilities as can be predicted.

The exercises that Boal has collected, devised or adapted serve equally well as an actor's training. A list of the areas which the exercises cover help show how complete this list is:

- Muscular Exercises
- Sensory Exercises
- Memory Exercises
- Imagination Exercises
- Emotion Exercises

Many of the above general exercises are similar to the areas of training devised by Stanislavski. In addition, Boal works with other familiar Stanislavski ideas - particularly Emotion Memory and Objectives, though these latter are adapted in significant ways.

Emotion Memory he finds a useful device up to a point. It does not work, he finds, with an actor who has no memory similar to one that the character has. For example, an actress who had to remember a pleasurable sexual experience to play her part, could not because she was a virgin. But she was able to play the part convincingly when remembering the very pleasant experience of eating ice-cream on an exotic beach!

The main problem Boal finds with Emotion Memory is its danger. To be carried away with emotion is dangerous and he cites examples to prove it. Emotion must be analysed, even while it is occurring - something he feels that we all do in any case. Even when experiencing extreme emotion in our own lives, our brains are noticing things - the expressions on people's faces, physical details around us - whilst still in the throes of the emotion. In the same way, the actor must learn to both stir up his emotion memory to enhance his acting, and to apply rationality to it as well.

A secondary problem of Emotion Memory is the slow, often over-loaded style of acting it can lead to. Theatre should be about conflict, action and re-action. Emotion Memory can lead to stasis. This conclusion is one that Stanislavski himself was reaching by the end of his life and was working to counter with his Units of Physical Action.

In conclusion, I would say - from Boal's own writings - that he was more aware of Stanislavski as diluted through the work of Lee Strasburg and others of the American Method School. Stanislavski was himself well aware of the dangers of being too carried away with emotion and talked often of the split in the actor's own self between 'feeling' and living the emotion and 'observing' himself in action. It is this kind of split that Boal also advises.

Eventually this split between emotion and rationality becomes closer to Brecht's style for Boal: that is, emotion observed and demonstrated. This emotion must still be

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recognisable and ‘true’ - because Boal is seeking through Forum Theatre to show images of the real world and how it can be altered by real people.

Now to deal with Objectives: Boal’s ideas about the actor’s objectives in a scene are that these must be very concrete. So far, this concurs with Stanislavski. Every character must know precisely what he wants at each moment of the play; this gives him his dynamism - his actions.

Boal then takes this further to demonstrating how any scene, to be theatrical, must contain a constant flow of conflicting wills. In Romeo and Juliet’s love scene at dawn, after their secret marriage, Romeo wants to leave to save his life whilst Juliet wants him to stay. Having listened to each other’s reasons, the scene progresses to Juliet wanting Romeo to leave, to save his life, whilst Romeo now wants to stay to be with her. Whole plays thus become a patterning of Wills [similar to Stanislavski’s ‘I want’ objectives] always balanced with Counter-wills, which give to each moment of the play its theatrical tension and interest.

At this point of analysis of a scene, we see the political Boal coming into action. The idea of Will - though not actually spelled out for spect-actors - is at the root of all Forum Theatre. The oppressors want one thing, the oppressed want another. The Forum Game has the Oppressed seeking to impose his will on the Oppressors, whilst the Oppressors will try every way to keep what they ‘will’ in place.

From the above, we can see that much of an actor’s training for a Boalian actor is rooted in Stanislavski - for the study of real people and their emotions and motivations - and Brecht for the necessity for his actors to be flexible, to swap roles, to keep aware of what is happening, to demonstrate the world as it is. The Brechtian ‘coldness’ is tempered with the Stanislavskian warmth. Added to this are the improvisatory and other skills as detailed above in the opening paragraphs of this section.
BOAL: THE THEORIES EXPLORED THROUGH PRACTICE

Note that throughout these exercises, the teacher or group leader will be called the Joker, as Boal and his followers would do. Teachers should introduce these exercises by pointing out that this is their role.

1. MUSCULAR EXERCISES - UNLEASHING THE BODY’S POTENTIAL

Boal never pushes exercises to an extreme where they become painful. They are designed to unleash potential, to remove blocks - not to create new ones, something that would happen if the actor experienced too much discomfort. The idea is gently to push at the barriers rather than storming them, as Artaud or Grotowski proposed. The removal of the blocks is a gradual process.

I have picked out a few of Boal’s muscular exercises designed to help understand the mechanics of the body and to activate muscle groups that have fallen into disuse.

a. Columbian Hypnosis. The point of this exercise is to make people challenge their bodies points of balance. Leaders need to be instructed to keep challenging this - putting their partners into positions where it is hard to maintain control and balance. This in turn will awake muscles that are rarely used.

The group form into pairs, calling themselves A and B. A puts his palm up and outwards and B puts his nose as close as possible to the centre of that palm. Instruct the students that B is ‘hypnotised’ by that hand - he should focus his entire concentration on it. Whatever A’s palm does, B’s nose must remain a constant distance from it. But A needs to be instructed that, as with mirror exercises, the idea is NOT to try and catch his partner out. A’s hand should keep moving - if necessary swapping palms - to ‘work’ B’s body. Concentrate on the spine - bending over backwards, twisting and so on. Try to make B’s body go into all sorts of weird contorted positions. You will find that, provided the B students are totally concentrated on that hand, they will forget what their body is doing to some extent - in itself a help to liberating it from self-consciousness.

Obviously, once B’s body has been thoroughly worked, the partners should swap.

There are a number of variations to this exercise:

i. In threes, taking turns at being ‘leader.’ The leader puts up both of his palms, guiding two actors as above. The possibilities are enlarged - by swapping hands, the leader can steer his partners over and under each other. The bodies of the other two must not touch.

ii. In fives. This time the leader has someone hypnotised by both hands and both feet. It is the big toe that should be the object of fascination with the feet; the palms remain the centre for those following the hands. Those hypnotised try to follow the object of their fascination through dance steps, jumps and other complex patterns of movement such as crossing the arms.

iii. The grand finale of this sequence is ‘mass hypnotism.’ For this, someone goes into the middle of the room and starts to move - keeping as far as possible the whole body in motion, though the movements must be smooth and slow. The rest of the group attach themselves - by being hypnotised by any part of the anatomy - either to this central figure or to
someone else who is already attached to that central figure. The centre figure is then instructed to very slowly rotate 360 degrees. This must be slow, since those on the outside of the group will have to move far faster and further than those closest to the middle.

b. The way we do things on a day to day basis forces our bodies into mechanical habits that need to be broken. Our bodies need to be shown that they are not victims of our habits by seeking to break our established patterns of movement. For example, the way we walk has become a mechanical activity. Try re-assessing walking through the following exercises:

i. Walk in slow motion, taking huge strides. Concentrate on stretching the whole body. One foot rises as soon as the other touches the floor and each knee must be pulled up so that the forward stretch of the extended leg is maximised in the air before it begins its descent to the floor.

Boal usually make this into a race, in which the winner is the person who manages to move slowest and with most control.

The whole exercise should cause people to realise what muscles could or should be brought into play when walking.

ii. Try ‘walking’ like various animals:
- an elephant - all fours, right foot moves with left hand, left foot with right hand;
- a camel - right foot and right hand move together, left foot and left hand;
- a monkey - knees bent so that hands are always brushing the floor;
- a crab - all fours, sideways;
- a kangaroo - gripping the ankles and moving in bounds.

iii. Standing next to a partner - try a three-legged walk, though without the ankles of the inner legs being tied. Instead one partner hooks his leg round the other’s. Concentrate first on walking so that it is as smooth as possible. When this is achieved, try it as a three-legged race.

iv. Standing next to a partner, lean the inside shoulders together and, having established a balance, push the feet out as far as they can go to each side so that only the partner’s shoulders are keeping the pairs upright. First walk until a smooth action is achieved, concentrating on extending the balance to its furthest degree. Then try a race like this with the whole group.

A variation is to work in fours, all in line, again using the shoulders to lean in against, all walking with the feet as far out from the body as possible.

The emphasis with Boal is always on ‘oppression’, whether it is physical or mental. Even in the physical exercises he promotes, the attitude is that of a problem or an obstruction which is overcome. It is the winning through - the ‘overcoming’ - that brings a sense of liberation and of joy in achievement.

c. With this view in mind - that of obstacles or obstructions to be overcome - try the following;

Stand the group in a circle and ask everyone to draw a circle in the air with the right hand. Easy. Then ask them to write a cross in the air with the left hand. Again, easy. Now put the two together. Few, if any, will achieve it. Yet the only obstacle is the brain, which causes the blockage in this case. With practice, says Boal, this can be overcome.

There are a number of variations of this idea to try, once again tackling the idea through walking. Try the following sequence:

i. walking jaggedly - using the whole body to prescribe jagged movement

ii. walking smoothly, with rounded movements of the whole body
iii. walking with the top half of the body making jagged movements, the bottom half rounded ones
iv. walking with the top half of the body making rounded movements and the bottom jagged ones
v. Walk with one side of the body jagged, the other rounded
vi. Swap sides
vii. walk with less effort than is needed, so that every step is a burden
viii. Walk with more effort than is needed. Once again, this will soon prove exhausting
ix. try to find the middle way - maximum control and efficacy of the body

By thinking of something as normal and habitual as walking in this way - through many of the exercises above - the idea is to release a more natural and harmonious way of walking in every individual and to conquer the oppressions put on the body by our own habits and life-styles.

d. A final sequence of movements I will include in this section at this point, because it seems to me to stand as a good metaphor for the whole attitude of Boal to oppression. In this case the oppression is gravity. The earth's gravity seeks to pull us down and it is our daily task to overcome gravity and remain upright. This exercise shows us what an enormous feat this is.

Pick up from the last exercise at the point where the group are walking with less effort than is needed and then with more effort. The 'more effort' causes a feeling of strain and exhaustion which results in the slump of 'too little effort'. During the less effort periods of time, talk to the students about gravity pulling them down - keep going with this, so that they feel more and more tired and pulled. The 'more effort' moments will gradually become shorter as the 'too little effort' moments prolong. Gravity is winning. This needs to go on for quite some time, until the students start to droop towards the floor. Their spirits will droop too, and that is normal.

Make clear that they must keep struggling against gravity - but that gravity is clearly winning. Their movements should start to drop towards the floor - ending up with crawling, even slithering on the belly, until at last they can do no more. They lie absolutely immobile, exhausted. Gravity has won. And it is still pulling them. Instruct them to feel the pull all along their bodies, seeking to draw them right through the floor. Dwell on individual parts of the body to help them identify the weight of each part.

The exercise moves on to the struggle of the individual against gravity. This time the focus is on the 'more' effort rather than the 'too little'. Gradually bits of the body - a finger, a hand, a foot - struggle to rise. Taking plenty of time and using the same pattern of 'too little' followed by 'too much', instruct the students to begin to struggle up. Though the patterning is the same the emphasis is this time on the 'too much' effort rather than the 'too little'.

Eventually, falling down, staggering and struggling up again, the students should achieve standing on their own two feet once more. This will not have the desired effect unless the whole of the previous sequence has emphasised the struggle and the effort needed. They then begin to walk, looking straight ahead. Then their walks should carry on, this time with them looking upwards at the ceiling. They try to reach for the ceiling - to jump higher and higher; then to accompany the jumps with shouts; finally to run freely, jumping, reaching for the ceiling and shouting with exultation each time they jump.

The point needs to be made at the end that, though gravity is a powerful force, seeking to pull us down, every person has an even more powerful force within them that can
vanquish gravity. Though the students will be tired at the end of this sequence, they should also feel quite euphoric.

*Note that in ‘Games for Actors and Non-Actors’ translated by Adrian Jackson, published by Routledge, Boal runs the last two exercises together. That is, the whole sequence starts with the jagged walks and rounded walks and finishes with the conquering of gravity. For explanatory purposes, I have separated the two.

2. SENSORY EXERCISES - JUST AS WE NEED TO BE MORE AWARE OF THE PHYSICAL BODY, SO WE SHOULD SEEK TO AWaken THE FULL POTENTIAL OF THE SENSES

a. A good opener for this is the following game, which Boal calls the Peruvian Ball Game but which may be familiar to many under other names. It awakens the senses of sight and hearing nicely, and the intense concentration it needs enhances that kind of ‘extra’ sense of group awareness, so important in drama.

Each person needs to start in their own space and invent a rhythm for playing with an imaginary ball. The rhythm, which is expressed through sound, should accompany the movement of the ball, e.g. ‘bam-bam-bam-bam-whee’ might accompany the rhythm of two long bounces sandwiching two short bounces, followed by the ‘ball’ being thrown up into the air. Everyone needs to come up with their own sequence of sounds and movements.

Then the group move into pairs. Each pair continues to play with his own ball, whilst also watching and listening to their partners. At a signal from the Joker, the pairs swap ‘balls’, adopting the moves and sounds of their partner. They then begin to move around the room, continuously playing with their new sounds and moves.

At another signal, they pair up with another member of the group, playing with their new ball whilst observing their partner’s. They swap on the given signal and move around the room. This should happen three times in all.

After the third time, and without stopping playing with whatever ‘ball’ they have now adopted, they are instructed to find their original ‘ball.’ They move freely round the room, listening and observing, but never stopping playing. When they find their original ball, they tap that person on the shoulder and that person goes out and stands at the edge of the room, from where he will continue to scan the room searching for his own original ball. Note that the person who has tapped him and found his original ball needs to go on playing still, until he is in turn tapped on the shoulder.

Play this as long as it sustains interest and concentration - but not to the bitter end. Like Chinese Whispers, many changes may have occurred to the original ‘balls’, which might by now be unrecognisable to their first owners.

b. Blind line, Sighted line.

Two equal lines of students face each other across a narrow space. One side has their eyes closed, the others are sighted. The sighted line makes a pose. When done, each member of the blind line steps forward and feels his partner, exploring the pose. He then steps back and creates the pose himself. When all blind-liners are back and posing, ask them to open their eyes and compare their poses with the originals.

c. Magnet - Positive and Negative.

The whole group mills around the room for this exercise, eyes closed. The movement must be slow and cautious, elbows tucked in. Boal suggests
arms crossed across the front and elbows covered with hands. I would endorse this because it has the added advantage of preventing the hands being used for feeling the way. The Joker tells them they are all negative magnets - every time they sense or bump into another person they are repelled by them and move away.

After a time, the Joker tells them the magnets are now positive. Every time another person is found, they stick together by whatever parts of the body touch. They must then continue moving around, stuck together. Often this turns into great clumps of people moving together.

Eventually the Joker calls ‘Stop.’ The magnets unstick. Each person must then find a face close to them and explore it delicately with their fingertips. Only faces, heads and necks may be touched in this way. It should be a delightful experience - not intrusive. As they are touching, they are instructed to build up a mental image of that person in their mind - using the touch to explore the face as if it were an entirely new sculpture or work of art rather than trying to guess who the individual is. In this way, the known image of a member of the group ought not to impose itself on the voyage of discovery that this exercise is. It is similar to when you suddenly see someone you know really well in a new light.

Finish by opening eyes and comparing the image in the head with the real face. It should help students to see each other in a different way.

The completion of this exercise must be treated with delicacy and respect.

Many of Boal’s exercises, including the ones above, demand a great deal of trust and respect for each other. This is built in to any acting group, of course, who need to trust each other in order to work harmoniously together. But it is a particular feature of Boal’s work, without which the more complex aims of Forum Theatre cannot be achieved. Respect for people is ingrained into every exercise and the way Boal writes about many of his exercises shows even more than that - a genuine love and caring. Often he talks about sensitive exercises as ‘beautiful’ and he seems to mean: the inner beauty hidden inside people, which is often unveiled through the exercises. That is what the last exercise in the above examples is really about.
3. MEMORY, EMOTION AND IMAGINATION. THE OTHER THREE AREAS USED BOTH IN ACTORS’ TRAINING AND IN TRAINING WITH THE SOON-TO-BE SPECT-ACTORS AT A FORUM SESSION

a. The group sit in their own spaces on chairs set around the room. The Joker instructs them to remember every detail of their morning routine as done that day. Though they stay sitting on the chairs, they should experience the memories in such detail that their bodies partially re-enact the experiences. That is, if walking is involved, their feet should move on the floor, if eating, their tongues and lips move - they should show by their facial expressions the tastes and so on, involved; if a shower was taken, shoulders, body movements on the chair, should react to the reliving of the experience in the memory.

b. Now, in pairs, one person relives a memory and the other acts as ‘co-pilot.’ The co-pilot’s task is firstly to prompt his partner into remembering further and more specific details about his chosen memory - e.g. details of colour, size, smell. The reason for this is that the co-pilot is trying to experience the memory and make it his own, as an actor has to when taking on a role. The co-pilot must genuinely feel, smell, taste, whatever his partner is relating and if he cannot, he must prompt further information out of him until he can.

c. Once this exercise is achieved, it is taken further into the realms of the imagination. The memory is repeated and relived, but where appropriate, the co-pilot now feeds in other characters and incidents which must be taken on board by both, and experienced as if they really occurred. The gathering of information and detail is now a two-way process: both must seek to give reality by adding detail to the imaginary person or object.

If desired, this memory plus imaginative detail can be acted out by the pair - either with one becoming all the other characters or by enlisting other members of the group - providing of course that these are given sufficient detail to act appropriately.

This series of exercises can also be used as a feed-in to Image Theatre, which begins with a recognition of the Masks and Rituals we use in everyday life. I shall refer back to it in the relevant section.
4. TRUST EXERCISES - TRUST AND RESPECT FOR OTHERS IS A MAJOR FEATURE OF BOAL'S WORK, WITHOUT WHICH THE LARGER AIMS OF, FOR EXAMPLE, FORUM THEATRE CANNOT BE ACHIEVED

As is implied by the exercises in sensory awareness, trust is an important feature of Boal's work. This trust has to be achieved very quickly, since much of Boal's work is with groups of relative strangers with whom he is seeking a solution for whatever problems they want to tackle. Before proceeding to Image Theatre or Forum Theatre solutions, the group must learn to know each other, trust each other and be prepared to listen or support the less confident members.

Every drama teacher is aware of trust exercises and probably knows a large number. Remember, too that inter-active games of all kinds also do a lot for achieving group co-operation, which is the basis for trust.

I do not propose to list a great many games ad trust exercises here - there is not time within the parameters of this book - but mainly to point out that Boal's own books are crammed full of games - many of them familiar [Grandmother's Footsteps, Musical Chairs, British Bulldog, Stick in the Mud and Cat and Mouse being some examples] as well as trust exercises, both familiar and unfamiliar.

I propose just to give three examples of trust exercises that may be less familiar. Note that Boal himself does not make a separate section in his books entitled 'Trust'. In itself, this is significant. Trust work is scattered throughout - surfacing in every area of his preparation work. It is an integral factor.

a. Working in pairs, and without talking, try to find as many ways as possible of leaning against each other and achieving balance. Instead of using words, participants 'suggest' changes of movement by moving the appropriate muscles; the partner then goes along with it or 'suggests' another way. There is never any co-ercion. Neither must dominate - because that would be a form of oppression.

   Now try the same thing in groups of four.

b. This next exercise is meant as a preparation for Forum Theatre. This is because it helps participants understand that 'playing' is not about winning.

   Standing either side of a line [if there are none on the floor of your workspace, use pieces of rope or bamboo canes to define a line] partners face each other and grip each others’ shoulders. They then begin to push with all their strength BUT as soon as one senses the other is weakening he eases off. If one's strength is greater than the other and he knows he could push his partner over the line with ease, he must still prevent himself from doing this. No one should be pushed over the line.

   Move on to using other parts of the body:
   back to back
   side-on shoulder to shoulder
   bottom to bottom
   palms of both hands to partner’s palms
In all the above, the principal remains the same. The balance must be achieved of matching forces so that they are equal. This requires a blend of ‘listening’ - being in tune with a partner - and effort - using strength to create a force that equals the opposition.

The same principle is true in Forum Theatre, where the oppressed seeks to equal the opposition of the oppressor and cancel it out or defuse it - not to ‘beat’ the oppressor - which would simply perpetuate the system by making someone else oppressed.

c. Sea Waves.

The group are in fours, calling themselves A, B, C and D. They should make sure that they are with people of approximately the same height. A and B stand back to back. A moves his buttocks into the small of B’s back. [Note - a common mistake - NOT bottom pushed against bottom, which will not work.] B leans over towards the floor and lifts A, balancing him on his back. C and D help this to be achieved by supporting on either side. Once A is safely held there, B undulates his body to create a sensation of rippling movements for A. All take turns to be lifter, lifted or supporters.
5. ONE OR TWO EXAMPLES OF OTHER TYPES OF THEATRE USED FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

Try one of the following ideas to get a further handle on other types of theatre projects undertaken by Boal in his own country for social educational purposes. These I have adapted as far as possible for use within our own society. Page 37 of the Theories shows some of the original uses of these.

a. Photo-Romance.

For this, I have directly transcribed the words from a section of a cartoon-style love magazine, putting it into a rough play-form.

MARY narrating
I recalled the first time I set eyes on Paul Dane at the drama school I was attending... [Reliving the scene.] Who’s that talking with the principal? He’s attractive in a ruthless sort of way.
FAY
He is ruthless, Mary, my girl.
DAWN
He leaves a trail of broken and bleeding hearts wherever he goes. Not that we would get a look in. He goes for the big, glamorous stars.
FAY
And being the top agent in the country, he has his pick of them. ’Tis said he has blood on his hands.
MARY
Oh, come on. You’ve got to be kidding. [Narrating.] I should have known better than to listen, but gossip and rumour are like food and drink in the showbiz world! I lapped it up...
FAY
He was penniless when he married his first wife. She died in mysterious circumstances - on a skiing holiday.
DAWN
That’s how he came into the money to start his agency.
MARY
You mean he murdered her?
DAWN
It was never proved of course.
FAY
But the rumours don’t seem to have made him less attractive. Girls fall over themselves to go out with him.
MARY narrating
The wild stupid gossip sank in. I was young and naive - quite new to the world of tinsel and high drama. A year later, after my drama school production...
PAUL
I’m Paul Dane. I was impressed by your performance, young lady. I’d like to sign you up.
MARY
Am I supposed to be over-whelmed? I intend to act my way to the top, thanks. Get
lost!
JANE
Are you out of your mind? That was Paul Dane!
MARY
I know what I'm doing.
JANE
If Paul Dane's interested in you it's because of your talent. If you've any sense, you'll phone and apologise.
MARY to herself
Jane's right. Why did I do that? [Narrating.] But it was too late. I couldn't pick up that phone. I joined the audition queues. [Thinks aloud.] I know I'm good but how do I show it in three minutes? And against this lot? [Narrating.] At that time, I had no idea that Paul Dane had an interest in that particular production...but he was there and after the audition he phoned me up.
PAUL on the phone
The director wants you for the lead, Miss Grant.
MARY
The lead! But...
PAUL
Don't sound so surprised! That Desdemona of yours was impressive.
MARY narrating
From that moment I seemed to be caught in a whirlwind. What breaks I had from rehearsals were taken up with trips to a top beauty salon.
PAUL to the Salon Manager
Try to do something with that hair. It can't be as straw-like as it looks.
MARY to herself
Who does he think he is? I hate him! [Narrating.] But deep down I knew I was already hopelessly in love. After the salon had finished he looked at me approvingly.
PAUL
That's more like it. I knew there was a Cinderella somewhere inside that pumpkin! How about dinner tonight?
MARY
Sorry, I've lines to study. [Narrating.] But there was no stopping him. A week later...
PAUL
Running away again? What's the excuse this time?
MARY
I don't need an excuse to say No Thanks, Mr Dane.
PAUL
What's eating you? I'm not buying anything but dinner, young lady!
MARY
Okay. Since you'll be able to charge the dinner to expenses, I accept. [Narrating.] To this day I don't know what made me do it. But it was an evening I shall never forget...
PAUL
I don't just see you as an investment. I've seen the magic in you since that production at your drama school.
MARY
Stop right there, Fairy Godfather! This pumpkin has no intention of becoming just another conquest on a long list of them. [Narrating.] But a little later, on the dance floor, Paul kissed me... I tore myself away from him, my pulse racing. It may have been the champagne but I don't think so. [To him.] How dare you, Mr Bluebeard Dane. [She slaps him. Narrating.] I rushed out of the restaurant in a light-headed confusion of emotions. [Thinking aloud.] He'll probably sack me for that, but who cares? [Narrating.] But it wasn't the end of my job. I went on to get rave reviews which led to a flood of offers. Paul stayed tactfully out of my way... then, one lunchtime, at the TV Centre canteen I bumped into him, carrying my lunchtray. When he saw who it was he asked me out to dinner, and more dinners after that. Somewhere in that period without seeing him, I'd relaxed. Things went well...
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PAUL
You’re a lot easier to get along with. I almost miss that spitting wildcat. Just what was eating you in those days?
MARY
I don’t know. Maybe your reputation as a lady-killer in every sense of the word.
PAUL his face twisting with rage
What does that mean? [He grabs her shoulders.]
MARY
You’re hurting me. It... it’s just some stupid rumour that was going around drama school.
PAUL turning away. Softly
So that vicious gossip about my first marriage is still doing the rounds, is it? I loved her. I wasn’t interested in her money... seeing that snow fall away beneath her skis - watching her fall ... it’s a memory I’ll have to live with for the rest of my life.
MARY
Paul, don’t ...
PAUL
Yes, I’ve used a string of empty-headed painted dolls in an effort to forget, and so far it’s worked. If that turns you off, you’d better go now. [He takes Mary passionately in his arms.] But by heaven, Mary, I pray you don’t. I can say ‘I love you’ again - and mean it.
MARY
His next tender kiss was the prelude to a wonderful courtship and engagement. Six months later... [To Paul] I’m giving up the theatre when we marry, Paul. I’m going to be your wife and nothing else.

i. Having read this piece of script, read it again, acting it out as far as possible.

ii. Analyse the script exposing:

- the differences between real life and the events of the script
- the social stereotypes and any other opinions and acceptance of the status quo being fed to the masses through the story

Does this make the students feel any differently towards this type of literature? Can they try the same sort of analysis of an episode of a familiar TV soap opera? This is perhaps something that could be set for a homework and may prove interesting. It will at least encourage students to look at things in a different and more critical way.

b. Analytical Theatre.

Take a simple story line: a thief steals some items from a large store. He is seen and apprehended by the store detective.

Decide on all the possible social permutations of the story: the thief could be homeless, working-class and desperate; could be all of these plus a father or mother too; could be upperclass, etc. The store detective could be ...

Allocate a symbol to each category, e.g. a tophat for upperclass. Remember the symbols are not realistic - a store detective would not wear a tophat - they are just symbols that stand for a class or social condition.

Using the symbols, play the scene with as many of the permutations as you have found.

Discuss the different reactions to the scene. For instance, when the thief is perceived as a family man, is his ‘crime’ more acceptable?

The point of analytical theatre, remember, is to propose the theory that most
human actions are a result of social pressures rather than human psychology.

c. Invisible Theatre.

This must be planned within the group and carried out as a kind of ‘field-exercise.’

Decide on a suitable subject which the group want to bring to people’s attention, e.g. respect for women. A scene would then have to be planned to take place in public, such as the school playground. Perhaps one or two male actors call a female actor names - ‘slapper’ and so on. They must make sure they are heard. She responds feistily and noisily and then starts to enlist others around, who will be attracted by the noise. One or two more ‘actors’ may need to be planted nearby to help stimulate discussion/ opinion. The action must lead to as much debate as possible.

Don’t forget the point of Invisible Theatre is that the spect-actors will never know that the scene was set-up.

It may be advisable to have one or two members of staff standing by who are in the know - but sworn to secrecy!

Discussion after this event is important. Do they feel that anyone of the unwitting spect-actors have been changed in any way - or at least will be more thoughtful about the subject in question?

Though there are more Boalian types of theatre, I feel that the above three examples are enough to be going on with. You will probably only have time to try out one of the above in any case. Choice of which one should be up to the group, before concentrating on the main ideas - Image Theatre and Forum Theatre.
6. PREPARATION WORK FOR IMAGE THEATRE.

Boal never expects a group of spect-actors to go cold into Forum Theatre. Usually they go through the Image Theatre process first, which allows a physical rather than a vocal response - something many people find easier. I include examples of some of the type of lead-in exercises to Image Theatre that would also be done.

a. The Mirrors Sequence.

In this sequence, the Joker announces and talks through each change before it occurs, then gives a signal such as a clap for the change to happen. This is to keep the flow going. There should be no break between the sections.

There should be absolutely no talking in this sequence. All communication is through eyes and visual or physical signals. Eye contact with partners is an imperative.

i. The group stand in two equal lines facing each other across a reasonably wide space. One side starts off as the leaders of the movements [Boal calls them the ‘subjects’] and the opposite side start off as the mirrors [the ‘images’]. The pairs should work together using slow, easy-to-follow movements. It should be impossible for an observer to tell who is leading and who is following.

ii. Without there being a pause, the Joker asks the sides to swap on a given signal. There should be no perceptible break in the movements for this change-over. The whole thing should look, in fact, as if nothing has changed - all are still working harmoniously together.

iii. The Joker now announces that, from the signal, neither side is the leader. Instead either one of the partners can lead at any time. Once again, there is no break in the action. The movements should flow easily on.

The skill in this development of the idea is, like the ‘no one should win’ trust exercise in the last section, no one should impose their will on their partner. If one starts to lead, he should remain totally concentrated on his partner to detect any inclination in him to take over the leadership. The exercise develops concentration and sensitivity in equal measures.

iv. On the Joker’s signal, the two lines join hands, but continue mirroring their opposite partners. Now, though, there will be constraints from both sides - but these must be worked with, not seen as restraints. The movements, continuing slow and easy, should remain unbroken, adapting to the changes imposed by the exercise becoming a group activity.

v. On the Joker’s signal, the lines drop hands and start to move into a grouping which is exactly mirrored by the other side. Care must be taken to remember that there is an imaginary mirror down the centre. Once again, no side is the leader of this action so maximum concentration and sensitivity to accept the movements of either group has to be achieved. They keep moving and adjusting the group image until...

vi. The Joker announces that on a signal the mirror will break into lots of separate mirrors scattered throughout the room. Without breaking the slow rhythm of the movements established, the group breaks off into pairs again and start to move, absolutely mirroring each other’s movements, around the room.

vii. The Joker will ask the pairs to find new partners three times during this sequence: the first change will be close, the second further away.
and the third right across the room. Movements, even when crossing the room, must remain slow and fluid - the movement should be what attracts someone to their new partner. Partnerships must last long enough to establish a real ‘dialogue’ of harmonious give-and-take between the couple before moving to the next one.

viii. With the last partner, the Joker announces that a particular rhythm of movements should be sought for and then enjoyed together. Providing they are still working absolutely together, this is where the continuous slow movement used to date can be altered at the whim of individual pairs.

ix. Finally, the Joker asks that the whole room should seek to unify - to all be moving in the same rhythm. Boal stresses that this is only an ‘attempt’ to unify, because, as always, nothing should be imposed. Sometimes, he says, the room will have rhythms that are still harmoniously in tune with the others, but acting as a counter-point.

Note that the above exercise series has been considerably reduced from its original.

b. The Modelling Sequence.

i. As in familiar sculptor/statue exercises, the group pair up. One acts as the statue, one as the sculptor. As in the previous mirror sequence, sculptors and statues stand in lines facing each other. The first exercise involves the sculptors moulding the bodies of their statues. They must stick to actually touching in order to communicate - not asking their statues to copy moves and definitely not speaking. The idea is not to aim for a finished image but rather, as in the previous series, to establish a dialogue of communication between sculptor and statue.

ii. The Joker lets the first exercise run for as long as he feels necessary, then moves it on, instructing the sculptors to step away from their statues, still maintaining a line with the other sculptors. They continue to mould their statues by using their hands in the same kind of movements they were using when touching. The statues must respond as if they felt the hands on them still.

There are a number of dangers here which must be avoided - talking, demonstrating with bodies, moving back to the statue again. Note, too, that the statues must execute only the movements specified for them - they must not think for themselves. For example, if a sculptor has executed a movement without thought which would cause the statue to lose balance and fall - then that must be what the statue does. Sculptors can then ‘lift’ them up again with an appropriate gesture and rethink their previous move to prevent the statue over-balancing. This teaches responsibility to the sculptors who must take care to be always watchful that a movement will not cause a problem.

iii. On a signal from the Joker, the sculptors now move around the room, still modelling their sculptures. The sculptures cannot move unless ‘moulded’, so sculptors need to make sure they keep moving always within their statues’ vision. Statues can now be made to move, a step at a time - backwards, forwards - or move their whole bodies up or down - once again, only by gesture communication from their sculptors.

iv. The sculptors now seek to move their statues into a single group sculpture which, without speaking, they should try to give a meaning to.

v. The final section of this sequence of exercises involves the first break in the fluidity of the communication between sculptors and statues. Now the class divides into groups of about four or five. One person in each group becomes the sculptor, the moulding of the group being as done
previously - from a distance, not by touch [and not by speech.] The sculptor moulds a picture which puts over a view he has or an opinion - perhaps about an aspect of society. When satisfied with his picture he changes places with one of the statues in the tableau. This new sculptor alters the picture in some way, as if to make a comment on it - either to agree with the idea or create a debating point. He then swaps with another statue - and so on until everyone in the group has been a sculptor.

A example might be that the first sculptor makes a happy family picture, the second, changes the expression of one person to make it look as though there is an undercurrent of tension - and so on.

It is worth discussing afterwards the ‘dialogues’ that took place in this exercise - which is the first significant advance into Image Theatre.

The next ingredient of Image Theatre - the discovery of the kind of Masks and Rituals employed by people in their daily lives - is an essential element. There are many exercises towards understanding this area from which I have chosen and adapted only a few.

First, I would suggest that the group discuss the whole idea of ‘Masks’, around the following questions. We are, of course, talking about the imaginary masks people use to cope with different situations e.g. at work, with family, with friends, most people play different roles - wear different masks. A mask is simply the outward signs people employ to cope with a particular situation, to blend in with a group, and so on.

Discuss the following:

What kind of ‘masks’ do people ‘wear’ in different situations, in general? Think of as many as possible.

What kind of masks do individuals within the group feel that they employ? How do they think people perceive them?

What has ‘forced’ their own particular ‘masks’? e.g. is it a social ritual that has determined them?

a. In pairs, ask each person in the pair to imitate the mask they perceive in their partner. Care must be taken here - showing the same sensitivity to others as in all the previous work done on Boal. Perceived masks can be ones a close partner has seen employed in a particular situation, e.g. in the classroom - or the mask they perceive in their partner at that moment - which might be anxiety, defensiveness or whatever.

b. To help identify the normal social masks people use - father, son, boss, interviewer, etc. - each of which will have identifying features: gestures, expressions and so on - try the following:

A volunteer goes into the playing area and starts an action. A second volunteer, having understood the action, goes up and establishes without words - only using visible signs and the kind of realistic gestures used by whichever ‘mask’ he has adopted - a relationship with the first actor, appropriate to the actions of the first. e.g. if the first actor was miming sitting at a computer, the second could come in as his father - which would mean the first actor, recognising this, would respond as his son; or the second actor could come in as his employer or a work colleague, each possibility eliciting a different response from the first actor.

The scene can then be added to, bringing in other actor-volunteers - and can now progress into speech. Alternatively, the Joker could
decide when speech can be employed, ensuring that people are reading the signs of gesture, body language and facial expression, in order to identify the masks.

Try one or two of these, using different volunteers from the group.

c. Try a series of greetings between different characters, to identify the rituals involved:

- husband and wife
- boy and new girlfriend
- two boys
- two girls
- teacher and pupil
- employer and employee
- doctor and patient
- interviewer and interviewee
- two Heads of State
- two soldiers
- colonel and sergeant

See if as well as identifying the rituals through discussion and observation, the class can also identify the social masks used.

d. Now try swapping masks in one or two of the following scenarios:

- a teacher ticks off a pupil. At a clap from the teacher, the actors swap masks [swap roles.]
- a headteacher reprimands a young new teacher for being too informal and friendly with his class. Once again, swap roles on a signal.
- two homeless people, one old and one young, try to persuade the social services [represented by one or two people] to give them shelter over Christmas at a special shelter. There is only room for one. Swap roles so that everyone has at least played a social services person and a homeless person.
- at a school reunion there are two people who have done well in business and achieved some wealth and status; one housewife and mother and one who is on the dole. Explore their possible inter-action. Swap as many times as possible, to explore all the possible permutations of ‘masks’ and ‘rituals’.

Once again, make sure that the findings from all the above are thoroughly discussed. For instance, was there a difference of response between the two social services people in the third scenario? Why?

The students should have enough understanding of the idea of masks - which can be translated roughly as ‘facades adopted under certain social conditions’ - and rituals - which can be roughly translated as ‘modes of behaviour adopted under certain social pressures or conditions’ to proceed from this into Image Theatre.

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7. IMAGE THEATRE - IN ITSELF A PREPARATION FOR FORUM THEATRE

The proper way to begin on an ‘Image Theatre’ session is to start with a group discussion of problems experienced by members of the group themselves. The kind of things to surface will likely be family problems - divorce or similar; possibly male-female relationships; the way young people doing Saturday jobs get treated. Anything along these kind of lines would be suitable subjects. Remember, the subject-matter must be a strong one, one that is experienced by as many of the group as possible in some form or other and one which involves oppression in some way.

Having aired a number of subjects the group need to come to a consensus over which one they are going to tackle in the session. As in the Modelling session, one member of the group - probably the one who proposed the subject-matter - sculpts other members of the group into a still picture showing his experience of this particular form of oppression. When completed, other members of the group can step in and alter parts of the tableau - each alteration needs to be debated and agreed upon. Finally, everyone must agree that the tableau gives as true a representation of how things are in reality as possible.

Next the whole group together work towards creating ‘The Ideal Image’ - an image of how they wish things were. Once again, this ought to be accompanied by debate and a proper concensus of opinion, till all are satisfied.

Those who were scupted into the first tableau - the ‘Real Image’ - then try through freeze-frames to suggest ways of getting from the Real Image to the Ideal Image. They do this by offering ‘Images of Transition.’ The images of transition can all be debated or altered physically by all other members of the group. The idea is to find real possibilities of how to alter the state of the world that has caused this particular oppression.

A number of possible solutions may be found in this way. They should debate and decide which images of transition are the most likely to succeed and why.

The role of the teacher is to act, as always, as Joker - making sure that everyone is heard or is allowed to finish their proposition. For instance, if they are beginning to sculpt a possible image of transition and someone else in the group can see what he is proposing but does not agree with it, it may be necessary to gently prevent this person interrupting, asking them to wait their turn. Point out that an image can only be altered after proper discussion and agreement - otherwise the interruption can in itself be a form of oppression. Debate is healthy, and can be passionate but argument in any aggressive form is not.

If this subject has been successful, the most logical thing would be to take it forward into the Final Project: a Forum Theatre project. Otherwise, I have suggested a topic for this last piece of practical work.

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USING THE THEORIES: A FINAL GROUP PROJECT

Finish your work on Boal by creating a piece of Forum Theatre. For this, you could use the subject used previously in the Image Theatre session or choose another appropriate subject which the group feel would be an important one, experienced as oppressive by many people in the school. I propose, perhaps, bullying as a suitable subject, if nothing else presents itself.

The group have to come up with a piece of theatre - a scene - which shows bullying occurring. This must be as realistic as they can make it, drawing on as much personal experience from members of the group as possible. It is important that the would-be spect-actors will be able to recognise the situation; it should have real resonances for them.

Having rehearsed the scene itself, they will have to brainstorm all the possible scenarios that their spect-actors might come up with - improvising responses so that, as far as possible, they will not be thrown when it comes to the real thing. The characters the actors are concentrating on are the bullies - it is the spect-actors who will be playing the ones who are bullied, and they will be suggesting ways of preventing the bullies. The bullies are trying to find ways of keeping their victim as a victim, so will need to improvise as many 'what-if-the-victim-says/does-this?' situations as possible.

When they have rehearsed the scene and all the possible permutations they can envisage spect-actors might come up with, the group should invite a class with whom they can Forum the scene.

It is important that enough time is given to this exercise. The invited class cannot just be thrown into the final Forum Theatre suggestion. It would be best if some exercises are done with them first - perhaps some from the Preparations for Image Theatre session, followed, if possible, by an Image Theatre session on the subject. This gives a chance for the class to be both more relaxed and more aware of the physical and mental 'tools' they have at their disposal.

When it comes to the Forum Theatre part of the session, the rules must be carefully described to the class by the Joker - who could be the teacher, or a member of the group. The rules are described on Page 36.

Then the play is performed once through. After the scene is finished, it is performed again - perhaps slightly speeded-up - and the game can begin. This second-time through, a spect-actor can call 'Stop' and step in to the role of the victim in the scene, from which he tries to change the outcome whilst the 'bullies' seek to keep the ending of the scene as it was. This interrupting of the scene can happen as many times as there is time for, making sure that at the end of the session, before the class is sent away, time is given to discuss their reactions. Have the solutions the spect-actors have come up with made them feel more empowered - less oppressed?

Actually running a Forum Theatre session of their own will teach the group many things about the reasons for Boal’s theories and also about the particular skills required of actors working with his theories, all of which will have had to be used for the above exercise.
PETER BROOK: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Of all the practitioners to study, Brook is the hardest to define. This is because he himself believes that to be recognised for a particular style, to be tied down to a particular system leads to the practitioner becoming ultimately boring - in fact, joining the ranks of Deadly Theatre.

So, what is he about? Mainly, he is about an attempt to understand what theatre is and, perhaps even more, why it is. He sets about defining, through personal exploration, different styles of theatre practice and the beliefs of different cultures. By literally putting the whole world of theatre expression under his own personal microscope, he seeks to define the essence of theatre, its basic ingredients.

His life’s work has encompassed a study of the basics of the art of acting, using actors from a variety of different cultures and traditions, to pool the ideas and discover what acting is all about. He also undertakes a study of audiences and the unique relationship between actors and audience which can go so badly wrong - creating Deadly Theatre - but which can create, at best, something truly magical. Particularly he wishes to recreate the density of experience found in Elizabethan theatre, which, though he has literally and figuratively roamed the world to study other theatre traditions, remains to his mind the optimum blend of ‘Holy’ and ‘Rough’ Theatre - always alive and full of startling images.

The only way of studying his thought, to my mind, is to recreate as much of his personal journey as is feasible - bearing in mind that his conclusions have formed over a lifetime and, more importantly, are still forming. Students can test certain of his theories and understand the conclusions he comes to by trying out some of the exercises he tested out with his actors.

That is the way I have approached the following work - a quick gallop [unfortunately, because of time constraints] through Brook’s own experiments, first of all with other twentieth century theatre practitioners, including all - except Boal - of those covered in this series, followed by his investigations of the theatre forms of other cultures, present and past.

From his findings, a kind of style does emerge - as it does from all of the practitioners in this series. Possibly, Brook would hate the fact that there are certain features of stylistic approach which remain identifiable but, in the end, even freedom and open-mindedness becomes a stylistic feature. His insistence on unlearning anything pre-conceived, on approaching every project with a child-like innocence and without planning, on creating a space where actors can discover both themselves and the core ideas of the play and their character, becomes a style in its own right - even if the results will differ wildly, because the chosen play-sources are so different.
PETER BROOK [1925 - ] : CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Please note that the following does not attempt to be a full list of Brook’s achievements. It concentrates instead on pivotal moments in Brook’s career, from which we can see his theories forming.

1. Educated at Oxford University, Brook left Oxford dreaming of a life in film, which is where his first inclinations lay. Instead, however - though he has made films of some of his work - he quickly became known for his direction, mainly with the Birmingham Repertory Company, of Shakespeare and of opera. Acclaimed productions from the young director, which excited particular critical interest, were ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost’ in 1950, ‘Titus Andronicus’ in 1955 and ‘Measure for Measure’ in 1956. These early forays into Shakespeare culminated in his 1962 production of ‘King Lear’, which marked a turning-point in his career and in his attitude to theatre. All his early work showed a marked ‘cinematic’ interest in settings and atmosphere. ‘King Lear’ was the beginning of the new Brook, because he made many discoveries about theatre through his work on it, most notably conclusions about setting and its importance to the piece. For the first time in a production of his, Brook scrapped his setting ideas for the play during rehearsals and instead allowed a setting to grow naturally out of the process alongside the actors’ self-discoveries.

From his early work, we learn that:

   a. Brook’s love of cinema led him to consider the physical atmosphere’s created by the play first and foremost. For ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost’, he used the paintings of Watteau as inspiration. He was fascinated by the effect in Watteau’s work of a dark brooding figure against pretty, frothy backgrounds, which seemed to him to sum up the essence of the play and to give it an extra dimension. For ‘Measure for Measure’ he sought to bring the dark distorted imagery of Bruegel and Hieronymus Bosch to bear, to underline the seamy undercurrents of corruption in that play. Colours, costumes and setting all reflected the distortions of these artists. Work on ‘King Lear’ however showed Brook that to constrain the actors with too finite an idea of setting, costume and colour - too strong a director’s vision - actually inhibits the cast to such an extent that they cease to be truly inventive. Brook was beginning to discover that uniqueness which is theatre and which cinema does not possess because, as later he puts it himself, film offers flashes of the past; it is unreal - at one remove from the audience - whilst theatre is always in the present - is physically ‘there’ and so is, therefore, much more disturbing.

   b. Brook was drawn by those plays that are considered problematical - brave indeed for a young man to undertake. ‘Titus Andronicus’ was widely considered almost an impossibility, yet Brook managed, according to the delighted critics, to give it a unity and illumine it by extracting meanings previously unrealised. This ability to give a unique slant to a text, particularly in Shakespeare, is something that has been a constant in Brook’s work all his life. His much-imitated ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ was the first to use the idea of doubling fairies and the Court, posing the question for an audience, ‘What are we when we are asleep? Might we not, maybe, be freed from our physical selves to become something other? And might not our inner selves, thus exposed, illumine our conscious selves?’ [I was lucky enough to see this production at Stratford as a student and have never forgotten it.]

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c. Brook’s love of Shakespeare has been perhaps the most enduring aspect of his work. His intuitive understanding of a play’s themes and talent for exposing new angles and seams of richness is still a feature. The difference is that he blends these intuitions with those of the cast. No longer does he impose ideas on a production but, because of his own insights, he will put in the way of the actors such objects and images as his intuition has found, for them to use as they will. Direction of a play is thus, nowadays, a blend of the director’s vision - which is still needed to give the play a core - and the way the actors enrich that vision with their own discoveries, freely ‘playing’ within the bounds of that vision.

2. From the rehearsals of ‘King Lear’, Brook began to realise two main things: that an actor crossing an empty space is more charged with meaning than any background setting could be and that a truly creative actor, such as Paul Schofield who played the part of Lear, needs freedom to grow into the part. Central to this was Schofield’s refusal to play Lear as ‘old’ in any traditional sense. One can see this in the film version to this day. Schofield’s Lear is upright, strong-voiced and strides about the stage, the very essence of self-confident certainty in his own power and might. Eschewing aging make-up and other traditional trappings, the audience saw Lear’s age - especially as he aged in suffering - through their imaginations alone. They did not need physical aids, other than the power of the actor to convince with his own body. This realisation was an important one for Brook.

From these realisations we can see:

a. How it was that Brook became intrigued by the essence of theatre - an actor, an empty space, an audience. The rest of his career has been devoted to discovering as much as possible about the potentials of these three elements.

b. the seeds of his principles about allowing free rein to his actors to create their own characters - though within the confines of a central core of ideas. This ‘freedom within boundaries’ idea is central to theatre traditions of the Far East and was confirmed for Brook once he had started to work with international actors.

3. 1964 was an important year for Brook. This was the year of the Theatre of Cruelty season funded by the RSC, in which Brook experimented with the ideas of Artaud in particular. Many pieces of theatre were performed as part of this season, including Artaud’s own play ‘Spurt of Blood.’ The most notable production of the season was Brook’s production of ‘The Marat/Sade’*, which used a blend of theories from Artaud and from Brecht.

Also in this year, Brook began to conduct his first proper investigations into theatre. The Theatrical Research Group, run by him, used the LAMDA theatre in which to conduct their experiments, focusing on the basic essentials of ‘What is theatre?’ Working in strong white light with a piece of carpet for a performance area, Brook wanted to concentrate on what made up that unique concentrated energy which is built up, without the distractions of theatre trappings, between an actor and an audience.

From these events we can see:

a. How enormously eclectic Brook is. He draws - and still does - from all and any sources. Here we see him putting Artaud and Brecht together, on the face of it an unlikely combination - yet it worked. Brook wrote about the play: ‘Everything about the play is designed to crack the spectator on the jaw, then douse him with ice-cold water, then force him to assess intelligently what has happened to him, then give him a kick in the balls, then bring him back to his senses again... It's not exactly Brecht and it's not Shakespearian either, but it's very Elizabethan and very much of our times.’ The quote is enlightening - showing what it is about the piece that Brook found so fascinating. He was [and is] always looking for plays that will create a similar energy to that achieved

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by the Elizabethan theatre, a similar blend of soaring heights and passion [Holy Theatre] and crudity [Rough Theatre.]

* The full title of the ‘Marat/Sade’ by Peter Weiss is: 'The Persecution and Murder of Marat as performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Cherenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade.'

The play combined shocking violence, strange cries and noises from the inmates, the audience being threatened, startling make-up - much that is familiar from studies of Artaud about Total Theatre and Cruelty - with a singer/ narrator, placards, political slogans, and four singer/commentators who break up the flow of the action - all familiar features of Brechtian theatre. The blend of the two created this startling effect of being alternately horrified and forced to think, as Brook’s quote shows.

b. The beginnings of Brook’s ongoing researches to which he was to end up devoting all of his energy. The LAMDA experiments show the start of his reductions - theatre without excess, seemingly quite the opposite of what the Marat/Sade was all about. Yet, about his rehearsal for that play, Brook stated he had encouraged his actors to all sorts of excesses, in order to explore the idea of untrammelled madness as well as the excesses of Artaud, but that then much of the rehearsal period was devoted to trimming down these excesses to essential outlines, what he described as a ‘gradual withering away of excess.’ This method of rehearsal became normal for him and he still uses it. The idea is that the actors should first of all unleash everything they have - glory in an excess of ideas, allow themselves complete freedom to play with their characters. From this ‘excess’, a number of useful ideas will emerge and these form the basis for the eventual realisation of the character. All the other ideas will gradually fall away and be seen as unnecessary, quite naturally.

4. 1964 saw Brook’s production of ‘US’, which dealt with both the USA’s involvement in Vietnam and the British lack of awareness of it. It was an attempt to confront a British audience with truths about that war - the title ‘US’ stands for both ‘us, the British people’ and the United States - and as such was a one-off, a kind of ‘Happening’ that evolved out of fifteen weeks’ intense work. The work evolved out of the group themselves, who all brought stories they had found out about events in Vietnam, photographs and other items round which to evolve their work. The work had an intensity and vitality about it at the beginning, which, Brook reports, gradually fizzled out with constant repetition over a five-month performance period.

A significant feature of the devising process was Brook’s invitation to Grotowski to spend ten days working with the actors - with mixed results. Not all of the actors found Grotowski’s methods helpful, but Brook was fascinated by the man and his dedication.

This work helps us to understand:

a. Brook’s open-mindedness, his constant willingness to challenge himself and his confident expectation that others will want to be similarly challenged. Grotowski draws him because of their many similarities - not of style or subject-matter - but of dedication and research. Brook points out that no one since Stanislavski has so closely investigated the phenomenon of acting - a credit which can now apply to Brook himself. Grotowski’s ideas were probably too steeped in Catholic/ Polish roots to be truly applicable to British actors, but some of Grotowski’s ideas did spill into ‘US’ nonetheless: the self-immolation of the Buddhist monk reminds me of the kind of ‘sacrifice’ that Grotowski demanded of his actors; the huge uniformed model of a marine commando, which hung over the stage, a napalm shell in its belly - reminds me both of the huge brooding shapes advocated by Artaud and the symbols constructed out of pieces of rubbish into outsized religious icons in some of Grotowski’s work. The lack of setting and props were both an imperative, since the action of the finished piece moved

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from an English lawn to the steps of the Pentagon to a square in Saigon, for example, and an exploration of the ideas inherent in ‘Poor Theatre’ where limited items can be used again and again to represent anything at all and are made convincing by the way the actors use them. The ending of the play, which involved the ritual burning of a white butterfly is the kind of shocking symbol with which Grotowski’s work abounds.

b. The process out of which ‘US’ was formed was a furthering of Brook’s now usual ideas of free play with ideas and objects, to stimulate the actors’ creativity, and a newer significant realisation: that a group of actor’s must be a real collaboration and even more than this- a ‘community.’ It is this realisation that Brook carries forward into his research work in Paris.

5. 1970 was another significant year for Brook. In it, he directed ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, referred to above and also began the International Centre for Performance Research, based in Paris, where he has been working from ever since.

Both these events furthered Brook’s theories in the following ways:

a. It is worth mentioning that the Dream was a play in which he experimented with those ideas of his that were now beginning to crystallise: that the rehearsal space should be a kind of playground in which actors play, build up energy and spark off each other creatively, making a joyful, free atmosphere out of which a fizzing energy emerges enabling actors to foster their inner talents. In ‘The Dream’, his playground spilled over into the set itself - with its trapezes, its steel-wire forest, its spinning plates on sticks and its plastic red noses. The set was a place in which anything could happen - blank and white for the most part - it did not impose anything on either actors or audience. It became the space in which the actors’ creativity could be released and also a free space for the imagination of the audience to fill. The Dream also fulfilled Brook’s desire for a blend of Holy Theatre and Rough Theatre - something which he feels is built in to Shakespeare anyway, with his ability to switch from sublime verse and multi-layered thought, to crudity and direct audience address. Both of these extremes were capitalised on in the Dream: the extraordinary slow-motion beauty of the actors’ loose daytime robes, slipping into pools of bright colour on the floor and revealing the Immortals underneath against the crude sexual vulgarity of Bottom, carried shoulder-high, exultant and rampant, by a bevy of satyr-like fairies and lowered on top of Titania, penis first [represented by a fairy putting his arm, fist rounded, out between Bottom’s legs.] And the result - the blend - was literally magical and very very exciting. It was an extraordinary confirmation of Brook’s burgeoning theories about theatre and about Shakespearian theatre being the pinnacle - providing it is given life by exposing themes that make it relevant to today. These themes do not need to be political - though they can be, of course. Brook as ever is talking about the widest possible context - the relevance of appeal to people’s souls [Holy Theatre] as well as their capacity for laughter, satire and invective [Rough Theatre.] Shakespeare contains all this.

b. The formation of the International Centre for Performance Research, funded by a variety of international groups and foundations, gave Brook free rein to seek to understand the meaning of theatre with a view to revitalising what he saw as an industry facing extinction. Theatre was atrophying in Deadliness; it was all around. It was necessary, therefore, to pool together the special talents of a multitude of cultures and acting talents from many countries in order to give theatre a new impetus and re-light its spark. From now, Brook’s experiments will have more purpose.
of the different languages of the actors starts, of necessity, from physical expression.

‘Orghast at Persepolis’ 1971, used an invented language conceived by Ted Hughes and took place in the classical ruins of Persepolis in Iran. It was a celebration of ritual, seeking to get to the roots of our primitive, buried celebration of theatre. Artaud also proposes reviving theatre by going back to its roots in religion and ritual.

‘The Conference of Birds’ 1979 further sought to free the actors from the constraints of language by experimenting with the cries of birds. It too contained elements of ritual, based on a traditional folk-tale. Artaud’s admiration of the Balinese Theatre and its ritual language has some similarities to the actor’s physicalisation of this play.

Travels in Africa resulted in such plays as ‘The Ik’, in 1975, the story of a tribe who literally starved to death rather than leaving their traditional sacred grounds. Brook found that valuable lessons were learned from the African approach to theatre. The African actor, he says, has a way of combining ‘body, mind and soul’ so that they ‘speak as one.’ There is an innocence about both actors and audience - who have a similar response to that of children, a response that is much truer and realer because more immediate. Brook habitually invites audiences of children into the Paris Centre when working on a play, because he knows their response will be honest and they will see through anything dishonest about the play itself. Inviting audiences in at stages of rehearsal is valuable in another aspect too: it prevents the work becoming too narcissistic, too self-absorbed.

For the same reason, Brook worked with the National Theatre of the Deaf in Paris. This taught him, re-inforced by the stringent theatre traditions out of which many of his actors had sprung, the importance of the body as an instrument of communication.

More recent productions such as ‘The Mahabharata’ 1985 and ‘The Man Who …’ 1993, re-inforced many of the cultural lessons Brook had learned and were testaments to his beliefs about the nature of theatre. They combined ritual, story-telling, extraordinarily sensitive physical skills, a cross-cultural celebration of profound religious beliefs or, as in the case of ‘The Man Who…’ an investigation into life itself - the profound workings of the brain and how it affects our physical body. Throughout, he watched and noted audience reactions - his concerns have never wavered from his fascination with what is at the root of the theatrical experience, that magical something that occurs when actors and audience combine: actors ‘taking a spectator by the hand and setting out on an exploration together.’
BROOK: THE THEORIES

1. THE CATEGORIES OF THEATRE; DEADLY, HOLY, ROUGH AND IMMEDIATE.

i. DEADLY THEATRE is, in brief: all theatre that is driven by the needs of commercialism; all theatre that is contrived, stuck in a particular formula or set of theories; all theatre that is an imitation or repetition of a past piece, however inventive the original; all theatre that tries to follow a set of rules - e.g. the classics which some people will say can only be done in a certain way; all modern writing, that focuses too much either on the inner man [inward, obscure, introspective] or on the outer [superficial, meaningless] but rarely combines the two; all aspects of theatre which are taken for granted [there should be costumes, set, music ... or whatever ... because it has always been so - each thing should be challenged and questioned ... what is it there for?]; all things that, in short, are 'bad' - bad acting, bad designing, bad direction and bad audiences trained into the wrong sort of expectations by years of deadliness.

The one thing that is particularly depressing about 'Deadly Theatre', says Brook is that it is very much alive and well; to be deadly does not mean that it is dead. It is alive, but in the wrong way. The fact that it is struggling along, however, contains one element of hope: a theatre that is alive at all, however dull and deadly, is capable of resuscitation. It can be changed.

ii. HOLY THEATRE seeks to transcend ordinary life. It offers symbols and images that seek to make 'the invisible visible.' Brook’s work with Artaud’s ideas in the Cruelty season and his admiration of Grotowski come from his regard for this type of theatre which tries to give expression to man’s inner life, his soul. The problem, ultimately, with it is that its appeal is too limited. It does not speak to enough people. It is a theatre of rarified air, like a temple, and in the end, Brook believes, explores too narrow a spectrum of life. He finds it admirable in its dedication, in its purity, but it is, on its own, a kind of dead end.

iii. ROUGH THEATRE is basically popular theatre - any form of theatre that does not happen in a formal theatre building. Its raison d’etre is for fun - delight - and covers music-hall, circus and so on. Often, Brook says, it is the most vital theatrical form and has been the source of most of the renaissances in drama throughout history. Rough Theatre also covers political and satirical theatre, which appeals to the reason, to the capacity for laughter and mockery. Often, as with Brecht, it seeks to change society. Its main problem is that it too has limitations - the opposite limitations to that of Holy Theatre. The political theatre practitioner puts on material that is 'so down-to-earth that he forbids his material to fly.'

iv. IMMEDIATE THEATRE. This is a theatre where actors are, like mediums, being totally ‘in the moment’, translating feelings and impressions to an audience who are carried along ‘in the moment’ with them. This requires a type of actor such as those trained by Grotowski, who have worked through their particular blocks and are in touch with their own creativity, to the point where the slightest flicker from the audience or from something happening differently on the stage will cause a spontaneous adaption in him. For this to occur, for this kind of instant creativity to be at
the actor's fingertips at all times, requires complete relaxation of body and mind.

Does this type of theatre exist? Yes - at the time of Brook's writing about Immediate Theatre, it did exist but only in the realms of Holy Theatre, which Brook admired but found too narrow. The ideal would be to have this sort of responsive actor participating in a blend of Holy and Rough Theatres. Brook's experiment with the 'Marat/Sade' was an attempt at this and, since then, his research amongst the theatre traditions of the world has been part of the quest for the super-creative actor/medium.

2. WHAT ARE THE BASIC ESSENTIALS OF THEATRE?

This is Brook's starting point for his research quest. The quest started with trying to find out what is the least amount of anything - space, actors, movement, sound...etc. - required to keep audience attention. It also started out as a quest for the type of audience attention needed - and how to achieve that. This is the kind of work he was doing at the LAMDA Theatre, but it fed into the work he has devoted himself to since then, in Paris.

A. THE EMPTY SPACE

Theatre has no need of a particular building. Nor has it any need of any of the trappings of theatre: set, costumes, props, lighting. It can happen outdoors and be magical; it can happen in a bare room with a piece of carpet on the floor, round which sit the audience. An empty space is filled with potential; it is a place of possibilities in which anything can happen. The space is filled partly by the actors and the atmosphere they create and partly by the audience and the energy and attention with which they watch the event. On the whole, more of this energy is ignited by the need to use the imagination - to work with the actors to fill that space.

The principal of the empty space is the same principal which is employed particularly by the art of the Far East, which always leaves space for the spectator to fill with their own imaginations. A painter of a bird on a branch will produce just that - the focus of his attention - and feel no need to produce the tree to which the branch is attached, or the background of woods, fields or hills. The space left can be filled in in countless different ways, according to the individual onlooker, and the whole painting is given extra layers of meaning by this constant potential. Western Theatre tends to fill in the details and produces in consequence a lazy audience, unprepared to use their imaginations. Brook wants a theatrical event which is a fusion of actors and audience, both working creatively in their own ways to produce magic.

B. THE AUDIENCE

Brook has done many experiments with audiences. As stated above, the audience needs to be active - that is their whole attention needs to be actively engaged. It is the fusion of this attentiveness and the actor's art that produces that unique electrical magic that only the theatre can deliver. The end result can either be ecstatic applause or silence. Rough Theatre will produce the former, Holy Theatre the latter. Both are tributes and as important as each other.

Brook, in his attempts to create a fusion between Rough and Holy, often manipulates an audience between these two extremes, and he does it with remarkable success. The only pre-requisite is that the skill of the actors is such that audiences keep their attention and can be 'led by the hand' onto the roller-coaster, from where they can journey into laughter juxtaposed with the silence that comes with wonder.

C. THE ACTOR

I have already talked about the kind of actor that Brook aims for - the super-sensitive actor/medium - which he seeks to find by blending the best out of many different theatre traditions and training methods from around the world. Such actors rely more on their bodies for expression than their voices. Every emotion should be felt deep inside physically, send ripples out through the body which responds like a sensitive instrument to the stimulus and from there to the voice or vocal soundbox, which is merely another reactive part of the physical process.

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Brook’s starting point was once again - what is the minimum that is required to hold an audience’s attention? One actor walking across an empty space? This is momentarily interesting. One actor meets another actor? This is more interesting but has its limitations. A third actor is needed for real development to occur.

From the above, we can see that Brook has whittled down theatre to his own idea of the basics: an empty performance space, at least three actors and an audience who can be led by the hand through the actors’ skill into a story or a piece that alternates between taking them to the heights and shocking them or releasing them into laughter.

3. SHAKESPEARE - THE PERFECT BLEND OF HOLY AND ROUGH.

The one constant in Brook’s lifelong quest has been - and still is - Shakespeare. What is it about Shakespeare that Brook admires?

a. The blend of Holy and Rough that is integral to every one of his plays - sublime poetic heights, subtle philosophy and understanding of the world, juxta-posed with knockabout comedy which acts as an ironic counterpoint to the central themes of the play.

b. The audience appeal - something for everyone, a play or story that can work on many levels, which can create that hush which is ‘wonder’ and then puncture it with laughter. Shakespeare’s theatre is truly popular theatre and popular theatre has an energy which Brook feels much of theatre today has lost.

c. The empty space of the stage which does not rely on scenery but rather on the actor’s craft in creating the environment as well as the poet’s craft in appealing to the imagination of the audience.

d. Above all, Shakespeare has the ability to ‘make the invisible visible’. He performs the necessary task, which Brook realises that theatre audiences still need today as much as ever, of ‘feeding’ our inner selves, our souls, and thus enriching our lives. At the same time, by leavening the metaphysical with humour, he keeps our feet on the ground.

Brook himself has said that it is irritating that Shakespeare is still such a model of the perfect form of theatre for him but he does stress that the plays must not be made deadly by being approached too academically or by imposing a form on them. Rather, the plays should be approached in a modern context - not by ‘up-dating’ them, which would be dreadful - but by searching for and liberating those themes that are applicable to all men at any time. Shakespeare must be made modern by confronting the plays’ timeless themes.

4. ALL FORM IS DEADLY. BROOK’S REACTIONS TO THE WORK OF OTHER PRACTITIONERS.

More than any other practitioner, Brook has experimented with every theatre style that he has come across and thoroughly investigated the work of most of the great twentieth century practitioners. In the end, though, he rejects them all as a way to follow, since he is certain that to follow anything too rigidly ends in ‘deadliness.’

Of course, there are aspects of every practitioner that he admires and has even sought to emulate in his personal journey. Most importantly, the fact that Brook has made such a thorough trial of other practitioners’ work has given him the tools for freedom of choice. It is not necessary to follow any particular system but instead to look at the play and its needs with a knowledge of many systems at his fingertips - and choose those elements of any of them that will suit the particular play. And nowadays, the choice will not be a conscious one - he would not say ‘Ah, this play needs elements of..."
Stanislavski and Brecht plus a tinge of Artaud’s theory of so-and-so’ but just the fact that he has tried them all out has infused his thinking with an encyclopaedic knowledge which now inspires all of his work. By avoiding systems and forms, he has created a free style that is still very much his own - a tendency to the rituals of the East, to the folk-story-telling skills of Africa, with some of the symbolism of Artaud or Grotowski thrown in, the direct approach of Brecht and the spontaneity of action sought by Stanislavski and Meyerhold. All has fed in to create a Brookian style, which he may dislike but is there nonetheless.

So what does he admire and eschew about the practitioners and theatre styles he has investigated over the years?

a. Stanislavski he admires for his dedication and his search for truth but he believes that his basic thinking is wrong: a character cannot be ‘built’ because what is built by the actor will end as a strait-jacket for him, with no room to manoeuvre. Instead of ‘building a character’ - which implies that a character can be something that is finished rather than, as Brook believes, something that continues to grow - the actor needs to ‘unbuild’ himself, working to lose all his blocks so as to allow the character to ‘invade’ every pore of his being.

b. Brecht he admires for his popular appeal and the fact that he ‘shocks us into bringing the best of our reason into play.’ The Verfremdungseffekt [alienation/ distancing techniques; see the first section of this book for detail] constantly forces us, the audience, to adjust our view of the world, of society. These constant re-adjustments on the audience’s part are all to the good, they keep an audience alert. Better still about Brecht he likes the illusions he creates - like Shakespeare, he takes us back to an empty space, where a door can be a door to anywhere in the world and the surroundings are filled in by the audience’s imagination. A Brechtian play moves from place to place in total freedom, because it does not rely on scenery - yet, despite being carried along by the magic of these illusions, we are still always aware that we are in a theatre. Ultimately, though, despite the fact there is so much to admire in Brecht, he ties the actors and audience down to the real world too much - he does not allow ‘his material to fly.’

c. Artaud he finds fascinating for his inspirational way of writing, his opposition to the deadly theatre of his own time and his desire to revolutionise theatre. Like Artaud, Brook seeks to find a kind of universality of language which relies more on signals given off by the body than by speech alone. Brook’s Cruelty season - the Marat/ Sade [which mixed the ideas of Brecht and Artaud], ‘Orghast at Persepolis’ and ‘The Conference of Birds’ all explored theories of Artaud - to shock, to go back to religious beginnings, to find different forms of theatrical language, yet in the end Brook has two main and crucial criticisms of Artaud’s theories.

Firstly, he says that ‘Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed.’ He wonders if Artaud’s insistence on gut reactions, on bypassing the human intellect to create shock waves on the human psyche itself, might ultimately create ‘beasts’ of us all. One cannot deny the human mind.

Secondly, he proved for himself that shock wears off. After you’ve shocked an audience once, it quickly becomes used to it and in the end even the shocks can become ‘deadly.’ ‘Inertia is the greatest force we know,’ says Brook; the audience ‘starts willing and is assaulted into apathy.’

d. Grotowski was invited to work with the actors of ‘US.’ His main appeal for Brook remains his insistence on the ‘holiness’ of theatre; Grotowski’s actors, like monks, dedicated themselves totally to their craft and achieved extraordinary feats of physical and mental control. Brook, too, has a band of actors, many of whom have worked with him for many years, who are dedicated to the art of theatre. Like Grotowski, he believes in the importance of breaking down an actor’s ‘blocks’ and allowing the character to penetrate the actor once he is emptied of all, as a medium is filled by an invading spirit. This aspect of Grotowski’s work, Brook still follows.

Ultimately, though, Grotowski’s appeal to an audience is too limited. He was completely honest in what he did, totally sincere and truthful, but the aspects of life he explored are too narrow. The spirit might soar, but we need also to retain our awareness of the world - to have our feet on the ground.

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e. Co-operative theatre, the style used for ‘US’ which was written by all members of the group, is an exciting way to work but he admits is only as good as the individuals in the group and has the added problem of lacking the single vision, the focus, of a writer. Something is always needed to give the theatre piece unity.

Each of the above have given aspects of their work to Brook. He admires certain things about them all.

In addition to these he has taken the ideas of ritual from the different forms of folk theatre of India, Africa and the Far East. A ritual creates a special link between audience and actors; it draws them together in a shared experience which is healing to the spirit. It creates a magic circle around the performance space.

African Theatre also taught him the art of the storyteller. African actors are so natural in their movements that they do not seem to be acting at all - they create an intensity by the simplicity of their approach. They draw audiences in to them by this intensity and adapt easily and seamlessly to the differences that each new audience brings to a show. Their art is seemingly artless - and this Brook aspires to also.

5. WORKING ON A PLAY, THE BROOKIAN APPROACH.

Since there are no recipes, no systems, and freedom is essential, how does Brook approach working on a play?

First, the director needs to have a ‘formless hunch’ about the play. It is important that he does not give this hunch a more concrete form, because this would be to impose his ideas on it and might make a strait-jacket to inhibit creation.

This hunch will give him enough ideas to scatter the rehearsal space with the kind of stimuli that might encourage the actors to ‘play’ with the ideas inherent in the piece. The director’s job at this stage is to guide the actors through a series of free-playing games and improvisations, putting things in his way to aid his creativity.

Part of the essential preparation work will be to help the actors towards creating their character, which must be for the actor a ‘birth.’ The preparation for the character will be the actor demolishing his own self, to prepare the ground for the birth of the role. And once born, it must be recognised that the character will continue to grow and change. A character never is complete; it is a living thing which will change slightly with every different performance, according to the audience, the space and so on. Room must be given for it to continue to grow creatively because if a character should ever be considered ‘finished’, that is the moment it starts to wither and die.

For this reason, it is essential that the acting group is such a close ensemble that each are sensitive to each other at all times, both in rehearsal and performance. The slightest flicker of change in one member of the cast in performance will be picked up and will subtly alter the performance of the others, who need to accept each change and react accordingly. Thus the whole play is constantly in motion, altering and changing, in slight ripples, all the time. This is possible - and does happen - because of the close way that these actors work together, many of them having worked together for years.

After the free-play early period, the second stage of rehearsal is practical work on and around the text [or chosen story], the actors taking on the roles they will play. This work is approached without using any pre-conceived ideas, so as not to impede the actors’ individual creativity. Free-play is, therefore, still going on - but this time more specifically tied to the role and story-line of the piece.

The director’s role is half guide and facilitator, half decision maker. He is the one who has a sense of direction that will first sense the potentials within the play - those potentials that the actors explore and discover in their free play and free improvisation sessions - and then ties the whole thing together into a unity. It is he who will decide on the central image out of a welter of potential images released by the free-play sessions. From this early excess, the decision about which image to go with having been decided, the rest - the excess - is pared away until only clear outlines and unity are left.

Because this central image is discovered during the rehearsal process, it is

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important that no pre-conceived ideas of set, costume or, indeed, any of the design side of things, are made. The set and so on should evolve creatively along with the creation of the characters. Only when the central image is discovered and the excess material starts to be pared away can the design ideas begin to emerge.

It must not be thought, however, that the whole rehearsal period is as amorphous as this preparation period suggests. There follows, after the early freedom, a close analysis of the text [which might be a play text or a book like 'The Man Who ...' or a mass of legends like 'The Mahabarhata']. Here the actors' and director's brains, logic and reason are brought to play. An intellectual understanding of the piece is sought. Both the intuitive creative work and the analysis of language, themes and images suggested by these are then put into the melting-pot. Both feed into the final stage, which is rigorous and disciplined work towards the final product - always bearing in mind that there is nothing 'final' about that product!

The point of the detailed analysis is to help the actors realise that the play is a much greater thing than their own selves. It has themes, undercurrents, complexities; it has density. The director's job is then to help steer them through this, keeping to a central unity of thought and imagery, without getting in the way of their own creativity. With all the knowledge of the play and the creative ideas given free rein early on, the actor has the tools to empty himself and allow the play in its entirety to fill him. He becomes, as Brook puts it, a medium, through which the character - put together through equal parts of inspiration and understanding - can flow and come into being.

About three quarters of the way through the rehearsal period, Brook will take the play to an audience of school children - or invite the children in. This is because such an audience is both the most critical and the most honest. It is the testing-ground of all the ideas - will they work? Will something magical happen? What changes will be needed? If anything amorphous, meaningless, excessive is still there, this is the time that it will be cut out. The outside eye of the public is needed and what better critical eye than the innocent [innocent of theatrical pre-conceptions, that is] eyes of the young? This is another way of analysing the production, actors, audience and director feeding into the process.

The director throughout, says Brook, is both sincere and detached, part of the process and outside it, a difficult compromise. He must constantly change the stimuli for the actors, so that no one approach has time to become stale. Thus he 'rotates logic, explanation, improvisation, inspiration' and other methods as he sees fit, to keep the actors' creativity flowing freely. He must be always alert, always on his toes, and be prepared to hold back from imposing any more than 'hunches' until clear images start to emerge from the teamwork. Rehearsals must not be mere repetitions, even at late stages of the play's evolution, since repetition leads to 'deadliness.' Brook prefers the French word for rehearsal, which is 'representation'. This more nearly sums up his aims, since representation means literally making 'present', making things always new, constantly in the present, in the now.

6. SEEKING FOR THE 'MAGICAL' IN THEATRE: 'THE GOLDEN FISH.'
CONCLUSIONS ON 'WHY THEATRE AT ALL?'

The main aim for Brook in any theatre presentation is to 'net the golden fish', which means to come up with an image or a symbol that transforms life, that is unforgettable. These images have been found by such playwrights as Beckett - who gave us two tramps and a single tree and a woman half buried in the detritus of her life, both potent metaphors. Other powerful symbols that became, as Brook points out, part of the Twentieth Century consciousness - archetypes in their own right - are Brecht's old woman pulling a cart [Mother Courage], Arden's dancing seargent, Sartre's people

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trapped on a sofa in hell [Huis Clos]. These, and others, are all memorable images that transform our way of thinking about life. It is this sort of symbol that Brook too searches for. He wants to transform our thinking, translate life for us, make something so memorable that we will never forget it; this is to 'net the golden fish.'

In order to achieve this kind of magic in theatre, the ground must be prepared. Hence the work on creating an ensemble of actors who are so in tune with each other that the slightest ripple of reaction from one is picked up and reflected in all the others. Hence, too, the preparation of the audience for a ritual which puts them in a frame of mind for the revelation of wonders. Participating in a ritual, very much a feature of all Brook's more recent work, creates a sense of sharing between audience and actors and heightens the intensity - that special sort of electricity - which is part of the ongoing creative process. The disparate fragments of life which are the different individuals that make up an audience are brought together in the simple focusing of shared attention on a ceremony, such as the ritual lighting and blowing out of a candle, twice. It is an act, too, that crosses cultures - being understood by all cultures and religions. It brings people together - and that, too, is very much a part of what Brook is about. And because people are brought together and share in something, a healing takes place - the same kind of healing as was originally effected by participating in a shared religious ceremony - where people shed the complications of their lives outside the theatre and find a kind of innocence, regaining their childlike sense of wonder.

Brook sees himself now as part of a world tradition - not just a European one - and one that will continue beyond him. Just as the African storyteller slaps his bare palm on the ground to signify the end of his story, Brook has adopted many such simple touches from his investigation in world theatre traditions and his mingling of actors from different cultures into his performance group - for just as the slapping of the palm on the bare earth means the end of the story, it also is an invitation. The story is placed on the earth by the storyteller for another storyteller to pick up and carry on.

Brook's starting point was to ask 'Why theatre at all? What for? Is it an anachronism?.... Has the stage a place in our lives? What function can it have? What could it sense? What could it explore? What are its special properties?' And, after a lifetime's research and scientific investigation his response is a resounding affirmation of the role of theatre in our lives. There is a way to go, he acknowledges; people must be given a hunger for art and see it as necessary to life itself and to achieve this, deadliness must be overturned and living theatre put in its place with its ability to transform life through startling images and through a blend of the spiritual and the real. But it has and should have a place in our lives, because it is always in the present, because it shows life in an intense form, but above all because it can bring people together, in delight, in laughter, in the gasp of awe at wonders revealed, in a realisation of our shared humanity.
BROOK: THE THEORIES EXPLORED THROUGH PRACTICE

1. TRYING TO DISCOVER THE BASIC ESSENTIALS OF ACTION AND AUDIENCE ATTENTION. EARLY EXPERIMENTS.

The easiest way to approach Brook is to replicate, as far as possible in a very limited time, the journey he himself took. It is out of this early experimentation that his theories began to emerge. Hopefully, students can begin to see for themselves, through these exercises, some of the conclusions Brook came to.

The following are exercises such as Brook was trying out at LAMDA seeking to identify the bases of theatre. Through the following exercises, Brook was asking:

- Can one identify the impulse to action?
- What is the minimum movement required to convey something to an audience?
- What is the minimum sound required to convey something to an audience?
- What is the minimum required to retain an audience’s interest?
- How far can one stretch the audience attention span?

a. Ask for a volunteer to sit on the stage or playing area completely still, emptied of thought as far as possible.
   
   Then ask for a second volunteer to choose an emotional state and sit completely still once more, focusing inwardly on that emotional state.

   Was there any difference from the observers’ point of view? Did the attention of the actor on his inner state grab the attention of the audience? Or were both still actors equally unreadable ..., and ultimately boring to watch?

b. Now ask a number of volunteers, one at a time, to sit upon the stage having thought of an emotional state on which to focus. This time, they can choose one part of the body to help communicate that emotional state. It is probably best if the teacher suggests some parts of the body for this; vary ‘large ideas’ such as the head with very small ones - such as a single finger.

   Bearing in mind that Brook’s acting is about the subtlest and smallest of indicators - ripples in the body, which emerge from the inner state - how successfully could those given such as the finger communicate?

c. Try this same exercise, but this time the solo actors can choose a sound with which to communicate their state. It may be tapping with fingernails, whistling, audible breaths - gasps, sighs - or cries. They may not project their chosen sound for the whole time they are in the playing space - they are only allowed to produce their sound for a second or two. In other words - they focus in silence and stillness on their inner state, allowing, perhaps, one cry.
to break the silence.

d. Brook’s actors have freedom of choice - that is perhaps the most important thing about his methods. They must not have ideas imposed on them which might inhibit their creative impulses. The previous exercises have involved ideas being imposed on them.

For this next exercise, ask each member of the group to concentrate on an intense emotional state. They should prepare for this by being as isolated as possible in their own space in the room, eyes closed. Once they feel they have entered this state they may express it in any way they like. The only proviso is that they experiment - play around with movements, stillness, sounds - and see what arises naturally out of that state. They should end by having chosen the particular movement or sound that most seemed to ‘fit’ their state - that seemed most natural to them. Then one at a time, they ‘perform’ these.

This can have interesting results. Some will end up with obvious moves or sounds - but others will come up with something entirely unexpected, which will perhaps reveal the emotion to an audience in a startling or different way. Emphasise, once again, that subtlety rather than large gestures is what Brook’s actors are more about nowadays - even though he has experimented with Artaud, Grotowskii and others.

e. Test out audience attention spans by trying the following:

   an actor just sitting on the stage
   an actor just walking around on the stage

How long could the audience stand it?

Repeat these with occasional variations, i.e. the sitting actor shifts his position slightly; the walking actor stops and stands still.

Ask them to see if as actors they could tell when the audience needed a stimulus to keep their attention.
Ask them as audience to decide what was the minimum needed to bring their attention back once it had begun to flag.

f. Divide the class into small groups. Ask them to come up with a still image on the stage for the following:

   a random still image, creating a pleasing shape
   a still image that conveys some message
   a still image that is a frozen piece of intense activity

In every case the still image must be held for as long as possible - until the audience attention span starts to falter.

Now ask each group to try to judge when the audience are losing attention and, using their still image of frozen activity, to move into the next logical freeze-frame when they sense the need to move. Each time, they should hold the new image until once again they sense the audience slipping from them. It would be great if the group manage to sense the moments they need to move at the same time so that they move absolutely together! Some may achieve this.

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At this point they need to discuss the findings. Does the audience attention, once it has slipped once, become less? Which of the above groupings was the most successful and which the least? Why?

End by returning to the still image of the pleasing shape. This time, repeat that shape but with each actor concentrating with his whole being. Does this ferocious concentration make a difference? Does it draw the audience i.e. is it what Brook calls ‘a magnetic stillness’?

Return to the questions that Brook was asking, listed at the beginning of this section. Can the students begin to answer any of those questions yet?

Brook’s own conclusions to the many experiments he has done over the years along these lines are that an actor is ‘magnetic’ and draws the attention of the audience to him, however slight the movement is, through using his body, mind and soul as one. It is the concentrated energy created by the fusion of all the actor’s faculties that makes him interesting and watchable.

If this is so, is it possible to separate any of these elements and still be understood by an audience? For instance, can one make an action and simultaneously deny what that action seems to say by feeling something entirely different? Will an audience pick this up?

g. Try a volunteer approaching the audience with his fist clenched and raised.

What does the audience read this as?

Now try the same person approaching the audience with his fist clenched and raised but feeling warmth and affection.

Can the audience see this? How do they read it? Was it difficult for the actor to achieve? Did anything happen to the fist as the warmth grew in the actor?

The point is that some actions are universal signals.

Try one or two actors standing in front of the audience with their hands raised up and gradually tightening the hand into a fist.

If the actors’ faces remain pleasant, is the tightening fist still seen as a threat? Or if the intention is not there, can it be interpreted differently?

See if the group can come up with other ‘signals’ to ‘play’ with in a similar way. For example, approaching with a hand stuck out to shake hands

a. with blank face
b. with dislike in the heart and a smile on the face
c. with warmth inside and outside.

This should help prove Brook’s assertion that body [action], mind [intellect] and soul [inner feeling] need to be at one to communicate intentions correctly to an audience. To translate ‘soul’ as inner feeling, I am aware is a reduction of what Brook means - he means the whole inner self, cleansed, honest and sincere in intention.

During his early experiments, Brook tested out various ways of communicating using other means than speech. Try out some of these:

h. In pairs, one actor [A] faces the wall whilst the second [B] stands some
way behind him looking at his back. B decides what he wants to make A do, using no words or touch - only sound. This should be tried several times, A and B swapping regularly, investigating whether single sounds, patterns of sound or whatever worked best. Sounds can be made in any way - not necessarily just with the voice.

i. Using rhythms tapped with fingernails, clapped, slapped on thighs - or any other means of creating rhythms with the body, partners take turns trying to communicate different ‘messages’ to each other.

   Warning - they are not to mimic speech patterns. The messages will probably be on the level of ‘Danger!’ or ‘Stay calm’ but see if they can become even more specific than this. What is the most detailed message anyone can manage to communicate?

j. Partners now facing each other, try to communicate quite specific messages with the eyes alone. This will involve rhythmic movements as well as dilations, narrowing, widening, staring, moving the eyes sideways or up and down. Spend a little time exploring all the varieties of movement the eyes alone can make.

   Warning - try to isolate the eyes from the rest of the face. Distorting the face makes this exercise too easy!

k. Argue in pairs, gradually excluding different parts of the body - the voice first - feet - arms - head - torso - eyes. Throughout instruct that the argument must continue - it continues emotionally, through concentration.

   This is an exercise familiar to those who study Stanislavski as well. Much of this early investigative stage of Brook’s career covers exercises made familiar by other practitioners, which Brook intends to test out for himself.

l. Still in pairs, finally experiment with sounds and cries reminiscent of birds. Once again, don’t mimic speech patterns, but try to come out with patterns and rhythms that suggest emotional states. For instance, the ‘croo-croo’ of roosting pigeons might suggest contentment.

   Freed from the close association of language, does the listener experience the emotional state differently, with a fresher appreciation?
2. SIMPLICITY, HONESTY AND TRUTH

Coming out of the early experiments, which spanned a number of years, Brook realised that simplicity, honesty and truth communicate more magnetically than staginess in any form. Here are a series of exercises to test this out.

a. Hand out the speech from ‘Henry V’ on the next page, to every member of the group. Give them time to prepare it - unfortunately the speech is full of names difficult to pronounce - and then ask as many as you see fit to deliver it to the rest of the group as audience.

Without comment, then hand out the speech from ‘the Investigation’ to one member of the group and ask him to stand and deliver it cold, without preparation, to the group.

Then ask for comments. Which speech was the most effective and held the audience attention? They will all choose the second, I guarantee. Did anyone manage to make the Henry speech interesting? How?

The point Brook wants to make from this exercise is that simplicity and lack of staginess works best. The second speech is factual and simple in its approach; though it deals with horrors, it does not emphasise them because it has no need to. The words speak for themselves. In fact, the Henry speech is doing exactly the same thing - it, too, deals with lists of dead, with horrors and if treated in the same manner, without the staginess most people put on to ‘deliver Shakespeare’ it will be infinitely more effective and, through understatement, even moving.

Finish by allowing some of the Henry readers to have another go, treating the lists of dead people as if each one was known and regretted. Henry has won the war against the French, but he is not glorying in it here; he is horrified by the sheer numbers of dead royalty and nobility, many of whom he has met.

The key is sincerity and allowing the words themselves to do the work. This is particularly important when dealing with Shakespeare, which for some reason causes many actors to become false and stagey.

Note - when Brook originally did this same exercise, he enlisted the help of the audience for the repeat of the Henry speech. He wanted to show how theatre is a two-way process between actors and audience - both are actively engaged. If the audience consciously concentrate intently on the repeated Henry speech, does it help the actor? Is the atmosphere more electric? Do the audience, by feeding in, receive more back?

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a. Speech from Act 4, Scene 8 of ‘Henry V.’ by William Shakespeare

KING HENRY
This note doth tell me of ten thousand French
That in the field lie slain: of princes, in this number,
And nobles bearing banners, there lie dead
One hundred twenty-six: added to these,
Of knights, esquires, and gallant gentlemen,
Eight thousand and four hundred: of the which,
Five hundred were but yesterday dubbed knights.
So that, in these ten thousand they have lost,
There are but sixteen hundred mercenaries:
The rest are princes, barons, lords, knights, squires,
And gentlemen of blood and quality.
The names of those their nobles that lie dead:-
Charles Delabreth, high constable of France,
Jaques of Chatillon, admiral of France,
The master of the cross-bows, Lord Rambures,
Great Master of France, the brave Sir Guichard Dolphin,
John Duke of Alencon, Anthony Duke of Brabant,
The brother to the Duke of Burgundy,
And Edward Duke of Bar: of lusty earls,
Grandpré and Roussi, Faulconbridge and Foix,
Beaumont and Marle, Vaudemont and Lestrake.
Here was a royal fellowship of death.
b. An amalgation of two speeches from ‘The Investigation’ by Peter Weiss

WITNESS 6
On the 3rd of September 1941
the first experiments
in mass slaughter
using Cyclone B gas
were carried out
in the Bunkerblock
First aid assistants and guards
led some 850 Soviet prisoners of war
as well as 220 sick patients
into Block Eleven
As soon as they had been locked
in the cells
the windows were filled over with earth
Then the gas was introduced
through the airholes
On the next day it was determined
that a few were still alive
After that they poured in
a larger dose of Cyclone B.....
In this camp alone
over 3 million people
were slaughtered
But to calculate the overall total
of unarmed victims
in this war of extermination
we must also include the 3 million
Soviet prisoners of war
who were shot and starved to death
as well as the ten million civilians
who died in occupied lands.

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b. Follow this idea up by trying the following list of names [from Giles Cooper’s ‘Unman, Wittering and Zigo’] in a number of ways:

AGGERIDGE
ANKERTON
BORBY
BUNGABINE
CLOISTERMOUTH
CUTHBUN
HOGG
LIPSTROB
MUDD
MUFFET
MUNN
ORRIS
TERHEW
TRINDLE
UNMAN
WITTERING
ZIGO

Allocate a different motivation for rendering the list to each member of the group. They could be a list of:

schoolchildren to report to the headmaster -
the reader is pleased they will be punished
the reader is worried believing there to be some injustices

schoolchildren chosen to take part in an inter-school debate
the reader thinks they have a good chance of winning
the reader thinks the team is full of disastrous choices

people chosen for a team to represent England
the reader is enthusiastic
the reader is not really interested in sporting events

men lost on the battlefield
the reader is taking a memorial service many years later
the reader has received the news fresh from the event

people killed by a terrorist bomb
the reader is a news reporter
the reader is one of the terrorists who planned the bombing

people in the cast list of a village pantomine
the reader has some serious doubts about some of the casting
the reader has several friends and family in it and is delighted and proud

schoolchildren on a register
the reader is a teacher new to the class
the reader is a teacher counting the days to his retirement

prisoners in a high security prison
the reader is a visitor who has been allocated these names to put
on a play
the reader is a warder checking that all are present after an
attempted break-out

Before the class embark on the exercise, remind them that their whole selves should be
engaged in the exercise. They should aim for under rather than over-playing; for keeping
movements and gestures, facial expressions and voice subtle; and for making sure that the
inner feeling is there, understood and thought through, underpinning the movement
and voice.

Make sure that the results of this are discussed by the group-as-audience.

c. Have each student choose a monologue from a Shakespeare play to
prepare and perform. They should look for the feeling that runs through the
speech and deliver it as simply as possible, allowing the words to speak for
themselves and not imposing any preconceptions on the speech. This is best
done with plays that the students are familiar with, such as the one they
studied for GCSE literature. The test will be greater because they will have
certain preconceptions - that Lady Macbeth is evil, perhaps, for example.
They should not, in that case, put on an ‘evil’ voice - if evil is in the speech, it
will emerge of its own accord and be the fresher and more striking to an
audience for it.

So far, we have concentrated on the voice for this section on simplicity. To show that the
idea covers movement too, try the following exercise.

d. The group stand in a circle. A member of the group starts an action that all
the others copy. They do not copy by looking at the leader but by watching
the person opposite them in the circle. One by one each member of the group
changes the action for the others to imitate.

This is a well-known exercise, but is here given different emphasis by Brook. The
following should not be explained before the exercise starts. If anyone starts an action
which is pretentious or showing-off in any way, or which seems awkward, the teacher
must stop and explain that only the movements that seem most natural - that come
without thought straight from inside - should be used. There must not be any pre-
planning or artifice.

e. Working with sticks is another way of achieving simplicity and naturalness of
movement. This is because concentration on the object - the stick - absorbs the attention
so that the body’s movement becomes natural and unplanned - straight from the inner
impulse.

For this, you need enough 8 or 9 foot bamboo canes [which you can get at any
garden centre very cheaply] for every member of the class. Then perform the following
simple sequence of exercises:

i. Divide the class into pairs who stand opposite each other with a
cane lying on the floor between them, each end by one of the partner’s feet.
Using the tip of one finger only, each person bends and picks up their end of
the cane by placing their finger against it. Sufficient gentle pressure will need
to be used for the pair to keep the cane from dropping. They should then
experiment with the cane and their own bodies - watching the cane the whole
time. Lift it high, drop it low, spin around, move it every possible way. Start
to move around the room, negotiating other pairs, over them, under them,
until the transport of the cane is easy and automatic.

 ii. Next, each person should take a cane for themselves. They stand it on the floor upright, supporting it loosely with one hand. Each person needs to focus very strongly on their cane - until they exclude all other distractions; it is like the samurai who meditates in front of his sword - putting his soul into it; or like the Far Eastern actor who will meditate in front of his mask, until he has emptied himself and is ready to be ‘possessed’ by the mask. It is the fastest way I know of ‘emptying’ oneself - of bypassing one’s personal ‘blocks.’

 If the students are finding it difficult to concentrate, ask them to find a particular mark on the cane on which to focus - or personalise the cane further by asking them to look for a face on it. This usually aids even the most distracted of students to focus all their attention.

 iii. Each one is now instructed to turn their cane outwards, so that the ‘face’ is looking out into the room. The cane now goes for an exploration of the room - meeting other canes, investigating its surroundings.

 At first they will be embarrassed, but it is magical to see how the students will start to forget themselves and take on the ‘character’ of their cane - which is of course really their own personality emerging, free of ‘blocks.’

 iv. Next, ask them in pairs to explore an emotional state - or state of being - using the canes. Harmony, calm, tension, curiosity, anger - any of these and more are suitable states to explore if they are short of ideas.

 You will notice that the students’ own bodies and faces are becoming engaged now, though they are unaware of this. Because their attention is on the movement of their cane, their body is freed to impulses from within. The tremors of the cane are often mirrored by subtle nuances in the body. 

 After a time - allow some of the pairs to ‘show’ the state they are exploring - just informally, standing where they are in the room. When a number have been seen, ask the ‘audience’ to state what they noticed about the participants’ own body movements.

 v. Finish this little foray into cane work by forming the students into groups of four to six. Ask them to create a sequence of geometric patterns in the air with their canes - just for the sake of pleasing shapes. They are not to impose any meaning onto the sequence or try to force a particular pattern. Rather, they should start out playing randomly with the canes and seeing what shapes occur; after a time, a sequence will suggest itself out of the random shapes.

 This format is a reminder of the way Brook works on any piece - starting with free play and allowing the creativity to flow from inner impulses rather than from ideas brought in from the outside or from the intellect.

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3. FREEDOM WITHIN BOUNDARIES

The last exercise with the canes leads us nicely into the idea of ‘freedom within boundaries’ - itself a very Eastern idea. It is the same idea as the Noh actor, and also the Commedia actor, both of whom are highly trained in physical skills and also so in tune with the other actors that they can improvise spontaneously, within the guidelines of the story and the atmosphere being worked for. No performance will be exactly the same and yet, because all the actors are used to working in this way no one is thrown either. The actors are super-alert to any changes in nuance and can pick things up as they go along, run with them and pass them on. In this way, each performance is truly an act of creation - though the story itself will be the same and moments within the story - such as the opening rituals which set the mood and focus the audience - will be identical.

For this to be a possibility, the group need to be able to work very closely together. I propose to start this section, therefore with exercises that work on this skill.

There are a number of ideas that will be familiar to many of you and which I have used elsewhere - with Grotowski and Artaud particularly. Here are a couple to remind you, which can make good lead-ins to the whole idea of close teamwork.

   a. Everyone in the group needs a small soft ball, like a juggling ball - or a beanbag. Start simply, so instruct the group to move around the room slowly at first - keeping the beanbags moving all the time. They must be thrown as soon as received, so they are always constantly in motion.

   This is very hard to do, but if your group becomes good at it, try increasing the speed of movement to walking fast and finally running round the room. This brings in the added difficulties of not bumping each other as well.

   Note - it is easier to achieve this difficult exercise if a rhythm is established - everyone throwing and catching in the same rhythm.

   b. A simpler exercise, still requiring group listening and concentration, is to stand in a circle with one person in the centre holding a decent-sized hand ball. The ball is thrown to individuals in the circle at random and back to the centre again - which is easy enough - but the aim is to establish a strict rhythm, made by the sound of the ball as it meets each catcher’s hands, which must be kept up unbroken for as long as possible.

   c. Now try some group movements - all moving round the room together at the same speed, like a shoal of fish or flock of birds, who turn and twist and change direction randomly but all together, without anyone being the leader. This is hard at first, but groups can get quite good at it. It requires the kind of listening to each other and concentration that must happen on all levels - physical, mental and intuitive.

   This exercise is a particularly good one for Brook theory too, since it demands freedom within discipline: nothing is imposed - there is no leader - yet changes and patterns of movement must be achieved.

   d. The following is a favourite exercise/game for Brook and his actors.

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The group sit in a circle. The aim of the exercise is for every individual in the circle to say - slowly and distinctly - all the numbers from 1 to 20. No gabbling allowed! No one is instructed to start - anyone can begin at any time. BUT if more than one person says an identical number at the same time as another - if two people say ‘three’ together, for example, the whole group have to start again at the beginning.

It becomes, then, a genuine freedom-within-boundaries exercise involving freedom of choice about when to come in and how to achieve the aim, with intense concentration and team skills, each seeking to help the others achieve the common aim.

e. Follow with another well-known Brook exercise. Here the group is once more in a circle. Take the line from ‘Hamlet’: ‘To be or not to be - that is the question.’ Saying only one word at a time, the group aim to make the line flow first of all and then, when the flow is good, they should aim to make ordinary sense out of it - i.e. bring out its meaning.

Achieving a flow is harder than it sounds, requiring complete alertness from every member of the circle; making it sound like one voice which is speaking the sentence in an ordinary fashion, using normal speech rhythms, is, surprisingly, very hard indeed.

Brook suggests carrying on from this exercise by interposing other words to replace ‘be’. This has the result of making surprising new connections out of the well-known quotation - and of course it requires also different nuances in the speaking of it, keeping the group on their toes so as to bring out these different meanings.

Try:

To laugh or not to laugh....
To cry...
To speak...
To cheat...
To try...

Or of course any others you or the group might fancy.

f. Finish by trying a similar thing, but with the group aiming to sing a well-known tune such as a nursery rhyme, once again aiming to keep the rhythm and the flow as it should be. Here, the main difficulty is not to clip the ends of the notes - each note should flow smoothly on to the next one. It is harder than it sounds to make the musical phrase sound pleasant, so use a simple tune such as ‘Twinkle twinkle little star, How I wonder what you are...’

Now return to any of the phrases you used for the previous exercise - ‘To be or not to be ...’ and sing them round the group. For this, once again you must make sure that the notes flow on - each person holding their note until the next picks it up.

It is best for each one to take a long note for the word they are singing, most of which are mono-syllabic in any case, drawing the note out and trying to make it full, rounded and beautiful. There is, of course, no tune - the group are in a position collectively to make one up on the spot - once again exercising their creative freedom.
4. EMPTY SPACE, EMPTY PROP.

An empty space is a place of infinite possibilities. Objects too, taken out of context, are full of potential.

a. Start with the famous game: ‘Fight in the Dark.’ Originally a game devised by the Peking Opera, this has been widely used by Clive Barker and many other teachers, as well as practitioners all over the world.

The group form a large rectangle shape - they do not need to be very close to each other. Two volunteers go into the empty space created in the centre, where they are blindfolded and led to different parts of the defined space. Meanwhile, two rolled up newspapers are placed anywhere on the floor within the space. The blindfolded contestants must search for their ‘swords’, represented by the newspapers, and when they have found one, they need to listen for their opponent, approach and ‘kill’ him with the sword. Other members of the group guard the edges of the arena and gently turn any of the contestants who stumble outside the boundary.

The game can be surprisingly tense. It is imperative that it is done in silence and the contestants need to be aware that they do not know when their opponent might find a weapon - or even both weapons. I have seen two good contestants prolong the game to nail-biting lengths - when one had both swords but the other was adept at listening and keeping out of the way. Often, too, contestants miss a weapon on the ground by a fraction - or miss each other by a hair’s breadth.

Needless to say, there must be no giggling or shuffling from the ‘walls’ either. In fact, a game that goes on for a reasonable length of time can, of itself, generate the kind of electricity that Brook talks about when an audience is actively feeding into the action with their concentration.

b. Follow this with the group who made the walls sitting down on three sides, leaving the defined space empty in the centre. Alternatively, if you have a good-sized square of carpet - a piece of equipment that Brook uses himself - lay this down and sit the audience around three sides of it.

Bring one actor into this space - a volunteer. He must perform an action. When the attention on this activity begins to flag, bring in another actor/ volunteer, who engages the first actor in conversation and/ or perhaps joins in the activity. See how long these first two can make things interesting then when attention starts to flag, stop the actors.

A discussion needs to take place at this point as to what potential for development the piece would have if a third actor were brought in to the scenario. Cover as many possibilities as possible: someone who is objecting, perhaps, to the action or someone who furthers it even more. Which would have more dramatic potential? - or is the potential just different?

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Consider a scenario where one person is trying to move a very heavy object. He cannot do it. The second one comes in and helps but it is still almost too much for them - they can only move it a little way. A third comes in....

He could:
also help, and they succeed in moving the object
help but be clumsy and get more in the way -or be incredibly stupid - or very bossy. All of these have different potentials for development.
come in and insist that it is moved elsewhere - or not be moved at all - or be very angry with them because they have damaged it.... plus a number of other possibilities.
The group may like to try the above for themselves in groups of three.

Brook states that there is no real dramatic development unless three actors as a minimum are used. Does the above exercise help prove this? Through analysis of plays and different scenarios, I tend to agree. Even plays that are two-handers tend to use, if not a third actor, an object or an imaginary person to rail against - such as a god, or similar, to break up the stagnation that might otherwise be caused. There are only a limited number of patterns that two actors can fall into; a third needs to come in to move things along or to bring in the unexpected.

c. Ask for volunteers to come in alone, or in pairs, with the instruction that they must ‘fill the space’ for the audience. The space is empty - how easily can they make an audience see it as a particular place? Challenge the actors to come up with as imaginative ideas as possible. Some may fulfil the criteria by performing actions, such as pushing an imaginary shopping trolley around and pulling objects off shelves to load it; some may simply ‘take us’ to a place they love - by the sea, in the woods - and paint the scene for us with words and actions. If they see their place in their mind’s eye, they will translate their feeling for the place and bring it alive for us by the subtlest of movements to accompany their description of it.

d. Challenge the space.

i. Without actually changing the size of the space that has been defined, ask groups to plan a short scenario which, when performed in the playing area will convince the audience that the space is either much larger or much smaller than it is. They could be lost in an endless desert.... stuck in a lift.... in a cell ... be tiny creatures on a table.... be huge creatures in a tight spot....

ii. Try a simple realistic scene .... a family ... a couple having a conversation ... and having quickly planned it, try it in different configurations of the allotted space. What difference does it make to the scene if the couple, for instance, are having to communicate with the whole width of the stage between them? What difference, again, does it make if they are practically eyeball to eyeball?

Try other different spatial relationships too: back to back, one behind
the other, standing at strange angles to each other.

Experiments like this can sometimes cast unusual light on ordinary things, making us see things in unexpected and often enlightening ways. It can work well with naturalistic conversations out of play texts being studied, too.

Make sure that all of the above is discussed. Have the students more of an awareness about the potentials of the empty space that is the playing area? They should never forget that it is an area for ‘playing’ in - for experimentation and for challenging everything.

e. Ask all the students to find some object in the room and use it as something for which it is not intended. A shoe can become a mobile phone, for instance. Keeping to the same object, ask them on a given signal to change its use again - and again - a minimum of three times.

f. Put an empty cardboard box - preferably large - into the centre of the playing space. Ask a number of volunteers to come up one at a time and demonstrate its potential use.

g. Finally, divide the class up into small groups - of three or, at the most, four. Each group is to have a simple object which must not be too complex or too rooted to a particular period in time. Timeless objects, then, are allocated. The following would be suitable:

   a stone   a box   a piece of rope   a pair of shoes   a bowl

They are to come up with a simple scenario based around their object. The principle around the composition of the scene is that it should be as like a folk-tale or street story as possible, simply told, with characters that are straight-forward and broad in outline.

   What would it be like, for instance, for a barefoot beggar to find a pair of shoes - or a bowl of food?
   What if a thief or trickster conned him out of his find?
   What if a quarrel then ensued and a third person entered in to try and sort out the rights and wrongs of the quarrel - recognised the shoes and claimed them as his own?

   Their stories should be as simple as this, use the space well, seek to draw in the audience by, perhaps, direct address, as well as by the interest of the story and the ability of the actors.

This last exercise, as well as using ‘the empty prop’, mimics the kind of work Brook was doing with his actors on their travels around the world, particularly in Africa.
USING THE THEORIES: A FINAL GROUP PROJECT

I am aware that there are theories that have not been explored. All of the sections so far have, in any case, tried to cover more ground than is really possible in a limited period. Brook, like all of the practitioners, has spent all his life coming to some of the conclusions he has done and any experimental work we do will be only scratching the surface - but will hopefully help us understand something of the nature of those theories nonetheless.

The area I have largely left out is that of the training of the actors, especially the eradication of their personal blocks and how to achieve this. If you have Styletasters 1, this is touched on in the section on Grotowski, which may be useful here, since Brook’s ideas largely concur with Grotowski’s in this area.

In addition, the work with canes, in particular, is relevant to this area, as are much of the teamwork building exercises in ‘Freedom Within Boundaries.’ Any of these can be referred to as back-up work for this area of Brook theory, when writing essays.

For a final project which uses as many of Brook’s ideas as possible, give the group the title ‘Creation.’ They are to come up with a piece that involves the following ‘ingredients’:

- a story-line that is mythic - that uses legend/myth as its basis
- an empty space
- a ritual to open and to close the show - this may be the same ritual or different ones. Remember, the ritual is to focus the audience attention - to bring them in and to generate that special ‘electricity’; it may or may not be a direct part of the action of the story itself. It would be quite acceptable to use Brook’s own ritual of blowing out a candle, relighting it and blowing it out a second time, if nothing more apt suggests itself.
- a story and presentation that is stripped down to the barest of essentials

It would be hard to be more specific than this, without imposing too much on the potential of the finished piece. I think it is important that the group should try to work in as Brookian a manner as possible, i.e.-

Starting with games and free improvisations that come out of the group’s own ideas and objects left around in the room, plus ideas from the teacher or director himself - fed in only judiciously and if the group’s own creativity is flagging. For instance, leaving around coloured balls of different sizes might lead to ‘playing’ with the idea of balls as planets; brainstorming different Creation stories might come up with free improvisations around Adam and Eve, Prometheus, and many others from world religions and legends. Always encourage adventure, play, using musical instruments, voices in different ways, pieces of cloth, canes, and so on - all around the free association of ideas around ‘Creation’. Plunder the actors’ own associations - which might have nothing to do with legends or religions at all - allow anything at this stage: the craftsman’s creation - the mother’s....

There does need to be a ‘director’ who is a unifier - whether that is the teacher or a member of the group. In the end, the director will piece together the final product by working his way through all the creative work on offer from this early stage, finding a startling image or series of images that would work together. This is the stage where any ‘set’ used starts to be created too or music, light, and so on.

Once all parts have been allocated, care must be taken to allow the actors’
creativity still to freely develop, within the confines of their role in the piece. If possible, it would be good to try out some of it on another group - or some younger children, before finalising the material.

The group should aim for a 'final' piece of around fifteen minutes.