

DRAMA *Works*

Styletasters 2
(Brecht, Boal, Brook)

EXTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

With an awareness that some syllabuses require not so much a detailed knowledge of practitioners as an understanding of different styles in more general terms, this series is designed to serve that purpose. The emphasis, as in all my work on practitioners, is on understanding the work through practice. Once again, theories are clearly explained in terms that any student can understand and each theory is then explored and tested through practical exercises. This practical work helps fix the understanding of the theory.

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

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

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

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

The format of the book is as follows:

1. Such biographical details as help with the understanding of the practitioner are given and followed by a clear exposition as to how those details help explain the theories.
2. The essential theories of each practitioner are clearly explained. These are easily photocopyable should you want students to have the text in front of them.
3. Each theory is then explored with one or two exercises. Students should be encouraged to try the theories through this practical work in an enquiring manner, seeking to understand the reasons for the practitioner's emphasis on such and such a theory, but

not being afraid to find the limitations of a theory either.

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

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

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

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

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

Extract One

BRECHT: THE THEORIES EXPLORED THROUGH PRACTICE

1. FINDING THE OUTWARD SIGNS - GEST.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Extract Two

If you are interested in further work on Brecht, the publication 'Brecht Through Practice', is packed with practical work - none of which are repeats of the above - and includes work on a number of Brecht's plays. Log on to the web-site for further information and order by phone, e-mail or by downloading a form. See front page for details.

AUGUSTO BOAL

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

Extract Three

3. MEMORY, EMOTION AND IMAGINATION. THE OTHER THREE AREAS USED BOTH IN ACTORS' TRAINING AND IN TRAINING WITH THE SOON-TO-BE SPECT-ACTORS AT A FORUM SESSION

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

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

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

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

This series of exercises can also be used as a feed-in to Image Theatre, which begins with a recognition of the Masks and Rituals we use in everyday life. I shall refer back to it in the relevant section.

Extract Four

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Extract Five

PETER BROOK: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

Extract Six

BROOK: THE THEORIES EXPLORED THROUGH PRACTICE

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

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

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

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

a. Ask for a volunteer to sit on the stage or playing area completely still, emptied of thought as far as possible.

Then ask for a second volunteer to choose an emotional state and sit completely still once more, focusing inwardly on that emotional state.

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

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

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

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

to break the silence.

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

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

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

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

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

How long could the audience stand it?

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

Ask them to see if as actors they could tell when the audience needed a stimulus to keep their attention.

Ask them as audience to decide what was the minimum needed to bring their attention back once it had begun to flag.

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

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

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

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

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

End by returning to the still image of the pleasing shape. This time, repeat that shape but with each actor concentrating with his whole being.

Does this ferocious concentration make a difference? Does it draw the audience i.e. is it what Brook calls 'a magnetic stillness?'

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

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

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

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

What does the audience read this as?

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

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

The point is that some actions are universal signals.

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

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

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

a. with blank face

b. with dislike in the heart and a smile on the face

c. with warmth inside and outside.

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

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

h. In pairs, one actor [A] faces the wall whilst the second [B] stands some

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way behind him looking at his back. B decides what he wants to make A do, using no words or touch - only sound.

This should be tried several times, A and B swapping regularly, investigating whether single sounds, patterns of sound or whatever worked best. Sounds can be made in any way - not necessarily just with the voice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Freed from the close association of language, does the listener experience the emotional state differently, with a fresher appreciation?

Extract Seven

4. EMPTY SPACE, EMPTY PROP.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He could:

also help, and they succeed in moving the object help but be clumsy and get more in the way -or be incredibly stupid - or very bossy. All of these have different potentials for development.

come in and insist that it is moved elsewhere - or not be moved at all - or be very angry with them because they have damaged it.... plus a number of other possibilities.

The group may like to try the above for themselves in groups of three.

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

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

d. Challenge the space.

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

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

Try other different spatial relationships too: back to back, one behind

the other, standing at strange angles to each other.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What would it be like, for instance, for a barefoot beggar to find a pair of shoes - or a bowl of food?

What if a thief or trickster conned him out of his find?

What if a quarrel then ensued and a third person entered in to try and sort out the rights and wrongs of the quarrel - recognised the shoes and claimed them as his own?

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

This last exercise, as well as using 'the empty prop', mimics the kind of work Brook was doing with his actors on their travels around the world, particularly in Africa.