TRAINING THE YOUNG ACTOR:
A PHYSICAL APPROACH

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A PHYSICAL APPROACH

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO TRAINING THE YOUNG ACTOR:
A PHYSICAL APPROACH

A number of scholars, actors, and directors view acting as a craft, while others view it as art. Some view their method as the only correct way to perform, and still others find value in all of the techniques. The debate will always go on. There seems no clear consensus about how to teach acting. To find an answer, one must define theater in terms of its purpose.

If theater is an art, then acting is not just a skill or craft passed down to students, and it is not merely a vehicle for fortune and fame. Acting becomes about asking some basic questions: What is theater? Why am I an actor? What is acting? The answers lead an actor to two important figures in modern theater: Konstantin Stanislavski and Jerzy Grotowski. Both men devoted their lives to answering these questions. They were influenced by great minds before them and around them. Their explorations gave birth to a physical approach to acting.

There are many acting techniques that teach a physical approach to adult actors, but how can these principles be adapted for high school students? This thesis will serve as a guide on how to teach acting to secondary school students
using a physical approach. Beginning with a basic history of the system of physical actions, as conceived by Konstantin Stanislavski and further developed by Jerzy Grotowski and others, this guide will define the basic principles of physical acting, including physical actions, mental action, mind and body, interaction, tempo-rhythm, verbal action, physical characterization, and total action.

Both Grotowski and Stanislavski looked for ways to remove obstacles (via negatīva), so the actor could find truth in his or her work. They saw that acting is more than a bag of tricks, method, or technique; that it is an art form that honors the actors, the process, and the surrounding world. This guide will also examine some of Grotowski’s core concepts concerning physical actions: via negative, conjunctio-oppositorum, Poor Theatre, montage, environmental theatre, Holy Actor, score, contact, and sign.

Building on Stanislavski and Grotowski, other performance researchers continue to investigate a physical approach to acting today. Eugenio Barba (director of Odin Teatret and founder of the International School of Theatre Anthropology), Thomas Richards (Artistic Director of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards), James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta (Co-Artistic Directors of New World Performance Laboratory) have added new ideas to Stanislavski and Grotowski’s original concepts. A look into each of their particular additions is also included in this work.

Finally, I will present a course outline and lesson plans to teach young actors a physical approach to acting. The first day or introduction to the course
lays out to students what is expected, how to prepare, and how to dress. Proper warm-up exercises are suggested. The course is divided into four parts or quarters, mirroring a typical school year. Each quarter builds upon the previous quarter’s work.

A unit on mask work is included. Proper mask work enhances many of the physical concepts presented. Libby Appel’s (former Dean of the California Institute for the Arts) mask work serves as a model for this unit. She designed a workshop, which compliments physical action work. Interweaving her work with that of Stanislavski and Grotowski provides a thorough grounding in the techniques of physical acting.

Why are these concepts critical to teach in American secondary education? First, arts programs are the first to feel the effects of the budget cuts facing schools today. As a result, well-intentioned teachers who do not have the experience or resources to teach basic acting fundamentals lead many high school theatre programs. Sadly, they end up teaching diluted technique at best and, at worst, clichés and bad habits. This guide is intended to help the over-loaded teacher instruct young actors in a few basic acting concepts. It also gives the most experienced teacher a more in depth course to stimulate those students who have the curiosity to discover the exciting possibilities physical theatre training offers.

Second, American high school drama programs often teach bad technique or no technique. When students arrive at college, a lot of time is spent getting rid of bad habits. Why not expose high school students to the techniques of
Stanislavski and Grotowski? Why not teach them some basic elements of craft before they start developing bad habits? This guide provides a blueprint to give secondary students a basic knowledge of the system of physical actions, a concrete methodology toward performing before a live audience, and a chance to build a corporeal acting foundation.

Before explaining Stanislavski’s concepts, it is essential to understand the development of his work in America. In order to move forward, one must take a step back. There is much confusion surrounding Stanislavski and his ideas, especially in the United States. The next chapter will explore the American evolution of Stanislavski’s ideas before tackling the last great innovation of his system, which piloted his physical approach.
CHAPTER II
AMERICAN INTERPRETATIONS OF STANISLAVSKI’S EARLY WORK

Stanislavski was the first theater practitioner to develop the various ideas of actor training into a written and practical structure (Hodson 2008). “Stanislavski called the detailed process he invented to analyze the components of creating character a ‘system’…” (Schwarzbaum 2008). According to British theatre director Declan Donnellan, “Stanislavski’s real legacy is his effort to create life and vitality on the stage” (Hodson 2008). Stanislavski had a difficult time formally putting his ideas down on paper. He wrote two books and planned to write several others (Benedetti 2008). The English versions of these books were heavily edited and left out many of his ideas (Nightingale 2008). In fact, An Actor Prepares (first published in English in 1936), and Building a Character (first published in English in 1949) were actually designed as one book with two parts (Istel 2008 106-107). Stanislavski was displeased with the edited version of his autobiography, My Life in Art. Stanislavski wanted his autobiography to introduce his theories, but the American publishers were interested in his memoirs only (My Life in Art Stanislavski 2008 xiv). All of his work, including his journals, is preserved in Russia at the Moscow Art Theater Archive and Museum.
Jean Benedetti (British actor, director, and professor at Rose Bruford College) spent many years researching Stanislavski and finally published *An Actor’s Work: A Student’s Diary*, a more accurate English translation of the Russian master’s work in 2008 (Hodson 2008).

The lack of a complete edition of Stanislavski’s work for so many years has led to confusion and misinterpretations of his system and ideas in the English-speaking world. Since *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character* were meant to be one book, but were actually published thirteen years apart, many American acting teachers held the first book as the gospel and largely ignored the second book (Hodson 2008). Famed American acting teacher and long-time director of the Actors Studio, Lee Strasberg (1901-1982), who never studied with Stanislavski, made the biggest misinterpretation of Stanislavski’s System with his own version called The Method (Nightingale 2008).

The Method might be more accurately described as simply the American evolution of Stanislavski’s work and ideas. The Method stems from the ideas of several of Stanislavski’s former pupils, American translations of Stanislavski’s books, and the interpretations of several American acting teachers. Some scholars believe The Method to be a narrow observation of Stanislavski’s wide examination of the art and craft of acting (Hodson 2008). Publisher Talia Rodgers says this regarding The Method:

> Because of the way the original thirties’ translations of Stanislavski were published – relegating the section on physical actions to a separate book translated and published fourteen years later – his ideas have been profoundly distorted. Generations of actors have been taught to express sincerity and emotion at the expense of
technical and physical mastery, particularly in the United States where the method has held sway since the fifties (Hodson 2008).

Most of the prominent teachers of The Method came from the Group Theater (see below). Similar to the way Christianity divided into many denominations, different teachers offered their own version of The Method. Depending on the teacher, the definition of The Method can vary vastly (Proffer 1989).

Lee Strasberg

In 1931, Lee Strasberg (1901-1982), Cheryl Crawford (1902-1986), and others founded the Group Theater (1931-1941), which championed the style of Realism in theatre. The Group Theatre aimed to build performances to have a certain “truth” and wanted them to be emotionally genuine and believable. The Group Theatre’s ideas were heavily influenced by the Moscow Art Theater productions, which toured in New York from 1924 through 1928 (Benedetti 2008). The Group Theatre was the first American theater ensemble to incorporate Stanislavski’s ideas (PBS American Masters 2003). Under the influence of director Richard Boleslavsky (1889-1937) and Stanislavski’s book, *An Actor Prepares*, Stella Adler (1901-1992) and Lee Strasberg started to develop a system known as The Method. Stella Adler eventually left the Group Theater and created her own technique. Lee Strasberg continued building The Method, while working at the Actor’s Studio during the 1940s and 1950s. The Actor’s Studio became the first place in America to teach a version of Stanislavski’s ideas (Hodson 2008).
Under Lee Strasberg’s guidance, The Method developed differently than Stella Adler’s technique. His version is based on the ideas of Stanislavski’s former pupil, Richard Boleslavsky. Boleslavsky and Michael Chekhov (1891-1955) were students at the Moscow Art Theater’s experimental arm known as the First Studio (1911-1923) (Benedetti 2008).

One of The Method’s fundamental ideas is to attain acting “truth” by looking inside oneself. Using a memory from the past, the actor can bring a certain depth to a character by throwing himself into the emotion of that particular, previous experience. This process is called *emotional recall*, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. In theory, techniques such as emotional recall and sense memory enable the actor to find the “truth”. Plainly voiced, Strasberg believed acting is about feeling something (Hodson 2008).

Stella Adler

During a trip to Russia in 1934, Stella Adler also stayed in Paris for five weeks where she met with Stanislavski in personal coaching sessions. She saw differences in what Lee Strasberg was teaching and how Stanislavski was coaching her. At some point in 1935, Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler disagreed on how to teach The Method (Nightingale 2008). Strasberg told Adler: “Stanislavski doesn’t know. I know” (Nightingale 2008). Stella Adler and Harold Clurman left the Group Theater, ventured to Hollywood where they achieved marginal success, and eventually returned to New York in the early 1940s. Lee Strasberg made a fresh start working with the Actor’s Studio (founded by the
Group Theater’s Elia Kazan (1909-2003), Robert Lewis (1909-1997), and Cheryl Crawford) and Stella Adler established her own school, which eventually became known as the Stella Adler Acting Studio (PBS American Masters 2003).

Why did Stella Adler revise her view on The Method, after studying with Stanislavski for a few weeks? She interpreted imagination and script to be more important than memory exercises to find the “truth”. Building on her experience with the Group Theater, Hollywood, Stanislavski, and other theaters, she refined her version of The Method. Unlike the internal style of Strasberg, she took an external approach to her technique, focusing less on memory and more on imagination and the play’s circumstances. Her technique taught actors to find character clues in the script and to use imagination rather than memory to develop a character’s background. Simply stated, Stella Adler believed acting is about doing something (PBS American Masters 2003).

Robert Lewis

Robert Lewis, a founding member of the Group Theater, also became a well-known teacher of The Method. His ideas took Strasberg’s and Adler’s ideas a step further. Robert Lewis thought that some of what Strasberg said was significant and some of what Adler said was also vital. He did believe, however, that Adler’s ideas were more accurate to actor preparation (Lewis 1984 53-84).

Following his travels to Los Angeles and London, Robert Lewis made his mark on The Method. After leaving the Group Theater and failing to succeed in Hollywood in the way he had hoped, he returned to New York to start the Actor’s
Studio with Strasberg. After a few unsatisfying years teaching, he departed to London. There he trained with Michael Chekhov, nephew of Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) and former talented apprentice of Stanislavski. In an effort to dispel misinformation regarding The Method, Robert Lewis, in 1957, composed the first of eight lectures. These lectures were his attempt to define what The Method is and is not. Generally speaking, he combined Strasberg’s internal memory work with Adler’s imagination exercises. He would later use the lectures to form the book *Method – Or Madness* (Lewis 1984 53-84).

The Group Theater and Actors’ Studio produced several other prominent acting teachers including Sanford Meisner (1905-1997), Herbert Berghof (1909-1990), and Uta Hagen (1919-2004). The Method, in their hands, went through more metamorphoses.

**Sanford Meisner**

Sanford Meisner developed his own technique, the Meisner Technique, after he left the Group Theater. Along with Stella Adler, he agreed that Emotional Recall (using the actor’s personal emotions to foster the development of one’s work) is not the most significant piece of The Method. He agreed with Adler that the imagination was the way to creating a truthful performance (PBS American Masters 2003).

The overarching idea enveloping Meisner’s technique is imagination. He believed that in order to find the truth in a performance, the truth has to come from the real responses or impulses of the actor under given circumstances. The
lines of a play are to be memorized neutrally so that the truest responses come from within the moment. At first, actors are not permitted to have any emotion, tone, or expression attached to the script. During rehearsal or performance, the actors respond to the given circumstances around them and the emotion originates from the natural reaction the actor has to the scene. Meisner’s process allows the actor, physically and vocally, to react freely and spontaneously, and encourages them not to think about what they are “supposed” to do or say. Based on improvisation and guided by impulses, the essence of the Meisner Technique is living in the actor's moment (PBS American Masters 2003).

Uta Hagen

Herbert Berghof founded his own studio in New York. Uta Hagen, his wife, became the studio’s legendary teacher. Uta Hagen’s acting style has its origins in The Method. Like her predecessors, her methods were founded in Stanislavski’s ideas (Feingold 2004, 1). In her books, she discusses emotion memory, sense memory, action, and objectives as well as many more of Stanislavski’s techniques. However, like Strasberg, she believes that by combining the two exercises, emotion recall and sense memory, an actor can bring forth the appropriate emotion during a performance. Emotions from memory are triggered recalling a part (one of the senses) of the emotional memory. She also believes that one cannot become desensitized to a memory; a memory, which could cause an actor to cry, should always work. If it does not
work, it is somehow the actor’s fault. For example, by anticipating the emotion, one can cause the emotion to lose its novelty (Gyford 2007).

This chapter gives a glimpse of the origins of most American actor training and how it has evolved. Although there are many differences and nuances to each teacher and their technique, Stanislavski and The Method are the main influences on American actor training. Most actor training programs in the United States hold one of these systems, if not both, as the core of their programs.
Konstantin Stanislavski’s goal was to create acting exercises and principles that any person could use to step into any role within a play and produce genuine life on stage. In this chapter, I intend to explain Stanislavski’s System focusing on what Stanislavski himself wrote about it and what his long-time students said about his work.

Stanislavski probably would not have called his work a system. For him it was more of an idea of how to work towards a goal. His idea was to train actors so that their performances would be full of life. Although he developed many wonderful exercises and theories, he was the first to leave well enough alone. He also knew that sometimes even his best students, with all of his valuable training, would fail. He realized that there is no perfect system in acting; however, he did believe there were exercises that could make the actor better prepared and ready to play a role. He saw acting as more of an art than craft. Craft being a skill, and art being a skill that conveys emotions and ideas. Much like a person can be taught how to paint beautiful landscapes, it is an entirely different process to teach people to be an artist of landscapes like Claude Monet (Donnellan 2008).
To Stanislavski life is art, and theater should flow with life. The title of his autobiography, *My Life in Art*, is no coincidence. According to Stanislavski, being full of life translates to truthfulness (Donnellan 2008). Stanislavski spent most of his life researching his System. The rehearsal system, refined during his last years, eventually became known as the “System of Physical Action”. Today Russian scholars more accurately identify it as a, “System of Analysis through Physical Action” (Merlin 2001, 4). In America, this later work is not well known. However, in order to understand his final work, one needs to turn to the beginning.

From childhood, Konstantin Sergeevich Alekseev (Stanislavski) was influenced by the theater, opera, ballet, and circus. At the age of fourteen, he began writing journals in which he analyzed theatrical problems. He continued to keep a journal until sickness and untimely death at the age of seventy-five (Merlin 2003, 2-3).

One of his first quandaries was how to construct a universal theatrical language. Stanislavski’s goal was to create a vocabulary similar to that of musicians. He was envious that musicians had the ability to communicate freely with each other using the same language (*piano, beat, coda, forte*, etc.) during their rehearsal process. While working on a play, he wanted to establish simple terminology where actors from anywhere in the world could easily and quickly understand their directors. (*My Life in Art*, Stanislavski 2008, 316-318). Although a language was not completed by the time of his death, he did leave a healthy beginning. Terms such as action, circle of attention, emotion memory, object of
attention, supertask, tempo-rhythm, and through action have entered the performer’s lexicon and will be explained throughout this chapter.

Late in life, Stanislavski outlined seven books to accomplish his goals. Unfortunately, the only volume he successfully wrote and finished was My Life in Art, and he despised the highly edited English version. An Actor Prepares, or as it is more precisely translated, An Actor’s Work on Himself, Part One, was left incomplete at his death. By looking at his notes, it becomes clear that Parts One and Two were meant to be one book. However, American publishers thought the book was too long so they split the book in half. In the English versions, Part One became known as An Actor Prepares and Part Two, which was published after his death from a draft, became known as Building A Character (Benedetti 2008).

Stanislavski feared that if the two parts of the book were separated, confusion and ultimately misinterpretation would follow. That is precisely what happened when Building A Character (or part two) was first published in 1949, thirteen years after part one. Another important fact is that half of each book (An Actor Prepares and Building A Character) was edited out in the English versions. Further, all other books he allegedly wrote (i.e. Creating A Role) were nothing more than a collection of notes, outlines, and research. Someone other than Stanislavski edited and wrote the books the English-speaking world attributes to him (Merlin 2008 2-4).

All of Stanislavski’s writings or Collected Works can be read unedited in Russian. However, the work needs to be looked at within its historical context.
Stanislavski’s ideas may be universal, but some of his writing now seems oddly dated.

Scholar Jean Benedetti spent numerous years studying and teaching the work of Stanislavski. He traveled the world making Stanislavski’s work clear for the next generation of acting teachers and students. Jean Benedetti is a credible source, who has translated and modernized Stanislavski’s theories, texts, and notes, not just by looking at Stanislavski’s often stilted and incomplete notes, but by interviewing and researching some of Stanislavski’s actual students (Merlin 2008, 1).

Toward the end of his life, Stanislavski knew he would not be able to finish his books, so he decided to pass his knowledge down to his pupils. He handpicked eleven actors and directors and together they selected twenty students to form the Opera-Dramatic Studio. This group was responsible for maintaining and disseminating Stanislavski’s legacy.

Action, both physical and mental, is the foundation of acting. The physical movement or body language often tells us more than what is being said. Researchers have long said over half of communication comes from the body, with the rest belonging to tone of voice and finally the actual words spoken (Tarnow 1-2). For an audience to respond to a play, actors must communicate physically the meaning of the play. In order to properly express what the body needs to say, actors need to be aware of and control their body language and physical actions (Benedetti 1998, 16).
The crux of the System is the action itself. Actions guide the actor through the performance and help communicate the actor’s intentions. In life, nine out of ten actions are performed unconsciously. An actor needs to be aware of these automatic actions. To begin, the unconscious actions must become conscious to the actor. Everyday activities such as putting on a pair of pants or writing a letter are a series of involuntary actions. The actions need to be broken down into their simplest form in order to communicate clearly to an audience. Miming the actions is an excellent way to study the routine actions because miming forces focus on the unconscious actions (Benedetti 1998, 26).

Tension

Tension is the foremost obstacle to overcome for the actor. When people are faced with public speaking, they generally become overwhelmed with tension and show some degree of rigidity. As a result, they have difficulty breathing, which generally leads to problems such as voice cracking and awkward movement. Actors are no different. They must learn how to release and control this tension (Stanislavski 2008, 120-121).

Stanislavsky taught his students to control tension by becoming aware of its presence. One simple exercise Stanislavski employed was having his actors perform everyday actions -- simple actions such as walking around the room or sitting in a chair — and find locate the tension in their bodies. Then he would have them work on releasing the tension, particularly the unnecessary tension which
had nothing to do with completing the action. The idea was to use the least amount of effort to make the most of the endeavor (Benedetti 1998, 17-18).

After becoming aware of the tension, the next step was to learn how to release the unwanted tension unconsciously during a rehearsal or performance. In order to accomplish this goal, the idea of a monitor was utilized.

It [the monitor] must, in life as onstage, be tirelessly on the lookout lest excess tension, muscular constrictions appear. The monitor should eliminate these tensions as they emerge. This process of self-monitoring must be brought to the point where it becomes a reflex (Stanislavski 2008, 122).

At first the actor had a fellow actor (external monitor) observe and then report on possible tensions during exercises. Then the actor attempted to become self-sufficient in observing tension (internal monitor) (Benedetti 1998, 18-20).

The next point in dealing with tension is balance, allowing the energy to flow from one’s body. Along with tension, improper use of weight may prohibit this flow. Finding the center of gravity is the next step, and Stanislavski designed several exercises to accomplish this, so that the actor’s body would be agile, flexible, and adaptable (Stanislavski 2008, 127). These lessons also focused on conserving energy and using minimal tension (Stanislavski 2008, 133). Once discovered, the next phase is learning how the center of gravity changes between different actions (Benedetti 1998, 20-22).

The last step to overcoming tension is proper use of the muscles. Using the internal monitor, one must locate the essential muscles and the nonessential muscles. An actor needs to use the right muscle for the right action. The more efficient an actor can be with the use of muscles, the less tension there will be in
the body. More importantly, the actor must apply this muscle release to rehearsals and performances. Often, props and set pieces in theater are not what they appear to the audience. Rocks may be made of paper, trunks may be empty, and doors may not be made of heavy wood. In order to maintain the illusion when dealing with these objects, the actor must use the correct muscles and the corresponding contractions (Stanislavski 2008, 127-130).

Intention and Justification

To elevate any kind of action beyond a simple movement of the body, an intention and justification need to be applied. The words *How* and *Why* are vital here. Why am I moving this rock? Have I been ordered to move the rock? Have I been paid a million dollars to move the rock? How do I move the rock? Am I tired from a long day of work? Because the rock is buried in mud, do I need a friend to help me? The psychology behind the action will affect its speed, emotional tone, and mood (Benedetti 1998, 25).

In the same line of thinking, doing organic actions is significant. Organic actions are everyday actions or series of actions that have a natural sequence to them. Washing the dishes, for instance, has a specific order of “doings.” A dry sponge will not clean the dirty dish! What makes these actions come to life on stage is the justification of these actions.

To summarize: physical actions are crucial to every performance. The actions communicate what the actor is saying or not saying. In order to be instantly recognizable and clear with actions, the actor has to harness tension.
and judiciously use his muscles. And physical actions need a purpose.

“Everything that happens onstage must occur for some reason or other” (Stanislavski 2008, 39). An action needs an intention and justification to have a purpose: “Onstage you shouldn’t perform actions ‘in general’ for actions sake. You should perform them in a way which is well-founded, apt and productive” (Stanislavski 2008, 42). Physical actions are almost always linked to other physical actions. The coordination of these actions, both with and without a partner, is important. Many physical actions have a natural order to them. While all of these principles are vital, these principles are only the foundation of the System.

In most performances, actors do not perform alone. The next step is learning to coordinate actions with a partner. Initially, this coordination of actions is trained and can be accomplished with simple exercises like moving an imaginary sofa. Even more imperative is the coordination of physical contact in conflicts such as a sword fight. Learning to work together without actually hurting a partner is obviously paramount (Benedetti 1998, 23-24). The next key to the puzzle is mental action.

Mental Action

If physical action is what the body is doing, then mental action is essentially what the mind is doing. Mental action is made up of four parts: concentration, imagination, the subtext, and emotion memory.
Concentration

No matter what activity one does in life, the more concentration employed, the smoother it becomes. Whether it is a baseball player playing in the World Series, a scientist looking for a cure for cancer, or a mother teaching her child to read, more focus and concentration equals better results. Human concentration yields powerful results, especially when more than one person is involved. Think of landing on the moon, winning an Olympic gold medal, sailing the globe, or climbing Mount Everest. All were once thought impossible, but with concentration on a singular goal, the impossible is achieved. Stanislavski understood acting to be the same. For an audience to understand a play and believe what it is seeing, an actor must develop a high level of concentration (Benedetti 1998, 32). If physical action is the bread, then concentration is the butter.

Concentrating on an object produces a natural need to do something with it. Action concentrates the attention even more closely on the object. So, concentration plus action creates a close bond with the object (Stanislavski 2008, 92).

Like any professional athlete, the actor must forget about the spectator in order to win. Winning in this case means staying in the “now” moment. All plays are a series of “now” moments. The actor goes from one “now” moment to the next. In order to stay in the “now” moment, the actor must stay focused on the object of concentration, which can change throughout a scene or play. An object of concentration is any person or thing the actor is focused on (Stanislavski 2008, 86-93).
Concentration takes on three forms in theater: the real world, the imaginary world, and multi-level focus. The real world is all that is happening to the actor currently in their world. The five senses come in to play here. The imaginary belongs to the character’s world. Multi-level focus is simply concentration on more than one thing. Knitting a sweater and talking to a friend while watching children play through a window is an example (Benedetti 1998, 38-39).

Concentration has two important components. The first is justification. In order to stay focused on something, there has to be a reason. Otherwise, the mind would eventually wander. The second component is the circle of concentration. Some things need a wide focus and some things need a narrow focus. The circle of concentration must expand or contract as necessary. For example, threading a needle on stage generally requires a very tiny, narrow circle of concentration. A five-on-one sword fight, in contrast, necessitates a much larger circle of concentration (Stanislavski 2008, 98-106).

Imagination

The next component of mental action is imagination. Imagination plays a significant role in an actor’s life. Most often, a playwright does not give all the information an actor needs, and the director and production team do not always supply the answers. The actor, especially as an actor-artist, must fill in the blanks by using imagination. The actor takes the given circumstances of a
character’s situation and invents or creates the rest of the detail, including the before-time (Benedetti 1998, 43-44).

Before-time is the back-story. Whether it is the start of the play or a simple entrance, the actor justifies what he is doing by inventing what has happened before this moment. Stanislavski taught proper use of imagination as opposed to actor’s fantasy (Benedetti 1998, 49-53). “Imagination creates what is, what exists, what we know, but fantasy creates what isn’t, what we don’t know, what never was and never will be” (Stanislavski 2008, 61). An actor needs to work with an active imagination rather than a passive one. If, for example, an actor must create a before-time for a character’s entrance, a passive imagination would have the character enter because he is mad at his nephew for throwing his money away. An active imagination, however, would have the character bowl open the door searching for his money and his nephew, who earlier disposed of the character’s money down a well. In both situations there is a reason to enter with emotion. The difference between the two is that the actor in the latter scenario has something to do, a way to express his emotion to the audience (Stanislavski 2008, 65-69).

Subtext

The subsequent element to mental action is subtext. Subtext is what occurs in the character’s mind, the thoughts. Subtext has two parts: the inner monologue and mental images. The brain is constantly working, even during sleep. People have private, internal thoughts (the inner monologue) which, for
instance, take place during conversations. People also recall mental pictures from prior memories (mental images) like their home, their favorite aunt, or their first kiss. The internal monologue and mental images happen spontaneously in daily life. However, the actor playing a role has to create consciously the two parts of subtext and then make them unconscious during rehearsals. The final result is that, during the performance, an actor uses the character’s unconscious thoughts rather than his own (Benedetti 1998, 57-61).

**Emotion Memory**

The final and most complicated element of mental action is emotion memory. What Stanislavski meant when he spoke of emotion memory has created many disagreements. First, the definition of emotion memory is the remembrance of feelings. Stanislavski originally called it affective memory, which Lee Strasberg also used. Strasberg also picked up from Stanislavski that senses, especially sight and sound, could help stimulate the memory. Lee Strasberg took this idea and developed an exercise called sense memory. Strasberg suggested that by using sense memory combined with emotional recall (remembering an emotional event), a good actor could will the emotions needed during a performance (Hodson 2008).

Stanislavski believed that stimuli are a way to emotions. Summoning an emotion from memory or simply recalling an emotional memory may or may not work. In fact, it will not work every time. Stanislavski knew that emotions had to be lured out; they do not respond to force. Just like trying to remember a “word
on the tip of your tongue”, the more one tries to force the word out, the harder it is to recall (Stanislavski 2008, 224-226).

“The actor must be able to respond directly to the decoys (stimuli). and master them, as a virtuoso does a keyboard,” said Stanislavski (Stanislavski 2008, 225). In his terms, stimuli means imagination, the physical actions, the object of attention, belief of being in the moment, and the given circumstances. These are all ways to lure the emotion memory out of its hiding place. He also believed the more emotion memory one had to draw upon, the better for the actor. The more the actor can experience, the easier it would be to understand the many worlds in which he will play, and all the characters he will embody. Stanislavski wanted emotion lured from the actor’s work on the character, and Strasberg wanted the emotion to come from the actor’s personal memory (Stanislavski 2008, 224-228).

Mind and Body

Mind and body are another significant point in Stanislavski’s System. Stanislavski did not agree with the conventional wisdom that mind and body are separate, disconnected. Eastern thought sees mind and body as different pieces, but not separated. In fact, they are very much connected. Stimulate one and the other reacts. One cannot exist without the other. This is a very Yin and Yang way of thinking. The practice of Yoga also emphasizes this mind and body synergy. Stanislavski practiced Yoga, which is the likely beginning of his thoughts on the integration of mind and body (White 73-92).
Stanislavski delineated four important positions concerning mind and body. The first involved the influence of mental behavior on physical behavior—a person’s mood can unconsciously make a person physically react in particular ways. For example, a happy person may whistle a tune or a confused person may furrow his brow. The second point Stanislavski stressed about the mind-body connection concerns the influence of physical states on mental behavior. This idea can be illustrated by the effect of yoga on a person. Yoga can yield a relaxed, peaceful state. The stretched body turns the mind toward a calm emotional state (Benedetti 1998, 69-70).

Stanislavski’s third point concerns the influence of the surroundings on one’s behavior. The surroundings can cause the body to react in a certain way, to do something, and this doing also affects the mind. The reaction of a driver to traffic provides a clear example. When there is no traffic, a driver’s body tends to be relaxed, but once traffic starts slowing down to a stop, the driver becomes physically tense (Benedetti 1998, 71-72).

Stanislavski’s fourth point concerning the mind-body relationship refers to the influence of external stimuli on behavior. While the previous idea deals with the effect of physical surroundings on the body, here Stanislavski deals with the emotional effect of the surroundings on the mind. Stanislavski often used light and sound to alter mood and atmosphere. One common example of the power of this effect is demonstrated in how restaurants dim their lights in the evenings. People are much more apt to relax in a half lit room than in a bright one (Benedetti 1998, 72-73).
Communication

The next fundamental piece to Stanislavski’s System is what he called communication. For Stanislavski, communication occurs when a subject conveys thoughts or feelings to an object (Stanislavski 2008, 233-235). In ordinary life, most communication is not very stimulating or thrilling unless something dramatic happens. The communication between a bank teller and a customer is not very interesting to observe. If, however, the customer is actually robbing the bank, the interaction becomes much more interesting. An actor’s job is to make the ordinary become extraordinary. For the actor, interaction is more than just being ordinary (Stanislavski 2008, 233-236).

Stanislavski lists three types of interaction. They are direct communication to an object, self-communication, and communication with an imaginary object. Direct communication to an object also involves actors communicating to other actors. Self-communication is usually when the head "speaks" to the heart and vice versa (thought versus feeling). An example of the third type of interaction, communication of an imaginary object, is talking to a ghost. During a performance, these are the three central types of communication (Stanislavski 2008, 242-243).

Stanislavski thought it was essential to be aware of the other, so-called bad, forms of communication as well, in order to fight against them. The first of these is showing one’s self in the role. An example of this type of communication occurs when an actor with great technique spews out the words with gusto and moves about the stage with flashy precision, showing off all performing skills but
totally eclipsing the character and the play. The second bad form of communication is showing the role in one’s self, by offering a mechanical performance. The actor performs the role with great precision, doing exactly what the play asks, but the life of the character is missing. In both cases, the actor tends to keep one eye on the audience. In the first example, the actor wants to show the audience their skills. In the second case, the actor wants to ensure the audience understands him. These kinds of bad communication lead to the loss of contact with fellow actors, actors “mailing in” performances, and reporting or indicating instead of living the moment (Stanislavski 2008, 239-243).

Stanislavski also understood that a perfect performance, in terms of communication, was nearly impossible. Each actor’s performance will have good moments and bad moments of interaction. “An actor's career abounds in moments of both kinds, and so good moments are mixed with bad moments” (Stanislavski 2008, 243).

Another key concept of communication is to understand that it works both ways--the actor becomes both the subject and the object when interacting with another actor. In each interaction, there is a constant flow of communication going to and fro even when just one actor is speaking. While one actor is talking, the other actor may be responding with a physical action. Communication expresses thoughts and idea, while also conveying feelings. The difficult part for actors is not to let their attention slide after they deliver their lines. The person speaking (the subject) to the other (the object) fails to become the object when the other responds. The energy or life of the scene is lost. The audience then
has difficulty believing the scene and consequently sees no truth within the scene.

When the audience sees two or more characters exchanging their thoughts and feelings, it becomes involved in their words and actions involuntarily, rather like someone accidentally overhearing a conversation. It participates silently in these exchanges, sees them, understands them and is caught up in other people’s experiences (Stanislavski 2008, 232).

If this two-way communication is working well, the by-product is outstanding communication to the audience (Stanislavski 2008, 233-236).

Communication is external, visible, and physical. In order to interact, actors use all of the senses, each of which carries equal importance. Excellent communication uses all of the senses, often simultaneously. An actor is both a subject and object; both watching and listening are imperative to remarkable communication. In the same vein, speaking and gesturing are also vital (Stanislavski 2008, 243-245).

Communication is also internal, invisible, and mental. Stanislavski called this type of communicating “emitting and receiving rays” (Stanislavski 2008, 246). Since the concepts of body language and nonverbal communication did not have a name when Stanislavski was teaching, he resorted to his self-admitted unscientific names. Unlike external communication, where thoughts are mostly conveyed, internal communication transmits more feelings than thoughts. The actor must relax and look deep in to another’s mind to see their soul, similar to two lovers looking into each other’s eyes. There is a stream of thought moving from one set of eyes to the other. “We already have the kind of tension of which
we must be very wary in the delicate, tricky process of emitting and receiving. They cannot occur while there is muscular tension” (Stanislavski 2008, 247). Stanislavski was very careful to say this type of communication was accomplished with no tension.

Tempo-rhythm

The next principal element of Stanislavski’s System to be discussed is tempo-rhythm. Tempo refers to pace, and it can be fast, slow, or somewhere in the middle. Rhythm means the measured flow, which includes accentuation. In theater, the benefits of excellent tempo-rhythm are the same as in music or dance. Tempo-rhythm creates mood and, for the actor, it is directly connected to feelings. A happy song has a faster and lighter tempo-rhythm, and a sad dance has a slower heavier one. Stanislavski said the following regarding tempo-rhythm:

You can’t discover the right tempo-rhythm without simultaneously experiencing the feelings that correspond to it. There is an indissoluble link between tempo-rhythm and feeling, and conversely between feeling and tempo-rhythm, they are interconnected, interdependent and interactive (Stanislavski 2008, 502).

In order to harness this idea, the actor must first understand the difference between external tempo-rhythm and internal tempo-rhythm.

External tempo-rhythm corresponds to the actor’s physical actions; the tempo is the pace of the actions. The rhythm is “the relationship of movement and stillness through time and space” (Benedetti 1998, 81). By altering the external tempo-rhythm, an actor can change the mood and feelings in a
performance. But also the actor’s feelings can alter the tempo-rhythm, and if conditions in an actor’s personal life are difficult, adjustments to the actor’s external tempo-rhythm must be made in order to play a cheerful character (Stanislavski 2008, 470-487).

Internal tempo-rhythm entails feelings and thoughts, which have their own tempo rhythm. Stanislavski believed that instead of saying, “How are you?” it would be better to ask, “How’s your tempo-rhythm?” (Stanislavski 2008, 487-488). Tempo-rhythm is a better gauge of a person’s state of being than their actual health (Stanislavski 2008, 489-506).

The external and internal tempo-rhythms can differ from each other when, for example, a character needs to appear calm and collected while their mind is full of rage. Hamlet is a good example of a character that embodies this type of dual tempo-rhythms. Stanislavski believed that a variety of tempi and rhythms was important for a play’s different characters and within the line of action of each character as well. As people change, their tempi and rhythms change, too. (Benedetti 1998, 85-86).

Vocal Action

The next fundamental element of the System of Physical Action is vocal action. To speak is an action, just as gesture and movement can be actions. Although this study focuses on physical action, some attention to vocal action is essential. If a person writes a letter badly, no one will understand it. Likewise, if an actor has sloppy speech, he will be hard to understand (Stanislavski 2008,
“Speech is music. Dialogue in a play is a melody, an opera or a symphony. Diction onstage is no less difficult an art than singing and demands preparation and technique at virtuoso level” (Stanislavski 2008, 398). Vocal work should be studied along with physical work in order to create a performance that is effective and interesting both physically and vocally.

But a good voice is rare in conversational speech. If you so come across one, it lacks strength and range. And you can’t express the ‘life of the human spirit’ with a range of five notes. The conclusion of all I’ve said is that even a good natural voice must be trained not only for singing but for speaking as well (Stanislavski 2008, 384).

Movement and dialogue on the stage differ vastly from real life. For the purposes of this study, verbal action is divided into three basic categories: punctuation, pauses, and stress (Benedetti 1998, 87-88).

**Punctuation**

Punctuation has both a practical function and an expressive one. “The real purpose of punctuation marks is to group the words in a sentence and indicate the speech rests, or pauses” (Stanislavski 2008, 441). As a practical function, punctuation serves to divide a thought into comprehensible and clear units. As an expressive function, it illustrates phrasing, breathing, and fluctuation of speech. Varying types of punctuation help mold the verbal action: a comma is a signal to breathe, a dash conveys an afterthought, and a question mark indicates a rise in pitch (Benedetti 1998, 88-89). Punctuation translates to inflections in speech, and inflections allow the speaker to deliver better what is being said (Stanislavski 2008, 411-416).
Pause

The pause is to the ear what punctuation is to the mouth. The pause is a break that helps the listener to understand better what is being said. Stanislavski identified two types of pauses: the logical pause and the psychological pause. The logical pause divides thoughts and sentences into understandable fragments, allowing the listener to comprehend the spoken ideas. The psychological pause, on the other hand, epitomizes the actor’s state of mind (Benedetti 1998, 90-91). The psychological pause represents the thoughts behind the words, and “brings the ideas to life” (Stanislavski 2008, 419). Psychological pauses articulate that which words cannot. “The logical pause serves the head, the psychological pause the heart” (Stanislavski 2008, 419).

Stress

In terms of verbal action, the use of stress has varying degrees. Stressing a word is one way to highlight it vocally. Stress can bring attention to a significant word between pauses. However, an actor should be careful not to stress too many words; overstressing renders the phrase meaningless (Stanislavski 2008, 425-426). The key word in a sentence requires more stress, while the other significant word or words have less stress. Correctly using stress to highlight the spoken word adds a logical perspective to the actor’s performance (Stanislavski 2008, 453-454).
Stress is not the only way to highlight a word, however. By using tempo-rhythm, pauses, inflections, together with stress, an actor can highlight words in many ways (Stanislavski 2008, 436-437).

Physical Characterization

Physical characterization is what allows the external stimuli to affect the internal action. The character of Richard III has physical disabilities, which in turn affect his actions. These actions then influence the character's psychology. “Physical features illuminate, illustrate and so put across the invisible, inner shape of a character’s mind to the audience” (Stanislavski 2008, 516). In essence, there is a change in the mental state of the actor because of the character's physical appearance (Stanislavski 2008, 519). Costumes, make-up, or props are all tools that help to create physical characterization. There are natural, professional, and social examples of physical characterization, as well. A natural one might be an old drunkard. Soldiers, ballet dancers, and fashion models are professional examples. Social examples are characters in particular places like an expensive restaurant or a church. All of these elements affect the physical nature of the actor, which leads them to build a physical characterization.

Physical characterizations must be very specific or they become cliché. In this case, to mimic is not specific enough.

Aristocrats always wear top hats and gloves, sport a monocle, speak gutturally and pronounce their ‘r’s like the French. They like to play with their watch chain or the ribbon of their monocle, etc. All
these are clichés ‘in general’ that are supposed to characterize. They are taken from life, they can be encountered in reality. But that’s not the point. They aren’t typical (Stanislavski 2008, 533).

In addition to detail, the physical characterizations must come from the actor. A high fashion model illustrates this point, as this specific type of model carries herself in a precise way. After finding this physical characteristic, the actor must make it her own. Perhaps this model becomes a cocaine-addicted model at the end of her career who is hiding her addiction from her friends. By adding these details, the physical characterization becomes very different than the cliché physical characterization of a fashion model. (Stanislavski 2008, 530-535). If the actor in the example of the addicted model carefully uses the physical characterization created, if she acts honestly, consciously, and without overemphasis, if she stays within the given circumstances, she will drop naturally into the character’s tempo-rhythm. “Characterization is the mask which hides the actor-human being. When we are masked we can reveal the most intimate and spicy details about ourselves” (Stanislavski 2008, 535). This “mask” allows the actor to inhabit the character freely and to show aspects of herself, which she may be reluctant to reveal in life.

Total Action

Total action is the next important component of Stanislavski’s System. Supertask, through-action, and counter-through-action make up total action. The supertask is the goal of the play, which joins together all of the other tasks, and arouses creative ideas and actions in the actor. “Or, in other words, you must
look for the Supertask not only in the role but also in the heart and mind of the actor” (Stanislavski 2008, 308). Everyone working on the play must agree on the supertask. The supertask is derived from the writer’s ideas and should incite a reaction in the actor’s performance. “The pursuit of the Supertask must be continuous, unbroken throughout the whole play and the role” (Stanislavski 2008, 307). The purpose is to direct all of the actor’s energy and focus towards the tasks that fulfill the supertask.

The Supertask should be fixed in the actor’s personality, his imagination, his thoughts, his feelings, as firmly as possible. The Supertask should remind him ceaselessly of the inner life of the role and the goal of his creative work (Stanislavski 2008, 311).

To truly accomplish this, each actor must take the supertask decided upon and make it his own.

The logical and coherent connection of actions is the through-action. “But the Through-action brings everything together, strings all the elements together, like a thread through unconnected beads, and points them towards the common Supertask” (Stanislavski 2008, 312). Playing with through-action is harmonious with the play’s goal and creating the life within the role. Stanislavski also explained though-action as “the linear thrust of the inner drives throughout the play (Stanislavski 2008, 312).

In 1687, Sir Isaac Newton surmised, “Every action has an equal and opposite reaction” (Newton 14). Stanislavski understood this principal as well. If there is through-action, there is an equal and opposite reaction, a counter-through-action. Counter-through-action creates the conflict and the obstacles
needed to make a play dramatic. If revenge were easy, Hamlet would be a very short play. Counter-through-action also exists to strengthen the through-actions. Together they create the necessary synergy of a play (Stanislavski 2008, 318-319).

In this chapter, I have attempted to describe and illustrate many of the basic concepts of Stanislavski’s System of Physical Action. Stanislavski knew his concepts were not perfect and, in some cases, may not even be needed. He would have been the first to leave well enough alone if everything is working well in rehearsal. His ideas were meant to fertilize the soil of inspiration and obtain true life in performance and to provide a life-line, a technique, for finding life when it eludes the actor.
CHAPTER IV

JERZY GROTOWSKI: A BRIDGE TO STANISLAVSKI

After Stanislavski, the next prominent theater practitioner to continue his work on physical actions was Jerzy Marian Grotowski. Grotowski was born in Rzeszow, Poland, in August 1933. He was born into a working-class family. His mother was a teacher and his father a park ranger and painter. During the 1950s, he trained at the Acting Department of the State Theatre School in Krakow. In 1955, he received a scholarship to study directing at the State Institute of Theater Arts in Moscow. There he studied with Yuri Zavadsky, an actor who worked with Stanislavski and Evgeny Vakhtangov (Slowiak and Cuesta 3-6).

Throughout Grotowski’s stay in Moscow, he studied the work of two directors other than Stanislavski: Evgeny Vakhtangov and Vsevelod Meyerhold, both disciples of Stanislavski (Slowiak and Cuesta 6-7). Each seized Stanislavski’s principles on acting and directing and added his own ideas to the System. Each started his own theater to present his new ideas, and eventually they both influenced Stanislavski’s work on physical actions. Stanislavski became known for his internal concept, Meyerhold for his external concept, and Vakhtangov for the way in which he combined these concepts (Allen 67-87).
One might say that Vakhtangov and Meyerhold are the figurative bridge between Stanislavski and Grotowski.

Evgeny Vakhtangov

Vakhtangov was born in 1883, the son of a wealthy tobacco merchant. His lonely childhood steered him toward theater. By age eighteen, he had already staged plays and earned favorable critical reviews. He left law school abruptly so that he could study theater. In 1909, he began working with Leopold Sulerzhitsky, Stanislavski’s assistant, and, in time, Vakhtangov joined the Moscow Art Theater, Stanislavski’s home base. Stanislavski founded the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theater in 1911 and established Vakhtangov as its director. From there, Vakhtangov launched his directing career (Gordon 73-75).

Vakhtangov publicly expressed the importance of Stanislavski’s system, but privately he believed it to be flawed. By the end of his life, he addressed his perceived faults in the system by combining Stanislavski’s inner techniques with Meyerhold’s external methods (Allen 83). The areas of Stanislavski’s system he focused on were relaxation and concentration; faith, naïveté, justification; circle of attention; task or action; affective memory; tempo; and communication (Gordon 75-79). Vakhtangov’s goal was “the creation of an acting technique that was both outwardly stylized and internally realistic” (Gordon 80).

Relaxation and concentration were the first principles Vakhtangov modified. Stanislavski stated that tension prevented the actor from doing. Vakhtangov disagreed completely. He believed that tension led to nervous ticks
such as playing with one’s hair or fiddling with an object like a cigarette. The nervous ticks prevented detailed and stylized acting (Gordon 80). In terms of concentration, Vakhtangov stressed this principle more than Stanislavski did. He said that an actor needs an object of attention at all times; the mind needs something on which to focus. He pointed out that even a bored man in a doctor’s office has an object of attention. It could be a magazine, a watch, or even the man’s own daydreams. The benefits to having an object of attention, according to Vakhtangov, are two-fold: 1) the actor avoids becoming self-consciously aware of the audience’s glare, and 2) the actor’s heightened state of attention enhances the audience’s attention to the performance and the play (Gordon 81).

The second change Vakhtangov made in Stanislavski’s System involved faith, naivety, and justification. Stanislavski believed that justification came by way of the character; an actor’s motives are justified by the character’s needs, wants, and objectives, in relation to the circumstances of the play. Vakhtangov reached a different conclusion: to create a constant faith or naïve belief in the importance and truth of a production, an actor must justify their particular presence on stage and the reality of each moment occurring in the theatre (Gordon 82). Vakhtangov believed an actor could not always justify the character’s actions with the circumstances of the play, but the actor could use the present circumstances. For example: a director tells an actor to jump through the window. The actor cannot justify why the character would jump through the window. According to Vakhtangov, the actor, in order to preserve the dynamic truth, needs to justify this action for himself. The actor’s justification can be
logical or complete fantasy. In this situation, the actor could validate the jump by thinking, “The director is an idiot, and so I’m going to pretend the window is the director, when I jump through it.” Or he could use off stage clicking sounds to envision a tiger in the room, and the only escape is through the window. The rationalization or justification does not have to be related to the play but it needs to connect to the actor’s present circumstances (Gordon 81-84).

Circle of attention was Vakhtangov’s next notable amendment to the System. Vakhtangov used Stanislavski’s ideas concerning circle of attention, but added the use of hands and imaginary objects. Stanislavski had his actors focus on real objects on the stage with their eyes. Vakhtangov allowed actors the use of hands to employ imaginary objects. Therefore, the actor’s focus or concentration could be on a real or imaginary object (Gordon 84).

Action, or the task, is Vakhtangov’s next noteworthy alteration. He divides the task into three parts: the goal, the desire, and the adjustment. The goal is “why the actor comes on the stage” (Gordon 84). The desire is “what the actor wants” (Gordon 84). The adjustment is “what the actor must do, based on the circumstances of the play or the direction” (Gordon 84). For example, if the goal of an actor is to escape a captor, and the desire is to run, yet the director tells him not to move, the actor’s adjustment might be that he is too scared to move. The adjustment allows the actor to keep with the director’s vision, while still being truthful to the character’s needs. This wrinkle is a slight departure from Stanislavski (Gordon 85).
Vakhtangov’s next modification concerns affective memory. He knew an actor could not simply force or conjure up a genuine emotion at will. He also knew that when an actor does produce a genuine emotion, it can linger with the actor into subsequent scenes, where the emotion may be incorrect. Vakhtangov’s solution was for the actor to use remembered emotions--affective memory. If an actor needs to produce an angry emotion, he can remember the moment when his car was vandalized or when his sister slapped him. The actor can then modify the emotion to match the scene. The more an actor practices affective memory, the better he becomes at summoning and controlling stage emotions (Gordon 85-86).

Vakhtangov’s addition to Stanislavski’s ideas on the subject of tempo is slight, but important. Vakhtangov understood that every person and every situation has its own rhythm. An actor’s job is to understand how the circumstances affect the character’s actions: when Cinderella hears the clock striking midnight, her tempo accelerates. The director’s job is to understand the rhythm of the play because that is the key to presenting the play (Gordon 86-87).

Communication is Vakhtangov’s final tweak to Stanislavski’s system. Vakhtangov put more importance on being in the moment than Stanislavski did. He understood that the audience is moved by the actor’s performance. If one actor does something unplanned, the other actor has to react to the new action rather than pretend that nothing happened. For Vakhtangov, communicating the direct reality is the priority of the actor (Gordon 87-88).
Vsevolod Meyerhold

Karl Theodore Kasimir, who would later change his name to Vsevolod Meyerhold, was born on January 28, 1874, the youngest of eight children. His father was a German businessman and his mother a patron of the arts. Ignored by his parents, especially his father, Meyerhold was left on his own, and spent much of his early life befriending the social fringe around his home. He took pleasure in popular traveling fair shows, which would influence much of his later work. Not long after his father died in 1892, Karl renounced his German citizenship, became a Russian citizen, and changed his name to Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold. A few years later, he married and started studying law. After earning a law degree he flirted with becoming a musician, and when that did not work out, he started studying drama at the Moscow Philharmonic Society with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. After completing his drama degree, he was immediately invited by Danchenko and Stanislavski to become a founding member of the Moscow Art Theater. From there he became a successful actor, director, and teacher in his own right (Leach 1-3).

An examination of Meyerhold’s ideas reveals how they permeate Grotowski’s work as well as the work of Bertolt Brecht and others.

By the early 1920s Meyerhold had discovered and utilized virtually every device of the theater we now associate with Weimar Germany, especially with Piscator and Brecht. The half-curtain, the use of projections, the refusal to hide the artifacts of the theater – brick walls, electric lights, and so on – the snapping on and off of the house lights, the bright stage lighting, the use of music and song, the striving for few but telling properties, the refusal to ‘identify’ the actor with the part, the formal groupings of actors on the stage, the breaking down of drama into episodes, the
willingness to adapt a given text, ‘montage’ not ‘growth’, ‘each scene for itself’ in a ‘narrative’, not ‘one scene making another’ in a ‘plot’, all these and more were employed equally by Meyerhold and Brecht, but in every case the Russian preceded the German by years (Leach 170).

Brecht and Meyerhold knew each other, observed each other’s work, and had several acquaintances and colleagues in common. The revolutions and wars during their time helped Brecht find fame and led Meyerhold into relative obscurity. Brecht traveled throughout Europe and America spreading his ideas, and Meyerhold eventually became a misunderstood enemy to his own government and had his ideas literally locked away (Leach 170-171). Some years later, a young Polish drama student, Jerzy Grotowski, would find a way to read Meyerhold’s forbidden documents (Slowiak and Cuesta 7).

To better understand Meyerhold, it is necessary to show where he and Stanislavski diverged in their philosophy on acting. Stanislavski’s intention was for his actors to keep their attention on the stage and not the auditorium; the actor’s circle of attention does not extend beyond the footlights. Meyerhold, however, believed that the theater has four dimensions: the playwright, the director, the actor, and the audience. The relationship between the actor and the audience is essential and allows the circle of attention to cross the footlights.

The basis of Meyerhold’s theater is to “start the spectator’s brain working, to stimulate his feelings, and to steer him through a complex labyrinth of emotions” (Leach 30). He goes on to say that his productions were never complete until experienced by an audience. When talking about this unfinished process, Meyerhold states, “We do this consciously because we realize that the
crucial revision of a production is that which is made by the spectator” (Leach 31). From this concept, Meyerhold sets out to find a theater that fosters the “creative intercourse” between spectator and actor (Leach 31). His focus is the dynamic energy which connects the audience and the actors.

While Stanislavski and the established theater circle encouraged a quiet reverential audience, Meyerhold was seeking a different type of spectator.

Stanislavski has described how the Art Theatre was ‘faced by an altogether new audience which we did not know how to approach… We were forced to teach this new spectator how to sit quietly, not to talk, to come to the theatre at the proper time, not to smoke, not to crack nuts…” (Leach 34).

After a performance of *The Fairground Booth*, Meyerhold said, “And perhaps the very fact the audience felt free to hoot so violently demonstrates better than anything that the reaction was a reaction to a performance of true theatricality” (Leach 32-33). There is no doubt his adoration for circus and vaudeville-like comedians played into his thinking. Concerning the audience reaction, Meyerhold states:

> If everyone praises your production, almost certainly it is rubbish. If everyone one abuses it, then perhaps there is something in it. But if some praise and others abuse, if you can split the audience in half, then for sure it is a good production (Leach 32).

Meyerhold realized there was no unified audience nor was there a unified performance, because just as the audience is divided by the actors, the audience divides the actors. It was this stimulation and fragmentation that intrigued Meyerhold (Leach 35).
Influence

From his early days watching circus performers to the height of directing farces, carnivals, and mystery plays, Meyerhold wanted the audience to both watch and experience his programs. Productions of medieval plays from Italy, Spain, England, Japan, and China were significant influences because the performers were “marvelous showmen, acrobats, jugglers, clowns, buffoons, [and] entertainers with a healthy sense of grotesque and the ridiculous” (Leach 35). He also employed several revolutionary concepts, which enabled the spectator to experience the performance, as well as support the stimulation and fragmentation. He eliminated the front curtain and the footlights, thereby emphasizing the forestage. “Meyerhold’s arrangement, by breaking the frame created by the proscenium arch, unsettled the spectator-object relationship and implicated the audience member in the dramatic action in a new way” (Leach 38). The house lights were left on so the performers could better draw upon the energy from the audience, and also to keep the audience’s attention from drifting. He tried to build an amphitheater with a steep rake, so the spectator could better see the movement patterns of the performer (Leach 39). The Japanese theater influenced his decision to change the scenery while the stage was illuminated (Leach 38). Meyerhold also loathed intermissions, and went so far as to place performers in the theater lobby to continue the encounter (Leach 36). He utilized aisles as entrances and exits for the performers, placed dancers around the auditorium, and hid “plants” in the audience (Leach 41).
Meyerhold’s intention was to remind the spectator frequently that he was in a theater. He asserts, “We intend the audience not merely to observe, but to participate in a corporate creative act” (Leach 45). He also affirms, “We have to protect the interests not of the author but of the spectator.” He placed focus on the performer and not the play, and he stressed that the audience should take pleasure in the performer as a performer (Leach 41).

To Meyerhold, the audience was indispensable and central, but his passion lay with the actors. “Understanding the ‘actor’s business’ and training young performers in it became perhaps the main labor of his life” (Leach 47). In 1904, he began teaching actors, and by 1905, he was teaching at the Theater Studio, described by Stanislavski as a laboratory for theatrical experiments. Teaching in his laboratory and directing performances in various theaters provided an artistic balance, and served to enhance and enrich Meyerhold’s work (Leach 47).

Movement

Meyerhold created an intensive course of study for his actors. He believed that actors should be proficient in certain skills and should learn movements from gymnastics and mime. Voice work was similarly important to the physical movement, and rhythm became an essential component with exercises based on a musical composition. Commedia dell’ arte was also a pivotal Meyerhold lesson. He said, “The duty of the comedian and the mime is to transport the spectator to a world of make-believe, entertaining him on the way
there with the brilliance of his technical skill…” (Leach 47). His students worked on three-minute versions of plays such as Othello and Anthony and Cleopatra. Movement, he believed, was the most dominant instrument of theatrical expression. Meyerhold described the role of movement in theater:

The role of movement is more important than any other theatrical element. Deprived of dialogue, costume, footlights, wings and an auditorium, and left with only the actor and his mastery of movement, the theatre remains the theatre (Leach 48).

From his earlier work on physical movement, he developed a method called biomechanics: “Biomechanics was not so much a set of exercises or a style of performance; rather, it was what bound the elements of acting together philosophically, psychologically and physically” (Leach 53). Biomechanics teaches three objectives: “self-awareness in three dimensional space, the need for efficiency as well as expressiveness in movement, and the essential rhythmic and dynamic qualities in stage movement” (Leach 53).

Inspired by the scientific methods of Winslow Taylor, Meyerhold created the following formula for acting: \[ N = A_1 + A_2 \] (N is the actor, A₁ is the part of the artist which imagines ideas and instructions to complete the ideas, and A₂ is the part of the artist which performs the ideas). He also expressed this formula another way: “One part of him is the performer, the instrumentalist; another, the instrument to be played on” (Leach 53). He referred to the two parts as the “first I” and the “second I”, or the creative process and technique” (Leach 53).

Biomechanics encompasses more than exercises and style; it connects all the elements of acting together.
Within Biomechanics, Meyerhold stressed several principles. From the Japanese Noh theatre, he borrowed the formula that the “actor is both acrobat and dancer” (Leach 56). The actor’s body is graceful and rhythmical and not ordinary and everyday. He encouraged his actors to do somersaults, leaps, and rolls as well as tap dance, Charleston, and fox trot (Leach 62). Actors became skilled in juggling with balls, clubs, and knives. Observing the Japanese methods, Meyerhold’s actors utilized their hands as an expressive tool. One exercise was called Pandora’s Box. A box is filled with small, simple items like feathers, buttons, toothpicks, and cloth remnants. The actors have to organize, clutch, experience, and play with the items using only their hands (Leach 60).

Meyerhold believed that “the ground of all human art is bodily motion” and that humanity expresses spiritual emotions by using “plastic movement” (Leach 61).

Biomechanics teaches the actor to use the space about him on the stage three-dimensionally, as a definite measurable commodity. Just as his feet measure distances on the floor of the stage as he walks, so the rest of his body is made to use the air about him for a specific effect. Through exercises he is taught to achieve the feeling of the place of the actor in space, time, and rhythm (Leach 61).

One simple exercise, which he used, was to have the actor walk with a cup of water on their head, begin to run and change direction instantly at the clap of the hands. Other exercises trained actors to hold any position, spring from stillness into forceful action, adjust movement patterns to other spaces, direct transitions from big to little movements, and improve one’s center of balance (Leach 61).
The physical pause is a critical concept in Biomechanics. Meyerhold likened the visual pause to a punctuation mark in a sentence; it separates and emphasizes. A type of physical pause is the silhouette where an actor recites lines without moving his body, gaze, or focus. Another silhouette pause is the pose-pause (Leach 59). The pose-pause involves two or more actors meeting and freezing. During this hold, ideas are communicated. Reject is another type of pause. Showing love to someone before strangling him or her is an example of reject, or doing the opposite of the action before performing the action. The concept is best shown in Meyerhold’s exercise *Shooting from the Bow*. In order to shoot an arrow from a bow, the arrow must first be drawn back, and only then can it move forward.

A variation on reject is retard. When the audience feels the action should speed up, the actor does the opposite. He slows the action down (Leach 57). Negation is another type of pause. It is easily explained by taking two steps forward and one step back. Entering the stage while waving off stage is an example of negation (Leach 59). For Meyerhold, the pause is central for establishing rhythm, which will be explored in detail later.

Equally in importance to the pause is gesture. Gestures, according to Meyerhold, explain an intention, justify it, or go against it. Gestures are always intentional and relevant, a part of the rhythmic performance, and passed through the whole body (Leach 59-60). Gestures are not superfluous actions; each has a purpose. The sound of an action contributes to the rhythm of the action, similar
to a hammer pounding out drumbeats. The entire body makes a movement, even if the movement is as small as scratching one’s nose.

Meyerhold incorporated other concepts worth mentioning into his method of Biomechanics. Biomechanics was meant for groups of actors, particularly for pairs. It was a collective training. The exercises were not meant to be performed on the stage; they trained the actor for the stage. Actors were aware of their actions as if they were watching themselves from outside the body. Meyerhold called this self-admiration or mirroring of the self. He and Michael Chekhov both began to teach that actions could be accomplished, “with the quality of rather than with the feeling of” (Leach 65). Studying animal behaviors enhanced everyday actions by adding another layer of quality. Analyzing paintings helped actors learn spatial aesthetics, and watching puppet shows taught actors how to be physically expressive without using the face (Leach 63-73).

Speech in general is not usually associated with physical work, but Meyerhold believed it to be important. Most acting methods blur speech and movement together. Meyerhold took a unique approach by separating the two, leaving the actor to focus on action. Speech merely became, “an illustration of action, a decoration, or a commentary on it” (Leach 77), the “rhythmic texture” of the performance (Leach 78). Much attention was placed on tempi, and speech took on the characteristic of a “verbal gesture” wherein actors created “verbal masks” for their characters (Leach 80). A verbal gesture can be compared to a measure or phrase in music. The measures and phrases added together create
the musical score; likewise, the verbal gestures added together create the vocal score for a performance.

Just as each character must have a vocal score, Meyerhold directed his actors to create a physical score as well. "For Meyerhold’s actor, this ability to create a sequence of self-contained entities is the secret of creating a part" (Leach 80). He equates the verbal and physical score to a brick wall; each entity or action is a separate brick. The audience does not see each brick by itself; they see the wall. The best actions were the actions that displayed the thoughts and ideas either of the character or the scene (Leach 81).

*Rhythm*

The relationship between action and pause perfectly describes Meyerhold’s work. Another way to explain this concept is through rhythm. “A performance of a play is an alternation of dynamic and static moments, as well as dynamic moments of different kinds" (Leach 112). Meyerhold believed everything in the theater has rhythm, particularly the space and the actors. Within the space, the scene design creates rhythm. A cluttered, cramped space creates a different rhythm than an open, barren stage. With actors, the movements and stillness create rhythm both individually and as a group. Meyerhold clearly stated that rhythm is not meter (an actor performing to a beat). Actors need to have the freedom to move with and against the beat as needed (Leach 112-113). He believed that the ability to create rhythm was the best skill a director could possess.
Rhythm was central to Meyerhold’s work, but his ideas did not stop with scene design and the actors’ movement. Western theater evolved from ritual dancing in Ancient Greece, and music and dance have always been a part of theater. Meyerhold’s actors were said to have a dance-like quality, but they did not dance every movement. They mastered the use of the pause, which prevented the performance from becoming a dance. The pauses not only ended movements, but served to begin the next one as well. In addition, the pauses were full of emotion. One observer of Meyerhold’s *Crimes and Crimes* stated that, “the pauses were fraught with unbearable emotion” (Leach 115). Meyerhold’s pauses added structure and value to the performance (Leach 114-116).

Music, much like the pause, was a central element to Meyerhold’s theater. Music was the basis of the rhythm of the performance. His productions all had a rhythmic score just as an opera would have a score, and music was the key to creating the rhythmic score. The music would set the tone for the audience and the movement of the actors. His rhythmic scores included traditional music as well as gunshots, motorcycle engines, and other noise-making contraptions (Pitches 46-49).

Meyerhold also formulated the idea of the montage, which has its origins in rhythm. Sergei Eisenstein wrote the *Montage of Attractions* in 1924. Eisenstein was a scene and costume designer for Meyerhold, and would later become a very successful director in theater and, most notably, in film. (Leach 2004, 4). He wrote his essay on montage while working closely with Meyerhold.
In turn, Meyerhold adapted Eisenstein’s theories on montage for his own purposes (Leach 121-124).

The *Montage of Attractions* was to film and theater what cubism was to drawing and painting. Montage shocked and surprised the audience. It was a collision of ideas, yet Meyerhold did not think of it as such, instead focusing on linking ideas. At the time, audiences were used to seeing a well-made play, much like seeing a realistic painting. When the performance did not flow like a well-made play, the audience was disoriented, similarly to how the world reacted to cubism. Each of Meyerhold’s performances had disjointed episodes or attractions pieced together with links such as music, creating a different kind of continuity and a stirring experience for the audience (Leach 121-125).

From Meyerhold’s death, in 1940, until 1955, when de-Stalinization occurred, nobody dared publicly mention Meyerhold or his work. In this same year, a young Jerzy Grotowski, during a trip to Moscow, cautiously researched Meyerhold and his ideas (Slowiak and Cuesta 3-6). Grotowski collected knowledge and concepts from all of his respected predecessors and, eventually, integrated their ideas into his own work on physical actions.

Grotowski contributed several important ideas to the art of theater. Some of his concepts provide magnificent lessons for the beginning actor. This study will examine some of those concepts, particularly poor theatre, montage, holy actor, score, contact, and sign.
Poor Theatre

Ludwik Flaszen coined the term “poor theatre” in his observations of Grotowski’s critically acclaimed production of *Akropolis* (Slowiak and Cuesta 13). Grotowski adopted the term and poor theatre became one of his most recognized concepts. One of Grotowski’s aims was to define the essence of theater. This task led to his view of poor theatre. Poor theatre has no connection to economics, but it is frugal in design. Poor Theatre removes all unnecessary elements from the theater such as make-up, props, and costumes (Christoffersen 14). After eliminating all unnecessary components, the theater is left with only what is essential. For example, a box may be a prop, but it could be used in a number of ways as a table, a chair, a drum, and an umbrella. Elements like sound must come from the actors or the props, which were present from the beginning (Grotowski 21). After the elimination of the superfluous elements, the true theatrical process becomes more visible. Grotowski postulated that the connection between the actor and the spectator is the basis of theater, stripped down to its bare essence.

Environmental Theater

Environmental Theater is a contemporary term, which encompasses Grotowski’s and Meyerhold’s thoughts on theatrical space. While space certainly affects the physical movement of actors, it can also affect the connection between the audience and spectator. A fundamental concept of Environmental Theater is the use of real space – not used as a theatrical convention or illusion.
Meyerhold’s interest in focusing on the actor’s performance brought him to place actors all around the theater’s space including aisles and in the audience. He also had designs to build a new kind of theater, made for the performer, and included forward thinking ideas like eliminating the proscenium arch. Grotowski, with his interest in a poor theatre, wanted a space, which served the work and disposed of the traditional illusionary setting. Ultimately, he wanted a space where the actor and spectator were compelled to a new responsiveness (Slowiak and Cuesta 16). He accomplished this goal by placing the audience in nontraditional formations, such as above the performing space or in the actual performing space (Christoffersen 14-15).

Holy Actor

While working with the concepts around poor theatre, Grotowski created and investigated the premise of the holy actor. He believed there were two kinds of actors, the holy actor and the courtesan actor. The former seeks to remove all hindrances and obstacles so he can go beyond his own limits. The latter accumulates skills and tools in order to perform, and is motivated by money and fame. The holy actor engages in self-penetration in order to reveal himself more authentically (Grotowski 34-35). Self-penetration is the sacrificing of oneself for one’s art and not for money (Slowiak and Cuesta 20). The path to the holy actor involves three concepts: *via negativa*, *conjunctio-oppositorum*, and the *total act*.

*Via negativia* is “a process of elimination” (Grotowski 101). It is the stripping away of the unnecessary and unessential, so the actor is free to react to
his own impulses. In its purest form, the actor would be devoid of ego (Slowiak and Cuesta 97). The principle of *via negativa* appears throughout all of Grotowski’s research (Slowiak and Cuesta 122).

*Conjunctio-oppositorum* unites two opposite ideas in order to find or create a new one: to understand a hero one could explore cowardice (Slowiak and Cuesta 91). *Conjunctio-oppositorum* also involves the relationship between discipline and spontaneity. Grotowski believed that opposites, technique (discipline) and impetuosity (spontaneity), fuel each other. Together the two opposites allow the actor to transcend the ordinary in a dynamic way (Lavy 9).

Grotowski used the score of actions as technique for the actor. Only within the score of actions is the actor permitted to improvise. The combination of technique and improvisation produces the dynamic result, the extraordinary. The dynamic, extraordinary result guides the actor to the *total act*.

Once an actor eliminates all obstacles, *via negativa*, and transcends the ordinary by *conjunctio-oppositorum*, the actor is able to accomplish the *total act* (Grotowski 93). The *total act* can only be achieved by a holy actor. Therefore, the actor presents *to* the spectator and not *for* the spectator. As Grotowski states:

> It is the act of laying oneself bare, tearing off the mask of daily life, of exteriorizing oneself. Not in order to “show oneself off”, for that would be exhibitionism. It is a serious and solemn act of revelation… It is like a step towards the summit of the actor’s organism in which consciousness and instinct are united (Grotowski 178).

He also explains the concept of total act with the very last words of his seminal book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*:
Before an actor is able to achieve the total act he has to fulfill a number of requirements, some of which are so subtle, so intangible, as to be practically indefinable through words. They only become plain through practical application. It is easier, however, to define conditions under which a total act cannot be achieved and which of the actor’s actions make it possible. This act cannot exist if the actor is more concerned with charm, personal success, applause and salary than with creation as understood in its highest form. It cannot exist if the actor conditions it according to the size of his part, his place in the performance, the day or kind of audience. There can be no total act if the actor, even away from the theatre, dissipates his creative impulse and, as we said before, sullies it, blocks it, particularly through incidental engagements of a doubtful nature or by the premeditated use of the creative act as a means to further his career (Grotowski 218).

The holy actor, via negativa, conjunctio-oppositorum, and the total act are all interconnected and one cannot truly exist without the others.

Montage

The next concept to discuss from Grotowski is montage. Grotowski’s montage and Meyerhold’s montage are similar in concept. For Grotowski montage is a term which simply supplants the word composition (Barba and Savarese 158). Montage is the combining of elements to form a whole. As in the case of a painting by Georges Seurat, each individual dot is unclear until combined with the whole. Once combined together, the whole work creates for the spectator a piece of consequence.

Grotowski worked with two kinds of montage: the script or text montage and the image montage. Grotowski selected texts that were important to him or the actors and restructured and shuffled the text. The rearrangement or montage

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of text clarified the theme or story to the spectator, thus creating a new whole from the bits of the old (Slowiak and Cuesta 90).

Image montage in Grotowski’s work involved combing each of the different actor's actions to fit the performance. Taking the many actions of all actors, he composed them into a fairly coherent whole for the spectator. Late in his life, during the period of work he identified as Art as Vehicle, he experimented with moving the “seat” of the montage from the spectator to the artist (Richards 1995, 122).

If poor theater is one of Grotowski’s most celebrated concepts, his work on physical actions is another. Continuing from where Stanislavski left off, Grotowski refined and sharpened the method of physical actions. His key points concerning physical action are action, score, contact, and sign. Together these elements form a significant part of his life long work.

A physical action is more than movement, more than gesturing, more than activity. Physical action is extraordinary. It is exciting and original, and actions contain an actor’s “desires and wishes” (Richards 1995, 76). Thomas Richards describes Grotowski showing the difference between physical action and activity:

He did so with a glass of water: he lifted the glass to his mouth and drank. An activity, banal and uninteresting, he said. Then he drank the water observing us, stalling his speech to give himself time to think, and size up his opponent. The activity had turned into a physical action, alive (Richards 1995, 31).

The action had a clear beginning, middle, and end, as all three steps are part of an action. Or, as Eugenio Barba describes it, each action has “its own beginning, its own climax, its own end” (Barba 112).
What separates Stanislavski and Grotowski in their work on physical actions is how one discovers the origins of the action. Stanislavski had his actors find their actions by asking, “What would the character do?” Grotowski employed actions through montage and allowed the character to materialize before the spectator’s eyes from the actor’s actions (Richards 1995, 77).

Score

The remarkable aspect of this concept is the score or line of actions. In the same way a musician needs a score to perform, an actor needs a physical score to perform (Grotowski 180). A physical score is a series of actions linked together in an effort to reach a desire or wish. Richard Cieslak, Grotowski’s leading actor, illustrates the score beautifully:

The score is like a glass inside which a candle is burning. The glass is solid; it is there, you can depend on it. It contains and guides the flame. But it is not the flame. The flame is my inner process each night. The flame illuminates the score, what the spectators see through the score. The flame is alive. Just as the flame in the glass moves, flutters, rises, falls, almost goes out, suddenly glows brightly, responds to each breath of wind – so my inner life varies from night to night, from moment to moment… (Barba 130).

The score is the structure within which trained actors search to find spontaneity, the conjunction of opposites. Grotowski said, “Spontaneity is impossible without structure. Rigor is necessary to have spontaneity” (Richards 1995, 82). A score allows the actor to repeat a performance. Each night will be slightly different, but the score provides consistency. After several repetitions, the actor can break down the score of actions further, perhaps dividing each action into two new
actions. This will always give the actor focus and prevent the score from becoming general (Richards 1995, 88). The score is the groundwork and foundation of the actor’s work (Slowiak and Cuesta 65).

Contact

Another vital component to Grotowski’s work is contact. “The core of theatre is an encounter,” stated Grotowski (Grotowski 56). Contact is the encounter between the actor and the partner. It is more than eye contact; it is a meeting (Slowiak and Cuesta 161). The actor is truly seeing and listening to the partner. Although the actor and the partner are following their respective scores during each performance, their reactions will be slightly different from day to day. Reacting to the slight changes, while staying with score, demands an advanced level of improvisation. This elevated level of improvisation cannot exist without contact (Slowiak and Cuesta 65-66). Grotowski urged, “to keep a line of actions from falling into ‘general.’ We should every time keep contact with our partner” (Richards 1995, 81).

Once an action is discovered and repeated, it can be distilled into a sign. A sign “is a human reaction, purified of all fragments, of all other details which are not of paramount importance. The sign is the clear impulse, the pure impulse. The actions of the actors are for us signs” (Slowiak and Cuesta 66). This concept also separates Grotowski from Stanislavski, or rather demonstrates Grotowski further advancing Stanislavski’s theories. James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta state, “In Grotowski’s theatre, the actor’s role is constructed of signs
through which impulses can flow. The sign becomes the exterior form that the spectator perceives” (Slowiak and Cuesta 67). In essence, Stanislavski’s actors observed actions from outside. They were very detailed in their observations, and were careful to note the social conditions or the given circumstances under which the characters operated. There was a certain element of the actor looking at himself attached to this process. Grotowski saw this element, an actor looking at him or herself, to be destructive. His actors developed a line of physical actions, not to imitate life, but rather as a vehicle to find more pure impulses (Richards 1995, 104).
CHAPTER V
TODAY’S ACTIONS

An emphasis on a physical approach to acting was introduced by Stanislavski and further developed by Grotowski. Carrying on their work, Thomas Richards and Eugenio Barbara have already made valuable discoveries and continue to further explore new ideas. Barba (director of Odin Teatret and founder of the International School for Theatre Anthropology), Richards, (Artistic Director Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards), James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta (Co-Artistic Directors of the New World Performance Lab), have written articles and books on their physical actor training techniques. These works include *The Paper Canoe*, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, and *Jerzy Grotowski*. This chapter will touch on some aspects of their most recognized research.

Eugenio Barba

Eugenio Barba, was born in Italy in 1936. After military school, he studied theater in Poland. He left his university to study with Grotowski for three years, beginning in 1961. He was a pupil, an assistant, and associate director during Grotowski’s first period of work at the Theatre of 13 Rows in the small town of
Opole, Poland. In 1968, Barba helped Grotowski publish his book, *Towards A Poor Theatre*. In 1964, he left Poland, after an extended trip to India, and founded Odin Theatret in Norway. The company later moved to its present day home in Denmark. Barba started the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), in 1979 (Turner 1-5).

As a theater practitioner, Barba added many new ideas toward a physical approach to acting. The most significant addition, which encompasses several smaller, yet still vital ideas, is the idea of theatre anthropology.

During the first year of ISTA, Barba established the new field of Theatre Anthropology. Theatre Anthropology involves the study of a “human being in an organized performance situation” (Barba and Savarese 7). “Theatre Anthropology is the study of the pre-expressive scenic behavior upon which different genres, styles, roles and personal or collective traditions are all based” (Barba 9). “This extra daily use of the body-mind is called ‘technique’” (Barba and Savarese 7). ISTA compares and contrasts Western performance ideas with Eastern performance ideas. The comparison helps one recognize one’s own culture and traditions of performance in a defined manner.

Theatre Anthropology is the study of behaviour of the human being when it uses its physical and mental presence in an organized performance situation and according to principles which are different from those used in daily life (Barba and Savarese 7).

In essence, Theatre Anthropology studies the “technique of techniques” in performance (Barba 10).
The purpose of Theatre Anthropology is not only to study performance in a quasi-scientific manner, but also to aid the performer and give the performer more freedom in his work. “Theatre Anthropology is the study of the performer and for the performer” (Barba 13). Barba compares and contrasts two types of performers. He discusses the “occidental” or “North Pole” performers, which can be loosely interpreted as performers from Western culture, and the “oriental” or “South Pole” performers, which describes performers from Eastern culture. His later work uses the terminology North and South Pole performers “to avoid false associations” (Barba 13). For example, classical ballet and pantomime have more in common with Japanese Noh Theater than they do with modern Western theater.

On the outside looking in, the South Pole performer appears to be less free, because the performer creates a performance from an existing code of rules. For example, ballet and Chinese Opera both have very defined movements and positions that the performers must follow. The performer’s virtuosity is identified by how well the defined movements are executed. Only after a long apprenticeship is the work “susceptible to evolution and innovation” (Barba 13). Eventually, the strict structure allows the performer great freedom.

North Pole performers, however, behave in an opposite manner. Defined less by the discipline of a particular performance structure, they are identified by how they approach the material.

S/he will use as points of departure the suggestions contained in the texts to be performed, the observation of daily behaviour, the
emulation of other performers, the study of books and pictures, the
director’s instructions (Barba 13).

This type of performer has many more obstacles to overcome despite the
appearance of more freedom. Since the structure is not supplied, the performer
creates a new structure each time. In essence, the North Pole performer is like a
tourist trained to read and interpret maps, who is dropped in the middle of a
strange city, given a map, and left alone to find a hotel. In contrast, the South
Pole performer is left in a strange city with directions, but no map. One creates a
personal path; the other simply follows the directions.

Theatre Anthropology analyzes three aspects of a performer’s work. The
first aspect is the individual performer and what makes that individual
extraordinary. “The performers’ personalities, their sensibilities, their artistic
intelligence, their social personae: those characteristics which make them unique
and once-only” (Barba and Savarese 7). The second aspect is the commonality
among performers of a specific performance genre, which Barba describes as,
“the particularities of the theatrical traditions and the historical-cultural context
through which the performer’s unique personality manifests itself” (Barba 10).
These first two aspects examine the shift from pre-expressivity to expression.
The third aspect encompasses all performers, at any time or place, or as Barba
says, “…the use of the body-mind according to extra-daily techniques based on
transcultural, recurring principles. These recurring-principles are defined by
Theatre Anthropology as the field of pre-expressivity” (Barba 10). The third
aspect seeks to find what is common within the variety of performance
techniques and how performers use the technique to craft their performances. All three aspects can help in observing performances from any culture or time period in order to better understand one’s own work and to transcend the present.

In order to understand Theatre Anthropology, one must first understand Barba’s concept of pre-expressivity. If the expression or the performance is the result, pre-expressivity or the pre-expressive level is the process. According to Barba, “Theatre anthropology postulates that there exists a basic level of organization common to all performers and defines this level as pre-expressive” (Barba and Savarese 187). Pre-expressivity cannot exist outside of the performance nor can it exist by itself, because it is intertwined with the expressive.

An analogy can be found in high-level athletics. When one sees a professional athletic contest involving teams from Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, or the National Football League; ones sees athletes playing at their highest level. These athletes make astonishing plays with great ease. Spectators see the results of years of work. They generally see one team win and one team lose. What they do not see is the process, which produces the seemingly effortless performance they witness on game day. Athletes practice. Their preparation includes such things as mastering precise fundamentals, developing plays and strategies, and watching films of themselves and their opponents. The average spectator does not see the minute adjustments in form or the anticipation in the mind of an athlete; the spectator
sees only the result. Like the professional athlete, the performer works on many aspects to achieve the final results of a performance. Michael Jordan has said many times he worked just as hard or even harder in practice than he did on game day; there was an organized process for reaching his goals. The intriguing element is when there is no separation between practice and the game.

Similarly, a performer’s work requires no separation between rehearsal and performance. During rehearsal, one must work to improve certain aspects of individual performance. Theatre Anthropology not only studies how the results were attained but also “the way in which results work” (Barba 108).

Barba speaks of several recurring principles existing in every performing art and he declares that the fundamental duty of Theatre Anthropology is to investigate these principles. The key recurring principles Barba has found in all performance activities include daily and extra-daily behavior, balance, opposition, omission, equivalence, and the decided body. These principles describe and characterize the performer. While North and South Pole performers have different techniques, they have these principles in common. Therefore, all performers are defined by these principles and how they use them rather than their techniques (Barba 15).

People move and act differently on a daily basis than when they are performing. Typically, movement in daily life is efficient and has little if any wasted energy. A performer during a performance tends to do the opposite. In every movement, he uses all the vigor he can muster, resulting in an extravagant use of energy. This can be seen in the Japanese expression *otsukaresama,*
which is said to thank performers after a show. It means, “You have tired
yourself out for me” (Barba and Savarese 9). Using excessive, unnecessary
energy does not necessarily make a movement extra-daily. An acrobat, athlete,
or martial artist uses copious amounts of energy, but something is missing in
their performance. Such performers amaze and astound the spectator, but
communicate little. A performer’s movements, which are extra-daily, “literally put
the body into form, rendering it artificial/artistic but believable” (Barba 16). While
daily life movement merely communicates, the performer’s body communicates,
amazes, and informs.

One way a performer can use extra energy or be extra-daily is through
balance. Balance is “the human ability to keep the body erect and to move
through space in that position,” and it “is the result of a series of relationships and
muscular tensions” (Barba 19). If performers walk differently from their usual
way, they jeopardize their balance. When they walk a different way, their bodies
react and counter the awkward movements. Thus, more energy is used. Extra-
daily technique for the performer is to keep an unsteady balance. “When
standing erect, we can never be immobile. Even when we think we are
motionless, minute movements are displacing our weight” (Barba 19).

In order to keep balance there must be tension. There are two opposite
forces working against each other. Force or energy comes in two forms, kinetic
and potential. Kinetic energy is water flowing in a river, while potential energy is
water behind a dam. “Energy… is the consequence of the tension between
opposing forces” (Barba and Savarese 12).
The next of Barba’s principles is opposition. Opposition is the tension between a performer’s daily life and his extra-daily life. An example of opposition might be seen when a performer leans a little left before walking to the right. Opposition uses both kinetic and potential energy. An example of when a spectator sees the kinetic energy of opposition is when a performer playing a drunk struggles to keep balance. Another example of potential energy of opposition exists in a moment such as one in which a performer standing on one leg attempts to remain relatively motionless; there is a great force of opposition as the body fights gravity. Opposition is also described as a ballerina disguising her weight and power in order to appear light and graceful (Barba and Savarese 13).

From the principle of opposition comes the principle of omission—eliminating or simplifying in order to clarify, expound, and illuminate. Like a cartoon in a newspaper, very little is said in order to make a big point. A comic strip is the product of many eliminations and simplifications (Barba and Savarese 175).

Picasso once said, “Art is the equivalent of nature” (Barba and Savarese 95). Picasso, like many artists, believed art and nature were equals. Art is not the reconstruction of nature, and the principle of equivalence follows the same idea. Equivalence means to find another way rather than imitate life. When a person pushes a large, heavy box, his weight and force go toward the box. If a mime were to move an imaginary box of the same proportions, weight and force go to the ground. The mime has to adjust because, in fact, there is nothing to
apply weight and force against. The mime must find an alternative way to
distribute weight and force. Though the mime appears, to be pushing a large
heavy box, this action is not an imitation of life. It is an entirely unique action.

The last of Barba’s principles is the decided body. A decided body
encompasses all of the previous reoccurring principles. The distinction Barba
makes is that at this point, the performer uses the principles without conscious
thought. “When a performer has learned, as second nature, this artificial way of
moving, s/he appears to have been cut off from everyday space-time and seems
to be ‘alive’: s/he is decided” (Barba 34). Danish physicist Niels Bohr found a
way to better understand this concept. Bohr was an avid fan of Western films.
While watching the films, he noticed that the gunfighter who drew first usually
died. Intrigued by this theory, he tested it. He found some squirt guns and
coworkers, and they dueled for hours. What he found was that the person who
drew first lost because he had to decide to shoot. The second person was faster
and won because he did not have to decide. He was decided (Barba and
Savarese 35).

Thomas Richards

Another person influenced by Jerzy Grotowski is Thomas Richards.
Thomas Richards is the son of famed theater director and educator Lloyd
Richards. In 1984, during Richards’ senior year at Yale University, he attended a
workshop led by Richard Cieslak, Grotowski’s leading actor for many years.
Cieslak amazed Thomas, and the workshop was a turning point in the young
man’s life. Over the next couple of years, he attended Grotowski’s seminars and workshops both in California and Italy. When, in 1986, Grotowski moved his operations to his Workcenter in Italy, he asked three people from California to accompany him. Richards was one of them. There, Richards and Grotowski launched a partnership which lasted many years. Together the two men commenced the final phase of Grotowski’s work, Art as Vehicle. A few years before Grotowski’s death in 1999, Grotowski changed the name of his operations to the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards (Richards 1-7, 2008).

Grotowski envisioned Art as Vehicle at one end of the performing spectrum. The other end is art as presentation. Art as presentation is what the public considers theater. The performance is created with the audience in mind and the performance is for the viewer. Grotowski said, “to some degree the performance… is in the perception of the spectator” (Richards 1995, 120). Grotowski also said that Art as Vehicle “looks to create the montage not in the perception of the spectators, but in the artists who do” (Richards 1995, 120).

This type of rigorous, precise work is for the doer. Richards would add:

In our work, we are not looking to make what might be conceived of now as a ‘public performance,’ but I also don’t want to say that this type of inner process cannot exist in an event that someone might consider to be a kind of theatre. It could (Richards 2008, 10).

Richards elaborates more on Art as Vehicle when discussing Action, his work from this period: “Action is in some way a performance. It can be seen. But is it done just to be seen? No. The moment be done just to be seen, it would lose
contact with its original intention, with the reasoning for doing” (Richards 2008, 29). Art as Vehicle is not for the viewer and is performed independent of a viewer. The actor-spectator relationship is not necessary for Action.

However, viewers have been allowed to witness the work. A witness may see something in the structure, which leads to an inner movement. Grotowski referred to witnesses watching and having a reaction as induction. He took the idea of induction from the physics of electricity, “the process by which a body having electric or magnetic properties produces magnetism, an electric charge, or an electromotive force in a neighboring body without contact” (Random House Dictionary 2006, s.v. “induction”).

Although Art as Vehicle was explored by both Grotowski and Richards, Richards is at the center of it now. Recently, Richards has taken new steps with Art as Vehicle. He regularly has allowed witnesses to see Action, the first opus of this period. He and his chief collaborator, Mario Biagini, have started a new work, The Twin: an Action in creation. An exciting element of this work is allowing witnesses to see the process of creation (Richards 2008, 143).

Two ideas are converging at this point in the work. In the beginning of Art as Vehicle, the work was considered sacred. To keep the work sacred, only a few carefully selected witnesses or viewers were invited in order to keep outside pressure of performance from affecting the doer’s work. After a while, however, the need to reveal arrived. There was a need to share the work and research, and to keep it from becoming mechanical (Richards 2008, 144).
Richards says that the challenge with opening the work to the outside is the pressure which exists when “performing” before witnesses (Richards 2008, 144). The pressure can block or impede the work being done. While working on *The Twin: an Action in creation*, Richards confronted this issue. His intention was to deal with the “excitement”; learning to advance his work rather than impair it. The need to share the work merging with the excitement issue of being seen was a new phase of Art as Vehicle (Richards 2008, 143-145).

Along with Art as Vehicle, Richards and Biagini recently developed another area of research called *The Bridge: Developing Theatre Arts*. The Bridge is an opportunity for newer members of the Workcenter to “strive to strengthen and develop their craft” (Richards 2008, 128). In the same way as the beginnings of Arts as Vehicle taught Richards and Biagini “how to construct living lines of actions with clear meaning, discovering the power behind the combination of organicity and tempo/rhythm,” The Bridge creates a framework to teach the Workcenter’s newest partners (Richards 2008, 128).

The main difference between Art as Vehicle and The Bridge is where the seat of the montage resides. In both, the doing is for the doer. The difference occurs because in The Bridge the montage is for the viewer.

In project The Bridge, we are creating works that take the presence of the spectators into account in another way. The montage of an opus created within that project is partly directed toward the perception of the spectators, revealing to them a kind of dream, let’s say, guiding their experience (Richards 2008, 127).
Tickets can be purchased and seats reserved for the work of The Bridge, as in a traditional theater performance. Art as Vehicle does not always have an audience, but if it does, the audience is invited.
CHAPTER VI
A PRACTICAL ACTION PLAN FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

Teaching someone how to perform is like teaching a student how to bake. Anybody can grab a box of cake mix from a store and have a reasonable result. Some people have similar notions about acting. It can’t be too difficult; just grab a play and start speaking. While it may be possible to have a reasonable result, there is no comparison between a cake from a box made by just anybody, and a cake created from scratch and prepared by a world-renowned chef. What distinguishes a great baker from a bad or good baker is not just knowledge, but technique. American Heritage dictionary defines technique as “the way in which the fundamentals, as of an artistic work, are handled.” In order to be a great baker or actor, one must first learn the fundamentals. Second, one must learn how to handle the fundamentals.

This chapter suggests fundamentals and exercises designed to develop a physical approach to teaching acting to secondary school students. This chapter is a starting point, a suggested outline. Just as there are many different ways to bake a cake, there are many different approaches to acting. The intention here is to provide the most essential ingredients and some ways in which to prepare
the ingredients. The students will create their own recipes; they will develop their own techniques.

No two students are exactly the same. How and what they learn will also vary. The exercises included here can be adjusted to fit individual student and teacher needs. The work is divided into four quarters rather than into daily or weekly lesson plans to allow for more flexibility. In addition to the four quarters, the first day and warm-ups are given special attention.

First Day

The first day sets the tone for the entire course. Boundaries and rules are explained, outlines and syllabi are distributed, and questions are asked and answered. The first question should be: Who are you? Everyone, including the instructor, introduces themselves and says a few words about who they are and where they come from. Propose other questions to the students: Why are you taking this acting class? What has led you to this class? What do you expect to gain from this class? These questions give the instructor a very rudimentary idea where the students are in their abilities as well as their goals and expectations for the course. Next lead the discussion toward the question: what is technique? State that all acting techniques and approaches have their place. What works for one actor may not work for another. The course work does not define the “correct” technique. Instead, it is designed to open new possibilities of how to work as an actor. After the initial discussion is complete, define the tone, rules and boundaries of the course.
Silence is golden. After the introductions are complete, explain and initiate silence. Once a student enters the classroom, there is no more socializing including giggling, joking, rolling the eyes, making faces, or anything of the like. There is no question asking or general commenting. If a student has questions, encourage the student to work through obstacles. It is suggested to try to extend the silence into breaks as well. Silence helps students keep their minds clear and focused and encourages them to answer their own questions, avoiding spoon-fed answers. While silence is maintained, writing in a journal provides the students with a creative outlet for communication (Slowiak and Cuesta 120-121).

An actor’s job is to remember. An important part of being an actor is remembering lines, intentions, actions, and circumstances. Beginning actors, as well as seasoned actors, cannot remember everything, so they write down what they need to remember. Keeping a journal is critical and every student should be required to keep one. Dedicate the journal for this course only. The student will chart their creative process throughout the program. The journal will become a constructive reference of the work, a record of choices. In most cases, near the end of class, set aside time for the students to record their work, discoveries, and observations. In order to encourage the students to be completely open in their writings, do not evaluate the journals (Appel 8).

As silence keeps the social clutter out of the students’ thoughts, cleanliness of the space keeps physical clutter from distracting the students’ actions. Dirt and debris is not only potentially dangerous, but also expressively
confining. An actor needs to feel free to roll and crawl on the ground. If there is a place to hide, the students will avoid confronting themselves. The space must be void of junk, muddle, platforms, desks, backpacks, costumes, and anything else not pertinent to the work. If the space is spotless, the students will be more at ease to do and take risks. Take the initiative to straighten and tidy up the space, so that clean-up becomes a part of the daily warm-up (Slowiak and Cuesta 119-120). There should, of course, be no eating in the space and cell phones and other media devices are to be left outside. The theater is a special place, a temple to imagination, and needs to be treated as such.

In keeping with the elimination of the unnecessary, proper dress is imperative. In order to work with the body, one needs to be able to communicate with one’s body. Hence, street clothes are prohibited; close-fitting, snug clothing used only for training work and for creative work is appropriate. A solid, neutral color like black is ideal. Long hair should be pulled back from the face. Wearing jewelry is prohibited for safety reasons. Necklaces can catch fingers and rings can scratch. Removing external decorations also helps free the body. A person can hide behind a ring, a watch, some hair, or a baggy shirt. Removing these items can sometimes be emotionally difficult, but the subtraction helps allow new discoveries to form (Wangh 39-42). Do all training work in bare feet; since shoes limit what the feet do (Appel 7).

Attendance is necessary and critical. Even if students are feeling a little weak or unwell, encourage them to work through it. Obviously, if there is a danger to themselves or others, they should not attend. Often lessons are built
upon one another, and missing a class sets students back. This is a practical class, like a lab, and recreating the lesson’s work is tricky. One absence and the momentum and rhythm of the class will be lost. Likewise, tardiness is prohibited. Arriving late, students disregard proper warm-ups and disrupt the other students’ activities. Beginning again for tardy students only wastes more time. Being prompt also means being prepared for the work. Punctuality is essential and respectful.

All of these rules are based on the valuable tenet of respect. The students will work on themselves, be encouraged to take risks, and undertake unfamiliar activities if they feel comfortable. A clean space, silence, and punctuality all help to create an atmosphere of respect. Respect covers all aspects of the work. All students must assist each other to achieve the best possible results. During the class work, the students not being directly worked with watch attentively the students doing the work. The watchers can learn from the impediments and successes of their classmates. Complete attention to the work is expected and required. When feedback is permitted, it must be critical and judicious, but constructive in nature. Do not permit students to discuss their work outside of the classroom. The work as well as the space have a certain sanctity and sacredness. Respect for the craft and the care the craft are absolutely demanded.

Once these policies have been established, the physical work begins on the first day. The first step to the physical approach has the students finding their bodies. Body mapping separates the students’ imagination of the body from its
reality. Asking where is the middle of the body will elicit different answers. Many will say it is the navel, waist, or stomach. In fact, it is the hips. More precisely, where the body bends at the hip joint.

The significance of body mapping is aligning thought with reality. This alignment of thought leads to acceptance of the body. If students accept their bodies, they are secure in their bodies. As Slowiak and Cuesta point out, “Being ashamed of your body or narcissistic toward it both indicate a lack of acceptance of your body” (Slowiak and Cuesta 124). The division of the body and mind leads one to distrust one’s body. If there is distrust in the body, there cannot be trust in oneself.

To map the body, have the students find a place and lie on the floor. Allow each student enough space to stretch without touching another student. Ask questions such as, “Where is the middle of the body?” Without speaking, they indicate on their own body. Correct the students as needed. Ask where the lungs start. Where do they end? Where does the spine start? Where does it stop? Specifically, where do the knees bend, the ankles rotate, the elbows bend, the wrists turn, and the hips bend? Where does the arm start? Where does it end? Where is your heart? Where do your toes start and end? Consult a basic anatomy book to ensure correct answers.

Physical Warm-up

The actor’s daily warm-up opens the student to the subsequent work. Just as a musician warms his instrument before a concert or a sculptor kneads the
clay, actors must warm up properly their instrument— their being. Like the musician practicing scales, a warm-up helps to develop the instrument; it matures the body, mind, and voice. Stephen Wangh discovered with Grotowski, “an awareness of the connections between the body, the mind, and the emotions, an awareness that can be reawakened and strengthened every day as a part of the warm-up process” (Wangh 8). A high-quality warm-up will include physical, mental, and vocal work. The purpose of the warm-up is to bring energy and focus to the actor and to get these three aspects of an actor to work together, connect, as one entity.

The daily warm-up serves more than stretching and limbering up muscles, more than gaining concentration, and more than loosening the vocal cords. It is about preparing the actor for training, rehearsal, and performance. “A warm-up is a bridge between the conditions of mind, body, and voice you have been using in everyday life and the conditions of mind, body, and voice you need in order to act” (Wangh 36). What one actor needs on one day may be different the next day. For example, an actor entering rehearsal after riding a bike may need less physical warm-up than the day he spent sleeping before class. “A warm-up is a process, one that can keep growing and changing, and one that you must constantly reinvent” (Wangh 37).

The warm-up is no different from any other artistic activity. There must be form and structure, but also fluidity and freedom. Rules are good, but in art it is also good to break the rules. A great actors employ both structure and freedom. Students may need to link their bodies to their minds or vice versa. To bring their
minds to their bodies, they may need the structure of yoga to center themselves one day, but they may need to run energetically around the room to join their body to their mind the next. Once connected, the actor needs to maintain the connection. For instance, actors may realize their voices need priming. Then they may notice their legs are stiff and they must adapt to keep both their voice and legs ready for their work.

Don’t make the warm-up an unpleasant task or duty. “It is a questioning process and a gift you are giving to yourself” (Wangh 37). Although students need to be taught the warm-up process, it will become their responsibility to find and take care of their own needs.

The first part of any warm-up is finding a safe space. It is necessary for an actor to feel comfortable. The goal is to remove all obstacles, which block access to creativity. For that reason, take the necessary time to find a safe place. Allowing actors to find their safe space gives them control. This external exercise helps actors “develop an awareness of the connection between your external choices and your internal feelings - the perception that something as simple as moving your body from place to place can have an immediate effect on your mental and emotional state” (Wangh 11).

To find a safe place, direct students to spend a few minutes walking and exploring the room. Have them test the first spot they choose by sitting, rolling, standing, and jumping in the spot. Ask them to pay attention to how they feel in this spot and to notice the environment of the spot. For example, is it light or dark? Ask them to try testing other places, including places near walls and away
from walls. Ask other related questions: Is facing away from the others better or worse? Where is the most comfortable space for you today?

Once a safe place is found, the next goal is for the actor to center himself by joining the mind and body. The most common process involves respiration. Having the students lie on their backs and focus on their breathing quickly helps align the body and mind. If a student is unable to center himself, do not panic. The entire warm-up is designed to center the student eventually.

After the students are in their safe places and are focused on their breathing, allow them to physically loosen up their muscles in a manner comfortable to them. This may mean some yoga stretches or sports calisthenics. It does not matter what type of exercise they use as long as they are physically doing something to engage their muscles. Remind them to keep breathing.

While on the ground breathing, encourage the students to relax. Then ask them to contract and relax all of the muscles in their bodies. Experience the dissimilarity between tension and relaxation. Pay attention to the enjoyment of the release. If an actor is too relaxed, he will be lethargic and uninteresting on stage. Find a balance between tension and relaxation, and release any superfluous tension. Unnecessary tension uses valuable energy and turns into an obstacle. Ask each student to mime picking up a chair. Where are the tensions? Then actually pick up a chair. Were your assumptions correct? Were there more tensions or less? Ask the students to act out some daily routines like opening a window, sweeping the floor, and brushing their teeth. Where is their tension? What tension is needed? What is not? Dig a hole. Crawl into it.
Focus on the tensions throughout the body including the back, fingers, neck, knees, hips, and toes. Remind them throughout the warm-up process to release unnecessary tension (Benedetti 1998, 17-18).

Try the following exercises while working with tension and relaxation.

“The container” is a simple improvisation. Place the students on the floor and curl them in the fetal position. Explain they are in a container in which escape is difficult, like a box buried below the ground. They should keep their eyes open. Encourage them to try and escape. Once they breakout, they will find themselves in another slightly larger container. They must find a way out. Provide fifteen minutes for this exercise. If this exercise proves too difficult for the students, turn their focus to a container around a body part like the hand (Wangh 104).

“The kiss” is an exercise in relaxation. Begin while standing or kneeling and direct them: let your body be kissed, trust your impulses, keep your eyes open, and “see” the images. Spend fifteen minutes with kissing. If a student is uncomfortable, try starting with just one body part being kissed like a finger (Wangh 104-105).

Turn the focus of the warm-up to individual body parts. Ask the students what their feet need. Perhaps it is running on a beach. Running on a beach may not be an option, so encourage them to imagine a beach and run. Maybe the toe joints need rotation, or a quick massage is in order. Continue this approach with the ankles, legs, knees, pelvis, abdomen, chest, arms, hands, wrist, shoulders,
neck, mouth, and eyes. Some parts may need very little attention, others a lot more. Allow time for the students to move through their entire body.

Once the muscles and body parts are awakened, a few basic yoga stretches help to coordinate breath, body and mind. The first exercise is Child’s Pose. This pose begins with the knees on the ground, slightly wider than hip distance, and the big toes touching. The forehead is on the ground, the body is folded onto itself, and the arms are extended and active. While it is a resting pose, Child’s Pose also stretches the lower back, and spreads the shoulder blades.

Following Child’s Pose are the cat and cow stretches accompanied by breathing. Assuming a position on hands and knees begins these stretches. “Cat” is the back is arched up, head is dropped down, and exhaling all the air out, to assist with the arched back. “Cow” is the back in an exaggerated “u” shape toward the ground, and the head is up while inhaling. Cat and cow follow a slow and deliberate breathing pattern. These exercises awaken the lower back and coordinate movement with breathing.

The next exercise is Downward Dog. The feet are hip distance apart, the legs are extended, and the arms are extended shoulder distance apart. The body is in an inverted “v” shape. Participants are asked to focus on the alignment of their arms, to straighten the back, and to “pull” the hips away from their hands. Even the palms of the hands are engaged, along with the rotation of the arms – in order to spread the shoulder blades across the back. For many, the heels will not reach the ground, “pedaling” the heels up and down while
bending the opposite knee will stretch the calves, and help the heels reach closer to the ground. While this is a simple pose, there is a lot to be aware of, and many tiny alterations are made in order to awaken different parts of the body.

Ask participants to walk their feet up to their hands, which brings them into a standard position of “touching your toes.” In the beginning, many students may not accomplish this stretch. Ask them to clasp each opposite elbow, dangle their head, and sway their torso back and forth. The emphasis is on being rag-doll limp. From here direct them to roll up to a standing position, vertebra by vertebra, until they are fully upright. Hands should be open, facing forward; the shoulders rolled back; the feet hip distance apart, and the tailbone down. This is an active standing position, and the eyes can be closed.

Now move into a series of Sun Salutations at each student’s own pace. The emphasis is on correct posture, openness, and movement with the breath. Once this is completed, participants resume the standing prayer pose with eyes closed, set an intention, bow, raise the head, and slowly blink the eyes open.

The Sun Salutation begins with the student standing, feet hip width or ankles together – whichever feels more stable and centered. Hands can be by the side, palms facing forward, or in prayer position at your heart. Shoulders are back, tailbone is down, and the back of the neck is long. Take several centering breaths here. From this position of stability, inhale and stretch the hands out to the side (as if you’re giving the world a hug), extending them up over the head, both hands facing in toward each other. Shoulders are down in the back. Exhale and sweep the hands back down while bending forward at the waist. Fingers
touch the ground. If they do not comfortably reach, rest hands on shins. Knees can also be slightly bent for comfort. Inhale and straighten the back, pointing the crown of the head forward, while maintaining fingers at the floor or shins.

From this position, exhale and move the body into a push up position, feet hip distance apart, hands under shoulders. The back is in a straight line – tailbone pointing towards heels, the neck an extension of the spine. Still slowly exhaling, lower the body to the ground in one solid line. If this is difficult, the knees can be placed on the ground – the main emphasis is to keep the spine and neck long. While lowering, focus on keeping the elbows back, and lowering the chest before the belly. Inhale, raising the chest and shoulders off the ground – still maintaining length in the back of the neck. Shoulders are still flattened in the back, and not up around the ears. Exhale, the head and chest move back down, fold the toes under, and raise the body into an inverted “v” (downward dog). Palms are shoulder distance, feet hip distance or wider, extending all over. Take several breaths here.

On an inhale, walk the feet up to meet the hands. Exhale the breath out completely. Inhale and sweep the hands out and up, raising the torso in one piece, back straight. Once the hands are above the head, gently look up. Exhale and bring the hands back to prayer, or at the sides of the body, as in the beginning.

The Sun Salutation can be repeated as many times as desired; the exercise becomes meditative when coordinated with the breath. The timing of breath and motion are crucial here, and it takes some time to become
accustomed to slowing down the breathing. If there is not a lot of time to go through a more thorough yoga sequence, doing a set of sun salutations can be very centering.

Balance is the ability to shift weight without losing control. The following exercises help the student to find the body’s center of gravity. Direct the students to lean against a wall and observe their center of gravity. Have them stand on one leg, and then have them reach for a heavy book. How does the body respond? Have the students reach for the stars standing on their toes and stretching as far as they possibly can. Then reach a little further. Eventually, they should close their eyes. They will most likely lose their balance. Do the exercise again, but direct them to focus and see a specific star or point. As they close their eyes, continue to see the point. Are they able to keep their balance longer? Unbalance leads to movement.

The next sets of exercises are based on Grotowski’s exercises corporels. The exercises corporels help the body revisit and remember what it feels like to be aware, to crawl, roll, and to be upside down. Exercises corporels awaken the lower body allowing it to be more expressive. The legs and pelvis become more than weight bearing slaves to the upper body. These movements help students become better actors by finding their inner reactions and feelings, rather than only their gymnastic potential. Attempt the exercises slowly and safely with appropriate gymnastic mats and spotters.

First, while kneeling, try a forward roll, which is essentially a somersault. Take time to notice feelings and thoughts. Then do a forward roll from a standing
position. Next, concentrate on making no noise and making it effortless. Once there is comfort and ease, try increasing the speed. Do the same for a backward roll. If there are more athletic types, feel free to try round offs and cartwheels.

Next, try some headstands. Use spotters and place the mats near a wall for safety, comfort, and ease. Grotowski developed these from hatha yoga asanas (Slowiak and Cuesta 139). The easiest and safest is the shoulder stand. The student has their arms, lower body, and legs in the air. The weight is placed on their shoulders and partially on the back of the neck. The tripod stand is another headstand. The head and the palms of the hand touch the floor forming an equilateral triangle. The lower arms are perpendicular to the ground. The body is then lifted over the three points. From there, the straight-arm headstand is possible. Instead of placing the palms down, the palms are facing up with the arms extended forming a large triangle.

Then there is the elbow headstand. To accomplish this, loosely interlock the fingers of each hand, and place them on the crown of the head. The head and lower arms are placed on the floor with the elbows about a foot apart. Walk the body to the head, tuck, lift your feet, and uncurl for the headstand.

Lastly, try the handstand. Place the palms down on the floor. Walk the body to the hands and lift the feet off the ground slowly extending the feet into the air. Once balance is achieved without the wall, try walking on the hands. Remember to roll out of each headstand. After each headstand, allow a moment to adjust to what just happened.
Once the headstands have been attempted, move to back bends. Kneel on the floor and simply lean back as far as possible while still being able to return to the kneeling position. Then try lying on the stomach. Arch the head back, extend the arms back, and grab the ankles. Rock back and forth. For the more athletic types, stand with the back to a wall not more than a few feet. Have them reach up, then back so their fingertips touch the wall. Walk their fingers down to the ground and back up the wall. Explore the balance and the inner emotion. Style is of no importance here. Take another moment to comprehend what just happened.

The last and most exhilarating exercises are the tiger leaps. Silence is vital as it serves to focus the nervous energy among the participants. Place the mats in a long line, and start by lining up the students at one end. One by one walk across the mats. Then introduce a somersault in the middle of the mats. Accomplish this one at a time. Then encourage them to leave their hands and feet in the air for just a second as they do the somersault. Next as the leader, lie down on the mats and have them somersault over. Maintain a walking pace. Then rise to a crawling position, and have them bound over. Continue to go higher. Ask the students how high they want you to stand. Then alert them you will stand a little higher, but you will duck down before they cross over you. One by one the students will face their demons. During this exercise they will learn fear is not always a negative emotion; it can be turned into positive energy. Acting is about confronting difficulties and transforming them into something beneficial (Wangh 70-73).
Mental Warm-up

As the physical work continues, another aspect will be added to warm-up the mind as well. The next series of exercises is a reduced version of *Watching* created by Jairo Cuesta. This exercise is simplified because most secondary educational institutions have rather brief class durations. *Watching* is an advanced form of the children’s game, follow the leader. As the name states, the exercise is about watching and is executed in silence, including no heavy foot thumping, wheezing, moans, or the like.

Since many classes will be taught in a proscenium theater, begin this exercise by having the students line up in the house of the theater. They wait in a state of readiness. Once the leader, in most cases the teacher, is ready, the group enters the space or stage area. The group moves together as one body. Fill the space, avoiding a circle shape or clumping together. Find the balance between the space and the group. The leader will stop once the balance is achieved. The group stops precisely at the same time and together the group moves to a crouch position. The hands and knees do not touch the ground. Adjust weight more on one foot allowing the possibility to turn (Slowiak and Cuesta 130-131).

This phase of *Watching* is called Control of Space and has three elements. The first is immobility. The group actively sees and listens. Attention is also placed on the “flow of movement inside you” (Slowiak and Cuesta 131). Use only the eyes to control the space. The next element is movement without displacement. Small movements are allowed as the group’s awareness grows
and they become more cognizant of the space and their partners. Subtle movements to look and listen take place. The final element is displacement in the space. Still crouching, the group explores the space. It is not necessary to go far. Always attend to the space maintaining a good balance within the space and assist the others. At the appropriate time, the group stands (Slowiak and Cuesta 131).

The next phase is Pulsation. Now standing, the group moves to the outer edges of the space and forms a circle. Move in a straight line and maintain the balance of the space. If it is incorrect, fix it later. Together the group moves directly to the center, not veering. All arrive simultaneously. Once in the center each person chooses a new direction and walks in a straight line, keeping the circle form. The process is repeated until a balance of space and rhythm is found (Slowiak and Cuesta 131-132).

Running starts the subsequent phase. This is a fast run following a leader. Run with a purpose to or from something. Incorporate the image of wild horses running. Pass to the outside of the group and pay careful attention to silence. This phase ends with the leader bringing the running into a tight circle in the center. Then as one group the ring explodes and each person finds their own space again. Attention to a balanced space is again important (Slowiak and Cuesta 133-134).

A second Pulsation phase begins. The same directives apply here as the first one. Awareness, coordination, balance, participation, and silence are still
being worked. In addition, attentiveness to the others is enhanced. More and more awareness is brought to the partners (Slowiak and Cuesta 134).

Connection-Disconnection launches the ensuing phase. Once the pulsation is in harmony, begin walking about the space. Look for an opportunity to make contact. Make contact with a partner. Contact is between two people and no more. Again this is done in silence, and no touching. The participants find a way to physically express their thoughts. The result may be an organic dance or a movement. Avoid being mechanical or repetitive. Enjoy the connections, but also do not stay attached too long. Tell secrets and share memories, silently, through movement, with these connections. Do not interrupt other connections and remember always to serve the space (Slowiak and Cuesta 135-136).

The Spiral starts the following phase. At some point, the leader ends Connection-Disconnection. The walking moves to a circle, and eventually increases in speed until running is achieved. The loose circle begins to slow down. When a slow walk is achieved, the group will once again find a place in the space, keeping it balanced (Slowiak and Cuesta 136).

The final phase repeats control of space. This time it goes in reverse order. First is control of the space with displacement, followed by control of the space with movement. Finally, Immobility begins. With a deep breath, the group rises and exits the space (Slowiak and Cuesta 136).
The next set of exercises is derived from Grotowski’s *plastiques*. These exercises allow the actor to work between the two poles of structure and spontaneity, and they are a way to explore freely one’s own body.

Each class creates their own version of plastic exercises. To begin, each student develops one exercise. It can come from anything including yoga, tai chi, or calisthenics. Each exercise must challenge a block or weakness such as flexibility, strength, balance, or endurance. Then they teach each other their exercises and refine them by making each one personal and full of life. They must commit them to memory allowing each exercise to become second nature. This is accomplished by doing them in an order, which leads to a smooth flow. The transitions between the exercises are as lively as the exercises themselves. The exercises become the structure, and the flow becomes the spontaneity. Be wary of and eliminate any “heaviness, fatigue, choreography, cheating, senseless repetition, beautiful forms, gestures, athleticness, wandering in the space, staring, attaching to one element, or doing something halfway” (Slowiak and Cuesta 141).

Vocal Warm-up

The last part of the warm-up process is the vocal exercises. The voice is a part of the body and has physical qualities. Voice can touch, grasp, massage, and caress. In a silent room, the slightest sound is heard. When doing silent work, being interrupted by sound is very distracting. In a similar way, voice work
invades someone’s personal space from across a room. Therefore, voice work is a serious responsibility to the actor and their partner (Wangh 150-154).

The foundation to any voice work is breathing. Grotowski named three types of respiration: upper thoracic, abdominal, and total. Upper thoracic respiration is chest breathing. Abdominal respiration is working with the lower lungs. Total respiration begins by filling the lower lungs and then softly the chest. Total respiration is the most sound and useful type of inhalation. However, it may be uncomfortable for some. As long as there are negligible respiration problems, do not try and force total respiration on students. More harm than good may come from trying to change a person’s respiration (Slowiak and Cuesta 146).

The best respiration exercise is breathing! Have the students lie on the floor and breathe while exploring it. Help them find total respiration. Look to see what is blocking their breathing. Breathing is natural and organic. If there are breathing problems, then it is likely inhibiting the actor (Slowiak and Cuesta 148).

After attaining an awareness of breath, add the sound, “ah” during the exhale. As the students lie on the floor, encourage them to open up and discover the vibrations throughout their body. Send their vibrations to a place ten feet below the floor, to the lights in the ceiling, and to other specific places around the space. Urge the students the guide the vibrations through various places in the body like the head, nose, chest, soles, and stomach. At appropriate times have them try other sound vibrations like “mmmaaaa,” “deee,” and “vooo.” Continue this exercise, while pulling their knees to their chest, rolling to one side, kneeling
on their hands and knees, squatting, and finally standing. Eventually move them around the room to examine the vibrations and echoes of the different sounds (Slowiak and Cuesta 152-155).

Sound is vibration. The voice launches from the vibration of the vocal cords and is carried throughout the body. Many parts of the body can vibrate and become a vocal sounding board or resonator. While most actors only use the chest and head resonators, Grotowski found over twenty resonators throughout the body. Grotowski believed using just the two most known resonators was monotonous and forced, so he developed exercises enabling his associates to access other resonators (Slowiak and Cuesta 148).

The following exercises help students find and use the different resonators in the body. Have the students recite a nursery rhyme or a children’s song. After a few repetitions, have the students place one of their hands on the top of their head. Tell them to sing through their hand as if their mouth was moved to the top of their head. Allow them to feel the vibrations. Do the same with the back of the neck at its base, on the chest, stomach, shoulder blades, middle of the spine, and lumbar region. The voice will need to be adjusted. Lower tones work best for the stomach and lumbar. Higher tones resonate best in the chest and head. Other vocal exercises can be created and modified as necessary to warm up the voice (Slowiak and Cuesta 150).

The last part of the vocal warm-up is singing. Grotowski believed singing was the best training for the voice. He recommended singing throughout the day, while doing other tasks. For beginning students the goal is to sing as a
means to open and free the body. It is a chance to disregard any limitations placed on the body from outside sources (Slowiak and Cuesta 155).

Following the first vocal exercises with the students, introduce a traditional song. Select a traditional song from American history and culture like African-American spirituals, immigrant work songs, or songs from wartime. When possible, choose a song whose origin is anonymous. “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” is a good example. One word of caution, some American folk songs have an ugly history. Don’t choose songs that might demean a particular ethnic group or privilege a particular belief system. Teach the song orally. Go phrase by phrase until the group can correctly sing the song. Do not just sing the song, engage it. Think of the song as a meeting with something or someone for the first time. Question the song during the singing. Is it male or female? Is it a person or an animal? Where does it come from? Is it playful? Explore the song’s structure, nature, and continuity (Slowiak and Cuesta 156-157).

Employ physical and vocal warm-ups daily. Spend more time early on developing the correct foundation. Once the students master the basics, feel free to adjust the exercises and develop new ones to meet the individual needs of the class. Also adapt the exercises to prepare the students for the subsequent class work.

One cautionary word on impulses is important to note. Much of the work here is designed to free the body and mind to find impulses. Impulses are wonderful, but they can be dangerous. If an actor has the impulse to punch another actor, the punch can hurt the other actor. The impulse in this case
needs to be channeled into a feasible urge. Perhaps the first actor punches the air next to the second actor or throws a chair. He can even punch with their voice rather than their fist. There are many options for a safe rehearsal (Wangh 33-34).

With warm-ups established, the coursework begins. The work for this course is divided into two semesters: discovering and playing the instrument. The semesters are separated into quarters. Each quarter has two sections of work, conventional and mask. The two sections are written separately, but are designed to be used together. Each class will need different work at different times. Adjust and interconnect the exercises as necessary.

First Quarter

Semester one involves discovering the instrument. Before a musician plays a concerto, he learns many concepts like scales, breathing, counting, reading music, and instrument maintenance. Pieces of music are learned, increasing in difficulty. Once all of the above is mastered, the musician shifts to the concerto. The actor’s journey is no different. The first semester begins with actions, the foundation of acting.

*Actions*

The verb “to act” has many definitions. The two most common and fundamental meanings are “to do” and “to be.” Consequently, an actor, one who
acts, must achieve both doing and being. The first quarter teaches students “to do.”

First, let the students do nothing. Divide the students into groups of five. Give the instructions: one student from each group is to stand in front of the others. Try not to do anything for one minute. Do not close your eyes and do not look above the group’s heads. The others just observe the standing person. After one minute, another person stands and tries to do nothing, while the rest of the group watches. What happened? Did you want to smile? Did you twitch? Were you nervous? What did your body do (Wangh 120)?

Now do the same exercise and embrace each impulse stating: if you want to smile, allow your whole body to smile. If you want to rub your chin, let your whole body rub your chin. By completely doing one impulse, did it reveal another one? Are you spending energy or blocking energy this time? Is energy flowing through you? Are you converting the uncomfortable energy into positive energy (Wangh 124)?

The doings of an actor are actions and are more than mere gestures. Each action has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Actions have a defined purpose. Grotowski said, “Activities are not physical actions,” and illustrated this by drinking a glass of water, “…he lifted the glass to his mouth and drank. An activity, banal and uninteresting, he said. Then he drank the water observing us, stalling his speech to give himself time to think, and size up his opponent” (Richards 1995, 31). Grotowski had turned an activity into an action. Another
key aspect of action is repeatability. The actor has to be able to perform the same action over and over again, precisely.

Four steps is a wonderful exercise, used by James Slowiak, to teach action. This simple exercise begins by the actors taking four steps. Each movement possesses a beginning, middle, and end. Now convert the activity to an action by asking questions: where are you specifically? How does your environment affect your steps? Is it hot? Is there wind? What kind of wind is it? Be exact. Who are you? How does your occupation affect your movement? Is it night or day? Are you hungry? What are you wearing? Do your clothes constrict your movement? If the steps become linked to a memory, it is normal. Look for meticulous details in the memory. Keep repeating these four steps asking these and other questions until there is a sound structure (Slowiak and Cuesta 158).

Now incorporate intention: why are you moving? Are you stepping toward or away from something? What is it exactly? Where are you going? Why are you going there? Is it important? Are the steps guiding you? Each step and the entire action must possess a beginning, middle, and end. What happens during these four steps? Did you achieve your goal, or did you fall just short? How does this affect each step (Slowiak and Cuesta 158)?

Begin to work technically, asking: what are your eyes doing during each step? Are they looking at something? Why are you looking or turning away? Can you see it? Does it hurt to look? Is it bright? Does the air make your eyes burn? How does this affect the way you see (Slowiak and Cuesta 159)?
Finally bring in different circumstances like a director would. During the second step there is a thunderous crash. How does it affect you? During the middle of the third step, a pain shoots up your leg. Now the focus is on the eyes. How can you translate what is happening to your feet through your eyes? Now the performance takes place under water. Keep repeating the score. This precise and detailed way of working creates the action of the four steps. If you keep working this action, it eventually becomes four separate actions, one for each step. Those actions become even smaller actions. In this way, an actor’s work is never completely done (Slowiak and Cuesta 159).

Score

A complete work of music is comprised of sheet music also known as a score. Similarly, a group of actions montaged together is called a score, as is a line of physical actions. Think of actions like being words in a sentence. In turn, the scores are the sentences. A sentence is a complete thought like a score.

To teach the students how to create a score, they will make a score for a song. Each student picks one of the first songs they can remember, which has some substance and is not too trivial. A lullaby or hymn would work well. The song is a complete work. Work in silence and build a score around the song. Ask questions to help them start. What do the lyrics make you want to do? What were you doing when you first heard this song? What were you doing the last time you heard this song? Use questions to spring board the students toward movements, which can become actions. Be precise and repeat often. At first, do
not worry about singing the song. Just do it. After a score begins to emerge, remove unnecessary actions. Refine the actions and make them clear and unambiguous (Slowiak and Cuesta 160-161).

With a score of actions for their song in place, introduce connections and disconnections. Connections are the meetings with partners, real or imaginary. Take two students and arrange a connection during each of the scores. Connect through eye contact. There is a moment of connection, where each student sees the other. Then they disconnect and continue. Initially, the first student does their score while the other watches. The second student does their score, while the first watches. Then they do their scores together finding a way to connect without changing their respective scores. They create a new story, but remain true to their original story. Finally, replace the real partner with an imaginary one. Who does this partner become (Slowiak and Cuesta 162)?

Work on levels. Space is thee-dimensional. Vertical as well has horizontal space must be balanced. Play with levels in the scores. Stand, lie, squat, kneel, and bend. Find the level, which works best for each action.

Start with the students crouching or lying on the floor, begin their respective scores, and work through their scores until standing erect. Do the opposite; start standing and then move to a crouch. How does sinking and ascending change an action? Try adding metaphorical qualities to the actions. Rise like the sun over a desert morning. Fall like a lost feather from a hawk’s nest. Rise like a rocket shooting into the evening sky. Fall like a light pebble in a flowing brook. Adding metaphoric movements to actions, gives valuable qualities
and helps turn normal activities into viable actions. Washing dishes is an activity. However, what if the dishes were washed in frustration? How is that accomplished? What if one is happy? How would the movements differ? By adding the metaphoric movements one communicates before speaking (McDonough 120).

Scale is another part of movement. When an actor plays a role in a large auditorium, they may choose a movement that fills the entire space. The next week they may play the same character in a small classroom, and have to adjust the size of their movements. Another actor plays an old man telling a story of their youth and has to present their youthful movements without looking youthful. In both circumstances, scale of action can be helpful.

Run through the students’ respective scores of action. The second time, do their actions inside a three-foot circle with the same intensity. For example, if one jumps up and runs across the room, this time the student jumps and takes one step. Next do the scores of action while sitting in a chair. Here the student might sit-up straight and swing their knees to the other side of the chair. Now do the actions with just the head. Then just with the eyes. The energy and commitment remains the same (McDonough 122).

After the physical score is complete add the vocal score to it. Keep the imaginary partner. Answer questions, which arrive at this moment. Do I sing and move at the same time? If the song is longer than my physical score, do I stop singing? Adjust to the story, but do not change it (Slowiak and Cuesta 161).
One of the most powerful elements of theater is silence. Silence most commonly takes on the form of a pause. A silent scream is one of many effective ways to use silence. A mother screams when she realizes her baby was murdered. The scream, if silent, can communicate more here than one with sound. Imagination is left to fill the silence much the same way the Ancient Greeks left acts of violence off stage. Human imagination is a compelling ally when acting. Working with their song score, ask each student to insert a pause into their score.

First Quarter Mask Work

The second part of the first quarter is the mask work. Introduce mask work well into the first quarter even coming near the end of it. The mask work primarily originates from three theatrical leaders. They are Libby Appel (former artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival), Anne Dennis (former Head of Movement at Rose Bruford College in London), and Ariane Mnouchkine (founder of Théâtre du Soleil). People often think masks conceal and hide, but the opposite is actually true. Ariane Mnouchkine, an internationally renowned French director, who conducts one of the most widely attended mask workshops in the world, says this about masks:

I think that the mask doesn’t hide the actor but rather the self. In fact, the mask hides nothing at all, but rather reveals. It’s a magnifying glass for the soul, a peep hole in which to see the soul. With the mask, all theatrical laws fall into place (Miller 121).
A mask exposes the actor’s shortcomings. If their actions are not clear, they are uncovered. If their actions are trivial and banal, they appear forged and false. The mask is a wonderful means to discover and refine the actor’s instrument. To work with masks, a space with ample mirrors and a black or neutral curtain, which can be drawn as necessary, is needed.

Selecting the right mask is essential for this work. The masks inspired by Libby Appel’s workshop are ideal. They can be purchased at the Maskery in Indianola, Washington (www.themaskery.com). Otherwise, purchase masks suited for the theater that are able to stand up to the rigors of the class. Seeing the eyes through the mask is vital. A black cloth or the like should cover the mouth of the mask, hiding the wearer’s actual mouth. The mask itself must immediately invoke expressive traits and provoke actions. Commedia dell’arte and Balinese masks are feasible. Avoid neutral masks, and decorative masks. Have more masks on hand than the number of students to allow for some choice and preference (Miller 121-122).

Observe a few ground rules with the masks. Revere the mask. Mnouchkine says, “With the mask it is you who must yield. Seek a humble and loving encounter with your character. Fear of the mask is a wholesome fear such as one might feel when a god descends” (Miller 126). Embrace the mask with care. Do not stick fingers in the eyeholes or place it face down. Handle it from its sides.

The first day of work is a time to meet the mask. Place a mask on one student. The rest of the class observes while the masked student is instructed to
run, jump, crawl, roll, sit, and move about the space. Ask the masked student to make contact with the others. Encourage the students to give their first impressions of the mask and record their first impressions. Ask the following questions: What was your first impression of the mask? Were you drawn to the mask? Why or why not? What happened when the masked student made contact with you? What images appeared in your mind as the mask moved about the space? What happened when the student removed the mask? Give the students a short break and send them out of the room (Appel 98).

During the break, carefully spread all of the masks out around the space. Bring the students back into the space and give them the following instructions: you have this class and the next to examine the masks before choosing one, work silently and alone, record your impressions of each mask, investigate each mask at least once, be patient, thoroughly experience each mask, take risks with them, leave your comfort zone, take time in front of a mirror, do not perform but respond to it, discover what the mask says to you, and really play with the masks in different ways. Be specific and honest in your notes. Lastly, do not discuss the masks or which interests you. Review your notes between classes (Appel 15-16).

Throw questions out to the students during the process. What is your immediate reaction to each mask? How does the silence affect you? Do you like covering your face? Does it change you? Do any of the masks block your imagination or physicality? If so, why? Are you aware of the others in the space? Are you able to direct their presence away from your work? Which
masks provoke you? Which mask is most like you? Which one is not? Why?

Which mask frightens you (Appel 99)?

The students will race through the first few masks before slowing down, and their work will be banal and stilted until they begin to relax. Eventually, the child inside them will take over and they will forget about time and surroundings. Their imaginations will carry them to the end of each class (Appel 17).

At the beginning of the third mask class, invite the students to look over their notes and prepare a few choices for their mask selection. Place the masks on one side of the room and the students on the opposite side. In silence, permit the students, one by one, to choose a mask, find a space, and write down their first impressions. Encourage them to answer the following: Is the mask secure? Does it need an adjustment? What does this mask hold for you? Will this mask tell you anything about yourself? What is your goal with this mask and the work (Appel 100)?

Second Quarter

The beginning of the second quarter opens with monologue work. To this point, the students are able to warm-up properly and create a score of actions. The monologue work will continue to develop their physical approach. To cultivate this work, the correct monologue must be chosen.

Have the students bring to class a few propositions for their monologue work. Give them parameters for selecting a monologue: select an intriguing piece, full of contrasts, from a different time and place, with a character whose
point of view is different from their own. The messenger speeches from Greek tragedies are terrific examples as are many Shakespearean monologues. Avoid sit-com style monologues with a punch line. Look for quality and depth rather than cliché and jokes. Choose a challenging work and stretch the bounds of safety and security. From each of their selections, choose the best one for each student (McDonough 34-35).

Monologue Work

Once the monologues are selected, advise the student to read the play from the monologue. The first reading is for pleasure, the second to understand the play, and the third to discover clues about the character they are portraying. Direct the students to read their monologues several times as well.

Before diving into the actual monologues, assist the students in creating the world of their monologue: Imagine the different situations and conditions of the play. Is one place freezing? How would cold weather affect your movements? Shift to other locations. How is walking different in each place? Explore the many possible physical adaptations the play’s environments cause (Miller 113).

Eventually, move to the scene of the monologue: Where are the entrances and exits of this place? Rehearse going through each one. With your actions, establish the conditions and the situation of the space while entering and exiting. Ask detailed questions. Are you in a small village in Kenya? What time of year
is it? Is it day or night? Who do you see? Where are they? Be specific and avoid clichés (Miller 114).

Starting with the actual monologue, instruct the students to develop a score of actions for their piece. Develop the actions the same way as the first remembered song exercise. Add scale and metaphoric qualities to the actions as needed. Explore different levels with them. Setting the score aside, ask them to reread the monologue aloud and find a place to accelerate the speed of the dialogue as well as a different place in the monologue to slow down. Play with the different tempos, and eliminate the ones not working. After forming waves of acceleration and deceleration, connect the tempos.

Acceleration and deceleration contain three principles. The first, tempo, is changing the rate of the beats. If accelerating, beat one is the slowest. Beat two is shorter than one, but longer than beat thee. This pattern continues until the end of the acceleration. The second principle, opposition, is moving in the opposite direction first. In order to accelerate, slow down a bit before accelerating. The third one, reserve, is to hold back. Always leave a little room to go faster or slower. If you go too fast or slow, you might not be understandable (McDonough 189-190).

Fading is the next area of development. Fading is a blending of energies, and a journey from one point to its opposite. Anything an actor does can be faded, such as rhythm (fast to slow), metaphors (soft to rough), movement (controlled to frenetic), or volume (quiet to loud). Fades use the same three principles as acceleration and deceleration (tempo, opposition, and reserve).
The tempo changes by speeding up or slowing down during the fade. With opposition, movement starts slightly in the opposite direction before continuing. Increasing volume before heading to silence is one example. Leaving room to go a little further in the fade is the principle of reserve (McDonough 207).

Builds are fades with a climax. Each build has its own high point and progressively changes pitch, tempo, and volume. “An action or decision, a realization or admission, perhaps the resolution of a conflict” are possible ways to build (McDonough 213). Stay away from emotional and psychological descriptions for the builds and fades. Instead, use verbs and metaphors to describe the changes (McDonough 215).

Eventually, the builds must descend. Cutbacks and decrescendos are two ways to move down. Cutbacks are abrupt drops and must be used sparingly. Some actors almost reach their goal, but something surprises them and makes them start over and rebuild their fade. A sudden change from one energy to the next is a cutback. The opposite of a cutback is a decrescendo, which is a gradual sliding down. They usually slow down in tempo as well (McDonough 222).

Apply fades, builds, cutbacks, and decrescendos to the monologues. The focus is on doing more and analyzing less. Play with different fades in movements, volume, and metaphoric qualities. Ask if there are emotional qualities to fade. Then look for a build for the scene. Pose the following questions: Is there a cutback or decrescendo? What makes the work clear and understandable?
Emotion

A time will come when one of the students will ask about emotions or feelings, or how to play a particular emotion or feeling. Emotions cannot be acted. Emotions cannot be controlled by the will. They come and go. Answer the students using a physical approach.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a psychologist, William James, and a physiologist, Carl Lange, created a controversial theory surrounding emotions. Instead of saying one cries because one is sad, they essentially said one is sad because one cried. Meaning the person reacts to a stimulus, because of what they are doing; the brain tells them what they are feeling. For acting purposes, the action leads to the emotion, but the action has a stimulus. In order to play sad on stage, the actor must do what sad people do. To go further, Wilhelm Reich developed the theory of body armor. The theory is that people will suppress emotions in their muscles in order to protect themselves, making muscles the key to unlocking emotions. Each person is different and each person has different experiences. There is no universal action for anger or any other emotion. However, if each person asks himself, “What do I do when I am angry?,” then there is a possibility the emotion could appear while doing the precise action. If the emotion does not appear, the actors are at least doing something believable and understandable.

While universal gestures for emotions do not exist, there are some helpful guideposts. Anger is normally stored in muscles located in the jaw and legs. When young children throw temper tantrums, they usually kick and scream. As
they grow older, they are instructed not to show those behaviors, repressing feelings in places, where they were once released. Joy and sorrow live in the chest. Society teaches young boys not to cry, so they puff their chests out to overcompensate, or they crane their necks out, pushing their chest inward. Young women are often embarrassed of their chest being too small or too big. They hunch their shoulders over to hide their chests. These are all ways of placing armor over the hearts. The protection of the heart makes it difficult to show joy or sorrow (Wangh 127-128).

A giggle or a grin may not always lead to happiness; it could be concealing a deep sadness. People hide emotion for a reason, and disturbing it can be risky and unpredictable. The instructor should always be careful and patient. Never take students to places of discomfort or anxiety (Wangh 133).

If the intention is to explore anger, try the Container exercise again. This time focus the work on the legs and lower body. Give the student a stimulus or image with which to work. Be specific. To explore joy, try the Kissing exercise. Focus on opening the chest area. Use an example of a soccer player who wins the match by kicking a last minute goal. She runs, slides on her knees, tears off her jersey, and throws her hands in the air. The instructor should give detailed images to the students (Wangh 127-132).

Images

Images permeate the acting process, and help actors find more life and detail in their actions. Images allow the actors to focus. Actors, who really “see”
images, play with more precise actions. Images are more than the objects seen by the human eye; they are feelings, ideas, and can be determined by any one of the five senses. Images lead actors to make more physical choices. A foul odor leads to a gag. Raining ping-pong balls as an image leads to a different physical choice than raining rotten fruit (Wangh 86-87).

Images stream in two contrary routes. Impulses from the body lead to images, appearing from physical movements like the emotion work previously discussed. Images flow from the body to the mind in this path, and they also flow in the opposite direction. If an actor imagines different sensory circumstances, the images provide different physical choices. An actor thinking the floor is a sheet of ice may decide to slide across the space instead of walk (Wangh 92-93).

The images flow through the body and back to the mind, feeding both and developing two possibilities for the actor: 1) the image becomes clearer and staying with that image offers more physical choices, and 2) the images give birth to new impulses to explore. Choosing either possibility is perfectly fine. Actors tend to lean toward one way or the other, but great actors work with both possibilities (Wangh 98-99).

A great exercise for working images is Image Walks. Start by asking the students to walk around the space. Encourage the students to relax the body as they move. Awaken their imaginations and encourage them to react to images. Stimulate them with images like the ground covered in hot sand, coated with oil and sludge, or inhabited by fire ants. Expand the images beyond the floor by adding freezing rain, bubbles, or strong wind. Finally, make the images unusual
like air thick as molasses, a room full of butterflies, a floor as one giant bubble about to pop, or naked bodies covering the ground (Wangh 92).

Second Quarter Mask Work

After working the monologues for a time, return the class’ focus to the masks. Varying the actor training with the mask work keeps the class fresh. High school students usually possess less developed attention spans than adults and adding variety to the work helps maintain a newness to it.

The next phase of the mask work helps free the actor both physically and personally. While helping to remove the barriers often associated with young actors, imagination is explored; stamina and concentration are expanded; and acting and reacting are taught (Appel 21).

Place a number of chairs equal to the number of students in the space. Feel free to include ladders, boxes, or cubes in the room, if there is plenty of space. Give the following directions: 1) with the masks on, explore the room; 2) do not pretend; actually be in the space; 3) work alone; 4) move in a variety of ways other than walking; 5) enter and exit the door; 6) if there are items in the room, move them using body parts other than your hands; 7) play with the objects, listen to them, look carefully at them, and what do you see?; 8) play with tempo; 9) approach the objects differently, like sideways, for example; and 10) do not stop at anytime (Appel 23).

For an entire class period, allow the students to observe themselves with the masks. First, they must observe themselves completely, using all
perspectives and positions for inspection. Second, staying away from social time, have them observe each other while listening to what the masks are saying. Finally, direct them with the following instructions: 1) explore one person fully; 2) use different body parts to observe; 3) when the time feels right, move on to the next person; 4) ignore being tired; 5) keep working, do not give up, and do not relax; and 6) work in silence (Appel 24).

These exercises help the students increase their awareness as they become familiar with the space and limitations of their mask. Social restrictions and excess tensions ease, as the space and everything in it, becomes safe.

Decorating the Christmas tree is the next mask exercise. Tell the students to grab a chair and find a place to work. They must find the imaginary box of decorations somewhere in the room and bring it back to their chair. Beside their chair is a tall Christmas tree to decorate. The box has lights, garland, tinsel, and a variety of ornaments. The chair is there to reach to the top of the tree. Challenge the students to allow themselves to be unbalanced. All of the decorations in the box must be used. Eventually, make the tree grow taller. Keep filling the box with more decorations. The students must stretch deep inside the tree, find the spots that are barren, and pick up the dropped ornaments. Ask questions: Are the ornaments brittle? Are the lights hot? Play with tempo. Continue this exercise for forty-five minutes. After the tree is decorated, quickly make the students move their chair without using their hands.
The purpose of the exercise is to physically open the bodies and to activate the imagination. Thinking gives way to a reactive imagination. Risking balance develops bodily control and develops stamina (Appel 25).

Fishing is the next mask exercise. Have each student find a place and stand on a chair that represents a small boat. The day is beautiful and there is a lake nearby. A light breeze blows and the sun is out. Ask the students to feel the warm rays of the sun. Using an imaginary fishing pole, cast the line; wait; and reel in the line. The students must feel the weight of the line dragging, determine where the fish are, and cast again. Tell them there is a nibble, to reel it in, and to see if the bait disappeared. If it is gone, they have to put fresh bait on the hook and cast again. This time there is a fish on the line and they must reel it in. For forty-five minutes, play with this scenario. Catch big fishes and little ones. Throw the little ones back. Some are catfish with stingers. Perhaps a big fish nearly pulls them off their chair. Use a net to scoop the big ones. Maybe the big one gets away at the very last second. A line may snap. Near the end add strong wind and rain making the water choppy. Keep them fishing. Play with tempo. Make the fishing pole weigh fifty pounds. Eventually the fish, which were caught, start to rot. They smell awful. At the end of the exercise, the students may fall in the water and need to swim to one side of the room.

Sweeping is another exercise to do for an entire class with the masks. Ask the students to sweep the floor with an imaginary broom. Move them all around the space. Keep the space balanced. Sweep and gather dust in a dustpan. Throw the dust away in a trashcan. The dust eventually turns into dirt and then
to mud. The mud really makes a mess. It makes the floor slippery. The mud turns into bubbles. The bubbles tend to float away. Make sure they sweep up every last one. The bubbles fly around and get in the way and eventually change into heavy lead balls. The students must notice how the balls roll everywhere. The lead balls morph into dust. Keep working through the cycle many times. The work is never finished. Make the students use different parts of the body to push the broom. They cannot stop and rest and must keep going until the end of the exercise.

These exercises challenge the students to increase their focus and broaden their imagination. They enable the students to work with many obstacles at once, to isolate specific body parts, and to stretch their physical and imaginary boundaries.

Three other exercises that Libby Appel created are deeply physical and require strong imagination. The previous mask exercises should have prepared the students for this further work. The combination of physicality and imagination in these exercises leads to strong emotional responses, which give birth to new impulses for the students. In essence, the emotional discoveries physically guide the body.

Appel’s first core mask exercise is Crawling in a Tunnel. Give forty-five minutes to complete the assignment. Use the emotional responses to drive the students’ bodies to the exit action or movement. Ask the students to do the following: 1) imagine a cave before you; 2) see the opening of this cave; 3) enter the cave noting its texture; 4) observe that the cavern is cool, yet not freezing; 5)
touching the exterior is enjoyable and pleasing; 6) permit the images to take over your attention; 7) relish the moment; and 8) creep, crawl, and discover. In due course, the cave narrows and the students must adjust accordingly. Tell them the temperature lowers and the surface dampens. Continue on and do not pause or break. There is a sharp turn to the right, and the students must find a way around the bend. Force the walls to narrow. Have the students adjust to keep the cave from scratching them, move with efficiency, and negotiate a jagged veer to the left. The cave is dark, dank, and slippery. The situation is grave, but the students must go to the end of the tunnel because there is no going back. The passage they find is a dead end. Tell them to go back to the fork and negotiate back through the turn. Explain that it is ice cold, nauseatingly moist, and very tight. They must get out of the cave. Describe a light that appears in the distance. They must crawl toward the light, hurry toward it minding their head and shoulders. They must get out by giving one last burst of energy and pulling themselves out of the hole into freedom.

The second core mask exercise is Flying a Kite and takes nearly forty-five minutes. The instructor should provide an enjoyable image, which moves the student. Lead the students through the following: 1) visualize a beautiful day in the sun; 2) smell the flowers blooming; 3) feel the calm breeze against your skin; 4) see an open field with no trees or obstacles; 5) construct a kite being specific with design, color, and structure; 6) take the kite, dart across the field; and 6) fly the kite. The day is an ideal day for kite flying. Direct the students to manipulate their bodies to move the kite and do some tricks. The breeze is just right; they
have hardly anything to do. Encourage them to take pleasure in the kite moving them around the space with its gentle ebb and flow. Ask them to let go of the kite and to actually become the kite, bouncing from cloud to cloud, allowing the clouds to catch them. Then have them lay on the clouds, roll to another one, and trust the cloud and stand. This exercise challenges one’s balance. Do not allow them to force the image or to dance. Tell them the clouds are holding them; embracing their entire body; and caressing their head, arms, and legs. Have them softly roll from cloud to cloud to the ground, letting each cloud catch them in their descent. The last cloud helps them stand on the ground. Walk them around the space. Bring their attention to which body part leads them (Appel 40-41).

The third core mask exercise is Rowing a Boat, which places the students into a dangerous and perilous situation on a beautiful day at the beach. The students are standing on a dock next to a small rowboat, and then they crawl in to the boat and relax. It is tied to the dock. They enjoy the peaceful rocking motion. The breeze picks up a little more. The rocking is slightly more intense, but they should not worry, the boat is tied to the dock. They continue to enjoy the day. The breeze turns into a strong wind. They look up and see they are no longer tied to the dock. They grab the oars and row back to shore. The current and wind are taking them out to sea. They fight against the conditions. Water is coming into the boat. The water is very choppy. They use one hand to bail out the boat, and they lose an oar and are in the middle of a bad storm. They battle the wind and row with one oar, and they eventually use other body parts to row,
while they bail with two hands. They lose the other oar and desperately paddle back to the shore. They receive a favorable gust of wind and paddle hard because they are almost to the shore. They crash ashore, pull themselves up, and walk around the room. Ask them to observe which body parts are leading (Appel 42-43).

Different body parts lead people. The leading parts are frequently called centers. Sometimes one part leads, like the pelvis in sexually driven people or the nose in arrogant people. At times, many parts together lead the body. A battered wife may lead with sunken shoulders and a craning neck. Go back to some of the previous mask exercises and do them again. Allow the students to find the centers. Experiment with different centers in the mask exercises as well.

The next element to discover is shape and form. Tell the students to develop a line of actions for a daily task such as brushing teeth or washing hands with the mask. Ask them to pick a specific age and a particular environment for this exercise and allow them to work in front of a mirror. Are their actions equal to the intensity and size of the mask? Coach the students through this exercise and revisit all the prior elements discussed.

Spend an hour with the mask learning how the body is able to speak. Before a word is uttered, the body can say a great deal. Call out words and short phrases. The students must quickly react and say the word or phrase with their body. They should not indicate or do an interpretive dance. Avoid clichés. Start with easier words like hello, yes, and good-bye. Continue with more challenging words such as thank-you, ouch, run. Then progress to phases like “Watch out!”
Holy crap! Who the hell are you?” and “I’m hurt!” Give the students time to polish their actions. Let the students present their work to each other.

Now combine all the elements together. While masked, have the students work on their monologues. Work through their scores precisely. Adjust as needed. Coach them through each new element added. Present the work to each other and allow time for comments. The instructor should ask questions to steer the comments into helpful conversations.

Third Quarter

Quarter three starts with scene work and finishes with character work in masks. Building on the foundation of previous quarters, quarter three advances work with physical actions, incorporates scene partners, and introduces character. Begin by assigning the students their scenes.

Unlike the monologues, the instructor selects the scenes and assigns the partners. Pair the students who display contrary strengths. Choose scenes which compel the students to work on their weaknesses. Scenes from classic plays by Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Williams are always a solid choice. Be careful of contemporary plays as they may be more difficult for the inexperienced actor to develop. After the selection and distribution of the assigned scenes, have the students begin to develop a score of actions. Use all of the fundamentals from the previous quarters, especially connection and disconnection.
Young actors seldom use visual pauses and silences. They tend to fill these moments of stop with speech or noise. A good pause or silence can often say more than words and is perfect for changing the energy in a beat. For instance, the long lost lover returns and is excited. As the lover races up the stairs to see his or her partner, the lover finds the partner passionately kissing the lover’s brother. The lover pauses and slumps to the ground in agony.

Encourage appropriate pauses and silences in student scenes and introduce them in different places. Experiment with placing the breaks in absurd locations (Wangh 221-222).

Life is about conflicts. Theater amplifies the conflict. Conflict is about opposites and obstacles, which are also a very powerful part of acting. Great playwrights, such as Shakespeare, placed conflict or opposites in their plays, scenes, and beats. In Shakespeare’s famous balcony scene, Romeo runs excited to speak to Juliet, but half way through his speech he second guesses himself and becomes scared. In this case, Romeo has an inward conflict. Actors viewing the inward conflict will discover new impulses, movements, and ultimately actions. Work with the student scenes, find the multitude of opposites, and work each one separately. Play each scene from an opposite point of view and then do the same with each beat and moment.

As the work with opposites continues, questions regarding emotions will emerge. For instance, how is the character angry at one point and happy the next? As students layer in opposites, emotions may come and go. Do not concentrate on them. Some emotions are obvious and some buried. Anger, for
example, may be hidden behind a smile, and fear may be covered with laughter. Instead, focus on the actions associated with the emotions. Does one hide anger behind a smile? How is the laughter that covers fear different from a normal laugh? Work with layering opposite actions in the scenes, allowing the students to choose where to reveal their opposites (McDonough 335).

Working opposites can apply to action in another way. Eugenio Barba describes the principle of opposition. At the beginning of every action, there is a slight impulse in the opposite direction. For example, if a student moves to the right, he should first shift to left before moving right. This principle brings a new dynamic to each action. Meticulously add the principle of opposition to the students’ physical scores for each scene (Barba and Savarese 177).

Precision is exactness, and its opposite is vagueness. Precision or form occurs in the structure of actions. Simply going through the actions leads to being vague and generalities. Precision keeps the actions alive. Each day an actor walks into rehearsal or performance, things are a little different. One day, the dog may have died. Another day, he or she may have fought with their best friend. Yet another day, they won five hundred dollars playing bingo. Although these are rather extreme examples of experiences outside of the theater, the experiences affect the actors and their work. As partners, actors must be acutely aware that each performance or rehearsal is slightly different, and tiny adjustments are necessary. Grotowski called this “keeping in contact with your partner” (Richards 1995, 81). These moments require an actor to be spontaneous. Grotowski also said, “Spontaneity is impossible without structure”
(Richards 1995, 82). Thomas Richards described spontaneity as a river and structure as riverbanks. In order to exist, both are necessary. A river cannot exist without banks to hold and guide it, just as a riverbank cannot exist without water running through it (Richards 2008, 73). As students work on their scenes building their riverbanks day after day, present them with the lesson of precision.

Third Quarter Mask Work

Returning to the mask work, spend time on developing character. Through the next exercises, a character for the mask comes into being. The students must not force the character to appear or stereotypes will form. The students must swiftly respond to their impulses. Many of these exercises are adapted from Libby Appel’s mask workshop.

Waiting for the Bus is the name of the next mask exercise. Give the students a few minutes to create a bus terminal. Use chairs, cubes, and whatever props exist in the space. The students should create an entrance which doubles as the exit and make a waiting area, vending machine, ticketing booth, and restroom.

Before the students enter the space, ask the following questions: 1) Where are they coming from? 2) Where are they going? 3) Why? 4) What do you do while you wait? Tell the students nobody knows anyone here, and each person is a complete stranger. Then ask them: without forcing communication, make truthful, natural connections with the people in the terminal and choose not to speak. Tell them the next bus is the last bus leaving the station to your
destination. The instructor should direct the students to pass the time hanging around for the bus while not pretending or showing the waiting. They must simply wait.

After some time, announce to the students that the bus will arrive late because of the weather. Inform them that there is no reception for cell phones, the vending machine is not working, and the air conditioning is broken. Remove one chair, and announce the weather conditions are becoming worse, the toilets are broken, and the sun is setting making the terminal cold. After some time, say the bus is approaching; it will be here shortly with only six seats available; and only those passengers, who absolutely need to leave should line up. Announce the bus’s arrival, and there are only three seats available (Appel 61-62).

The next mask exercise is attending a reception honoring the President of the United States. Place some chairs in the space. Coach the students with these directions: 1) you have been invited to attend a banquet honoring the President of the United States; 2) succumb to the circumstances of the situation (Where is the banquet? What is it for? Why were you invited?); 3) prime yourself for the banquet; 4) arrive by yourself, and do not speak to anyone; 4) when you are prepared, enter the space; and 5) while waiting for the President, dance to the music. The music starts as a waltz. Change the type of music after a few minutes. Tell the students the President has been delayed and to enjoy the music and refreshments until their arrival. Then say, the President is a few minutes away, please prepare to welcome him. Finally, announce the President has been assassinated, and please leave the reception (Appel 65).
As the students find their characters during the mask work, help their search by introducing various colorful costume pieces. Include boas, capes, skirts, hats, shirts, ties, and pants, and offer a wide selection. The students are free to play with the costuming, and there are no rules for this class. Two classes may be needed for their exploration. Encourage the students to try things on they have ignored and to experience what is wrong as well as what is right (Appel 67).

Explore language with the masks. This is like making the body speak exercise, but now the students are permitted to explore the word vocally as well as physically. Start with simple words then build to phrases. Start the students working alone. They must fill their body with the sound of the word, find the physical form and the vocal form, use the impulses to guide, and refine the physical and vocal actions. Then have the students take the word to each other, sharing in a connection. While not staying too long, have them move to another person (Appel 69).

The next mask exercise takes the connection a step further. Pair up the students and assign them a place. The place is simple like a park bench, a kitchen table, or the beach. Give them the following instructions: 1) do not speak; 2) the two of you must decide why you are here; 3) allow a connection to take place, and at the right moment, say a word or short phrase; and 4) only speak the word once. Have the students develop this line of actions, defining the intentions and obstacles. Once the score is created, have the students remove the masks, and refine the actions. Help them make the connections sooner, and
allow them to edit the scores making the work clearer. After fifteen to twenty minutes change the partners and places. Then repeat the exercise (Appel 71).

The last mask exercise for the quarter is the interview. Each student sits in front of the group and answers questions about their character. The person being interviewed is masked, while the peer audience is not. Interviews last approximately fifteen minutes each, giving the students a chance to learn and define their character. Only allow questions regarding the character’s past and present life. Push the students to quickly respond to the questions while not trying to anticipate them. The group should not draw comparisons to their own characters. Give the group interviewing the following directions: 1) do not try to trap the person being interviewed; and 2) ask questions regarding the character’s past and present life including personal preferences, inner desires, secret fears, wants, and obsessions. Ask the student being interviewed to answer quickly without thinking. Tell the interviewee: 1) if you do not know the answer, say you do not know at this time; 2) you do not have to know all of the answers; 3) you will be asked for the name of your character; 4) if you have one, give it; and 5) you can change it later, if you desire. Then ask the interviewee to walk over to the chair and introduce the masked character. Instruct the interviewee to not stay seated the entire time (Appel 75).

Fourth Quarter

Quarter four predominately concerns details in character. To this point, character work occurred behind a mask; originated from the physical; and
consisted of freeing the actor of obstacles and exploring impulses. Earlier

Thomas Richards described spontaneity as a river and structure as its banks.

Creating character with actions is about constructing the riverbanks. Stephen

Wangh continued:

You can build these levees in many ways: externally (using costume, make-up, and props), physically (by changing your body canter, movement, and rhythms), vocally (by altering your vocal placement, pitch, or accent), and internally (by finding character imagery, history, and attitudes) (Wangh 240).

Some actors use one method and some use all of them. All actors build

characters in their own way. No matter which way is chosen, the details refine

their work.

Wangh created an exercise called Circus Walks for creating character. It

begins on the outside and works its way to the internal. Coach the students with

these directions: 1) walk around the space and release the worries, thoughts,

and tensions of your personal day; 2) after a few minutes, begin stepping with

your feet in a physically different way like on your heels; 3) allow this new walk to

influence the means by which your legs move; 4) do not let the new movements

alter your walk; 5) allow this influence to move up your body; 6) permit the

stimulus to persuade your hips, stomach, chest, arms, hands, fingers, neck,

head, and face to move; and 7) as you arrive at a new body part, be sure to

transform the influence in some manner being little or big. Once the entire body

is adjusted, stop walking and have the students try sitting, lying down, standing,

and hopping, but do not allow them to lose the essence of their budding

character. While the students are working alone, have them add a voice to their
character. Eventually, have the students speak with each other. Allow them to let the character go and walk normally around the room. Have the students experiment with other walks in the same way. As the students become confident with this exercise, challenge them to start their work in other places such as the hips or chest. Dare the students to start the process with voice (Wangh 242).

The difference between a caricature and a character is detail. A stereotype or caricature is a simple sketch. A character has many defined aspects, facts, and facets. When creating characters, it is perfectly acceptable to imitate someone. The work may start out as a caricature, but through the actor’s inspiration and perspiration, details are generated and added. Thus, a character is born (Wangh 251).

Ask the students to find characters by imitations and use these instructions: 1) go to a place with many people such as a mall or park; 2) at a prudent distance, observe different people; and 3) try imitating their movements. How do they walk? How do they carry themselves? What are their tempi and rhythms? What do their movements tell you about them? Have the students 1) pick one observed person, 2) develop a character from that person’s movements, and 3) create that character’s history from imagination. There are no wrong answers. Try the same exercise, but have the students listen to the different voices. Build characters from the voices they hear. During the next class or two, interview the various characters. Discover the character’s likes, dislikes, history, and present.
Now solicit the students to explore their darker sides. Undertake an exercise Wangh called Not I. Invite the students to create a list of adjectives. The adjectives express how they rarely act or never act. Some examples might be sexy, innocent, stupid, vulnerable, powerful, masculine, or sad. Divide the class into partners. One student listens, and the other selects from the list one adjective. The student picking an adjective faces the other partner and starts, “I do not permit myself to be… (Insert adjective).” Then have the students gradually build up the statement. The listeners may encourage their partners. Direct them to 1) open up and follow the impulses, movements, gestures, and voices; 2) try not to force the work; and 3) imitate the actions, which are never permitted, tolerable, or acceptable. The work may not be honest or genuine at first, but push the students to keep going and looking. If a character appears and the students are relatively at ease, persuade them to go further. If they are uncomfortable, allow them to leave the character. In either circumstance, give the students a few minutes to reflect and center themselves. Have the students switch places with their partners (Wangh 254).

The company a person keeps helps define one’s character. Most people adjust who they are when they meet people. A knight will act differently to a peasant than he would a king. Listening is crucial to both the actor and the character. The character needs to know the other characters, so the character knows how to behave. Sometimes this is obvious, but most of the time, the work is very subtle. Ask the students to pick one of their recently created characters. Then request each character to meet the other characters one at a time. The
students can move to another student only when the time is correct. Ask them to notice how they react differently to each character and why.

Return to the scene work, and perform the assigned scenes in class. Using the characters from the scenes, try some of the previous exercises. After several days of developing the characters, perform the scenes again. Ask the students about the differences.

Fourth Quarter Mask Work

The last phase of the mask work is designed to broaden the character of the mask. Already possessing a good foundation of the mask character, this work will improve it further. While warming up with the masks, give the students some free time to find their characters. Ask questions like, “What details are absent from this character?” and “What do you not know about the character?” Push them to imagine and play the character in intense situations. Urge them to create memories for the character (Appel 78).

Tell the students to dress their masks for work and play. The masks must possess many kinds of clothes covering many situations. The choices the students make will advance their work. Then ask: 1) What is the mask’s favorite outfit? and 2) What kind of shoes does he wear? Give time after warm-ups for the masked students to dress. Ask them to answer the following: 1) How do they dress? 2) Are they exhibitionists? And 3) What are their personal habits (Appel 80)?
Homework is required for the next exercise. Tell the students to bring a bag full of various items the mask might find interesting. Also bring bits and pieces to define the mask’s space. After the students bring in their items, allow them to build and decorate their space. Towards the end of free time, ask them to dress for an evening at home. They can also use chairs, tables, cubes, and other items in the space. Direct them to spend time doing chores and attending to any personal activities as needed. Use the entire class decorating and living in the space (Appel 80-81).

The next work helps the students hide their objectives. Assign the group into partners, and give each group a place. Then quietly give the students conflicting objectives. For example the place is the one bathroom apartment of the first mask. The first masked students objectives are to dress and prepare themselves for their job, and they are running late. The second masked students just woke up and need to use the bathroom very soon. The students must not reveal their objectives until the last possible moment (Appel 82).

To prevent the work from growing predictable, seek to change the environments and situations as much as possible. By this time the students will crave new circumstances. Bring in new items, observers, and places. Be creative! (Appel 85).

Tell the masks, “It’s time to have a party!” The following work is done in character. The characters make the choices and not the students. Select two masks to throw a party. Every mask is responsible for some part of the party. Include food, music, and decorations. They must dress appropriately. Finally
add a surprise to the party. Introduce other students from outside of the class or an item like a camera to take pictures. Use the entire class period (Appel 87).

For the next class, the masked students must be prepared to work around the house. Provide the following instructions: 1) find a place in the space to do a chore; 2) you have put off doing this chore for a while; 3) you are now ready to tackle it; 4) find the tools you need to do this job and return to your space; and 5) begin your work. After a few minutes, announce that a body part you are working with becomes stuck. It is wedged, glued, or trapped. Try to free yourself. Use one of your tools to free yourself. It is not effective. Test another tool. Suddenly, another body part becomes wedged. Try to free yourself. Nothing is helpful. With a free body part, use a tool to pry yourself free. Somebody is watching you. Act as if nothing is wrong and return to your chore with your two body parts trapped. A third part is caught. Struggle to free yourself. You are still being watched. Keep going and do not stop. You have to search a way out of this predicament. One part is released. You receive a second wind of energy. Continue to liberate your body parts. A second and a third loosen (Appel 89).

The culmination of the mask work ends with the exercise called Finding the Right Words and comprises many classes. The students must find words for their mask. They may use as many sources as necessary and can be from anywhere except dramatic literature. Poems, essays, letters, fiction, and nonfiction are all acceptable. The piece should last five to seven minutes and must be in the character’s own voice. Allow the students to change pronouns and proper names to enable the words to flow correctly. There must be a clear
beginning, middle, and end. The words are to be spoken and delivered to the group, a character from the group, or to a pretend person. Also, the words must reveal one last fragment about the character.

Once the monologue is created, begin developing a physical score. In addition, the students must find the appropriate clothing and build the proper surroundings. Use all of the elements learned from this course. Then each student presents the mask character with words to the group. After an initial discussion of the work, they present the work again. The second time the work is performed without the masks. The mask stays, but the character lives on outside the shell of the mask.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

While many acting techniques and methods exist, a physical approach to training the young actor builds a solid foundation. The perfect answer is rarely, if ever, found. Each person has his or her individual experience and education. The varied acting techniques and methods all have their place. Though a physical approach may not always provide the textbook answer, it gives actors a place to begin their work. The doing will eventually lead to an effective answer creating the banks through which the river can flow.

The purpose of this guide is to build the banks for the river flowing within young actors. A physical approach is hard work and repetition. The work is more than polishing a few select skills or adding tools into the acting toolbox. It demonstrates how to confront questions, and it shows how acting can be elevated to an art. Rather than reading from a book, the students do and learn. The learning is passed down from teacher to student in one of the last truly accessible apprenticeships in today’s society.

The research for this type of acting has its genesis in Konstantin Stanislavski’s work on physical actions. Although he was not the first person to develop an acting method, he was the first to garner attention for his distinctive
ideas on the subject during the early twentieth century. After his death, his ideas on physical actions would remain relatively unchanged until Jerzy Grotowski emerged on the world theater scene during the late 1950’s. Grotowski expounded on Stanislavski’s ideas and incorporated his own thoughts. Thoughts he conceived and tested for almost a half century before turning over his work to Thomas Richards. Richards, Mario Biagini, Eugenio Barba, and others are continuing the work, which started over a hundred years ago.

Young actors typically are not exposed to Stanislavski or Grotowski until they enter a college program. Starting physical work earlier can better serve their performance, and, even more importantly, their psyche. A physical approach to acting will help them be more at ease with their bodies and their voices. Establishing this work in secondary schools prepares the actors to better express themselves both on stage and in life.

A physical approach is beneficial to the teacher as well. In a time when arts programs are usually the first courses cut due to declining budgets, teachers are less likely to possess actual theater knowledge, especially in acting. A course like the one outlined in this study gives teachers a solid framework to build an acting class or workshop. The exercises described here are flexible and can be adjusted for any situation a teacher may encounter. If the teacher already has a solid foundation in acting, this work can supplement his or her efforts with the same flexibility.

The foundation is constructed through the building block exercises. The students learn how to properly warm-up physically, mentally, and vocally. The
essential elements of physical actions are developed. Elements like silence, connection, and action are discovered. Components such as fading and tempo are developed. As the course progresses, precision, layering, and opposites are undertaken. Details, imitation, and characters are defined. A physical approach is taught through work on actions, monologues, and scene study.

The mask work enhances the physical approach. By enabling the student to hide behind the mask, the creative river of energy within each student is accessed quickly and easily. The mask supports and adds elements to the physical approach. The work culminates with a combination of all the elements in one last showing. The students are freed from the mask, enabling them to take their knowledge and experience with them.

Stanislavski, Grotowski, and the others who have contributed to physical actions continue to influence performers around the world. The performers seek to remove mental, physical, and vocal obstacles to find truth in their work. Along the way they discover that the physical approach to acting is more than a bag of tricks, a method, or a technique. It is an art form that honors the actors, the process, and the world around them.

While there are many acting techniques to teach a physical approach to adult actors, many of these principles can be adapted to teach high school students, as well. Use this guide to teach high school students a physical approach to acting. Carry on the work of the past practitioners, integrating it into the secondary arts curriculum. Teach the students to be open to impulses as
well as themselves, and show them how to take off their daily armor in order to perform.

Learning openness and vulnerability, removing the layers of barriers, and finding true impulses is an extraordinary experience. Breaking through personal barriers and reaching goals is exhilarating and rewarding, especially with an audience. Teaching and showing the students ways to work on themselves is a great adventure. The connections and transparency of this work is addictive and fulfilling. A physical approach to acting is the first stop on a long ride. Enjoy it!

Dramatic literature is called a “play” for a reason.
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