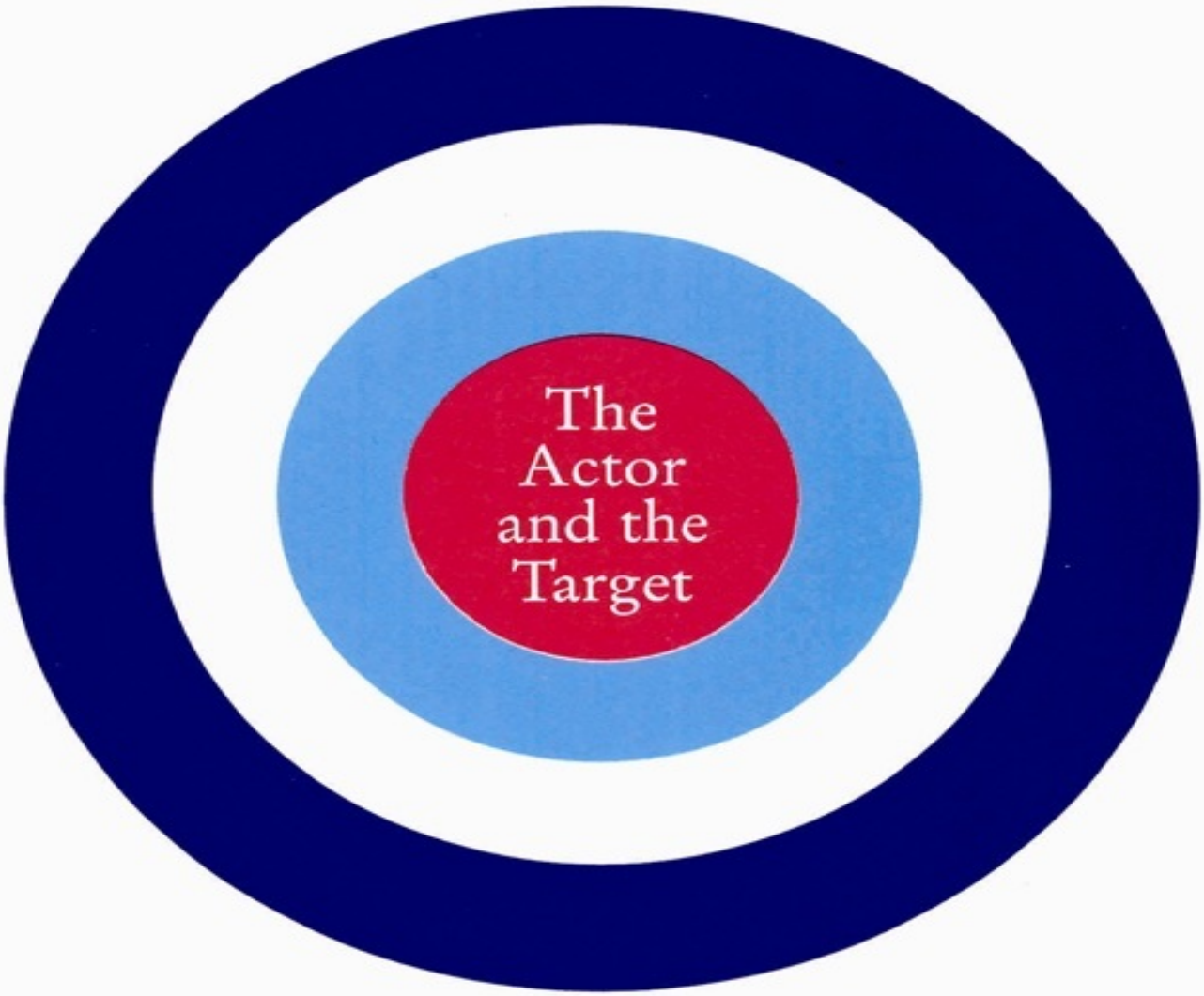
Declan Donnellan



NEW EDITION

THE ACTOR AND THE TARGET

DECLAN DONNELLAN

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CONTENTS

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For Nick

“Feverishly we cleared away the remaining last scraps of rubbish on the floor of the passage before the doorway, until we had only the clean sealed doorway before us. In which, after making preliminary notes, we made a tiny breach in the top left-hand corner to see what was beyond. Darkness and the iron testing rod told us that there was empty space. Perhaps another descending staircase, in accordance with the ordinary royal Theban tomb plan? Or maybe a chamber? Candles were procured – the all-important tell-tale for foul gases when opening an ancient subterranean excavation – I widened the breach and by means of the candle looked in, while Ld. C., Lady E., and Callender with the Reises waited in anxious expectation. It was some time before I could see, the hot air escaping caused the candle to flicker.

There was naturally a short suspense for those present who could not see. When Lord Carnarvon said to me, ‘Can you see anything?’, I replied to him, ‘Yes, it is wonderful.’ ”

Howard Carter, 1922,
taken from his personal diary,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book was originally published in Russian in 2000. However, Nick Hern had commissioned me to write a book in 1988, and dutifully phoned me every six months wondering where it was. So twelve years later it occurred to me that a reworking of the Russian book would fulfil my promise. And here it is, with thanks for his welcome tenacity.

I have added some exercises and an extra chapter on blank verse. The text has shifted a lot as it was revised for various translations and the revised version that now appears has been thoroughly reshaped by all those influences.

In short, the number of people to whom I am now indebted is far too long to be included. But particular thanks must go to Dina Dodina and Judith Greenwood who toiled over Russian and British manuscripts and who encouraged me from St Petersburg and Yorkshire, and also to Stacey McNutt for her re-editing, and to Matt Applewhite and Fiona Williams.

Declan Donnellan
London, 2005

INTRODUCTION

Acting is a mystery, and so is theatre. We assemble in a space and divide into two parts, one of which enacts stories for the remainder. We know of no society where this ritual never happens, so it appears that humanity has a profound need to witness acted-out representations, from television soap opera to Greek Tragedy.

A theatre is not only a literal place, but also a space where we dream together; not merely a building, but a space that is both imaginative and collective. Theatre provides a safe frame within which we can explore dangerous extremities in the comfort of fantasy and the reassurance of a group. If every auditorium were razed to the ground, theatre would still survive, because the hunger in each of us to act and be acted to, is genetic. This intense hunger even crosses the threshold of sleep. For we direct, perform and witness performances every night – theatre cannot die before the last dream has been dreamt.

'I am therefore I act'

A baby is born not only with an expectation of 'mother' and 'language', but also with an anticipation of 'acting'; the child is genetically prepared to copy behaviours that it will witness. The first theatrical performance a baby enjoys is when its mother acts out appearing and disappearing behind a pillow. *'Now you see me; now you don't!'* The baby gurgles away, learning that this most painful event, separation from the mother, might be prepared for and dealt with comically, theatrically. The baby learns to laugh at an appalling separation, because it isn't real. Mummy reappears and laughs – this time, at least. After a while the child will learn to be the performer, with the parent as audience, playing peek-a-boo behind the sofa; and eventually the game will evolve into the more sophisticated 'hide and seek', with multiple performers, and even a winner. Eating, walking, talking, all are developed by observation, performance and applause. We develop our sense of self by practising roles we see our parents play and expand our identities further by copying characters we see played by elder brothers, sisters, friends, rivals, teachers, enemies or heroes. You cannot teach children how to act out situations, precisely because they already do – they wouldn't be human if they didn't. Indeed, we live by acting roles, be it father, mother, teacher or friend. Acting is a reflex, a mechanism for development and survival. This primitive instinct to act is the basis of what is meant by 'acting' in this book. It is not 'second nature', it is 'first nature' and so cannot be taught like chemistry or scuba diving. So, if acting in itself cannot be taught, how can we develop or train our ability to act?

Attention

Our quality of acting develops and trains itself when we simply pay it attention. In fact, all we can be 'taught' about acting are double negatives. For example, we can be taught how *not* to block our natural instinct to act, just as we can be taught how *not* to block our natural instinct to breathe. Of course we can learn a multitude of stylised developments of our natural reflexes. The Noh actor in Japan may take decades to perfect a single gesture, as the ballerina will sweat years developing feats of muscular control. But all the Noh master's virtuosity will go for little if his ornate technique reveals nothing but ornate technique. This highly controlled art must appear, in some way, spontaneous. Those who appreciate this specialised form can discern the flicker of alertness that quickens each ancient gesture. The difference in

quality between one performance and another is not in technique alone, but in the surge of life that makes that technique seem invisible; the years of training must seem to evaporate in the heat of life. Truly great technique has the generosity to vanish and take no credit.

Even the most stylised art is about life, and the more life there is present in a work of art, the greater the quality of that art. Life is mysterious and transcends logic, so the living thing can never be fully analysed, taught or learned. But those things that apparently cut out life, or seem to conceal or block it, are not nearly so mysterious as they pretend. These 'things' are bound by logic and may be analysed, isolated and destroyed. The doctor may explain why the patient is dead, but never why the patient is alive.

Therefore this is not a book about how to act; this is a book that may help when you feel blocked in your acting.

Two provisos

It is not easy to write about acting. Acting is an art, and art reveals the uniqueness of things. Talking about acting is hard, because 'talking about' tends to make us generalise and generalisation conceals the uniqueness of things. Good acting is always specific.

There is also a problem here with vocabulary. The words 'actor' and 'acting' are devalued. For example, we say that people are 'putting on an act' when we mean that they are lying about themselves. The word 'acting' is often used as a synonym for 'lying'. Plato argued that there was no difference between acting and lying, and roundly condemned the theatre. Diderot's *Paradox of the Actor* asks how we can speak of truth in performance, which of its very nature is a lie.

Emotion and truth

But we can never fully tell the truth about what we feel. Indeed, the more we feel, the more useless will be the words we find to express ourselves. The question *'How are you?'* becomes increasingly banal the more the relationship matters; the words work reasonably well to greet the postman as he delivers a package, but are woefully inadequate to a friend with cancer.

There will always be a gap between what we feel and our ability to express what we feel. The more we wish for the gap to be smaller, and the more we want to tell 'the truth', then the wider this perverse gap yawns. We act constantly, not because we are purposely lying, but because we have no choice. Living well means acting well. Every moment in our lives is a tiny theatrical performance. Even our most intimate moments have a public of at least one: ourselves.

At times of crisis this inability to express ourselves causes great pain. Adolescence can be a journey through hell when we feel completely misunderstood; 'first love' seems unalloyed bliss only in nostalgia. We are tormented not only by the spectre of rejection, but also by the creeping hopelessness that we will never be able to express what we feel. The emotions are turbulent, the stakes seem impossibly high: '*Nobody understands what I am going through. And what's worse, I just hear myself spouting the same old clichés other people use*.'

As adolescents, we discover that the more we want to tell the truth, the more our words lie. But to mature, we must get on with the humble process of performing, because acting is all we can do. Acting is the nearest we get to the truth.

We do not know who we are. But we know that we can act. We know that there is a greater or lesser quality to our performances as student, teacher, friend, daughter, father or lover. We are the people we act, but we have to act them well, and with a deepening sense of whether our performances are 'truthful' or not. But truthful to what? The real me inside? To others? Truthful to what I feel, want, ought to be? The question marks hang with the observation that the above and all the following are not necessarily true, but may prove useful.

Block

Rather than claim that 'x' is a more talented actor than 'y', it is more accurate to say that 'x' is less blocked than 'y'. The talent is already pumping away, like the circulation of the blood. We just have to dissolve the clot.

Whenever we feel blocked the symptoms are remarkably similar, whatever the country, whatever the context. Two aspects of this state seem particularly deadly: the first is that the more the actor tries to force, squeeze and push out of this cul-de-sac, the worse 'it' seems to get, like a face squashed against glass. Second is the accompanying sense of isolation. Of course, the problem can be projected out, and 'it' becomes the 'fault' of script, or partner, or even your shoes. But the two basic symptoms recur, namely paralysis and isolation – an inner locking and an outer locking. And, at worst, an overwhelming awareness of being alone, a creeping sense of being both responsible and powerless, unworthy and angry, too small, too big, too cautious, too . . . *me*.

When acting flows, it is alive, and so cannot be analysed; but problems in acting are connected to structure and control, and these can be isolated and disabled.

Other sources of block

Many different problems arise in rehearsal and performance that can damage acting. The room may be ill lit, badly ventilated, echoey or cold. More significantly, there may be a difficult atmosphere in the group, or a bad relationship with the director or writer. External problems over which the actor may have little control can also coagulate the work; but circumstantial difficulties will not be dealt with here.

When things go wrong we must distinguish between what we can change and what we cannot change. We also have to divide the problem into two parts: first, the part that comes from outside, over which we may have little or no control, and secondly, the part which comes from inside, over which we can learn to have increasing control. This book only addresses that second part.

All serious acting problems are interconnected, so interdependent that they seem to be just one huge rock cut into blinding facets by a demonic jeweller. To define the stone by describing its facets is misleading because each facet only makes sense in the context of all the others. Therefore much of what is said at the beginning of this book will make little sense till the end.

A map

This book is like a map. Like all maps, it is a lie, or rather, a lie trying to tell a useful story. A metro map bears no resemblance to the city street system and will mislead the pedestrian, but it will help you if you want to change trains. And as with many maps, it takes some familiarity to help you find your way.

So before we continue it will help to revisit some basic terms.

Rehearsal

Broadly speaking, we can divide the work of the actor into two parts, rehearsal and performance. More controversially we can also divide the mind of a human being into the conscious and the unconscious. The rehearsal and the unconscious have certain things in common. Both are normally unseen, but both are essential. They are, in their different ways, the four-fifths of the iceberg that are concealed. On the other hand, like the tip of the iceberg, the performance and the conscious are both seen. We can easily see the tip of the iceberg, but we need wisdom to infer the other four-fifths.

However, this book makes a slightly different division: here the actor's work will be divided into the visible work and the invisible work. In fact actors normally work to a similar division; but then this is just a new map to make an ancient landscape clearer. We can begin with some features:

1. All the actor's research is part of the invisible work, while the performance is part of the visible work.
2. The audience must never see the invisible work.
3. The rehearsal comprises all the invisible work and passages of visible work.
4. The performance consists only of the visible work.

The senses

The actor's flow depends on two specific functions of the body: the senses and the imagination.

We are completely dependent on our senses. They are the first antennae that detect the outside world. We see, touch, taste, smell and hear that we are not alone. As tortures go, sense deprivation is theatrically weak but surprisingly efficient. When the stakes rise our senses become more acute. The interface between our bodies and the outside world becomes more sensitive and intense. We recall exactly the place where we heard astonishing news – no wonder that so many remember not only when but also where they heard that President Kennedy had been shot.

Three remarks may help here: first, it is dangerous to take our senses for granted. Occasional meditations on blindness and other sensory loss are nearly as life-affirming as the regular contemplation of death. Secondly, the actor's senses will never absorb as much in performance as the character absorbs in the real situation. In other words the actor will never see the asp as acutely as Cleopatra herself. Finally, this graceful acceptance of inevitable failure is an exhilarating release for the artist. That we will never get there is an excellent starting point; perfectionism is only a vanity. The actor needs to accept the senses' limitations in order for the imagination to run free. The actor relies utterly on the senses; they are the first stage in our communication with the world. The imagination is the second.

Imagination

The imagination, the senses and the body are interdependent. The imagination is the capacity to make images. Our imaginations make us human and they toil every millisecond of our lives. Only the imagination can interpret what our senses relay to our bodies. It is imagination that enables us to perceive. Effectively, nothing in the world exists for us until we perceive it. Our capacity to imagine is both imperfect and glorious, and only the paying of attention can improve it.

The imagination may be mocked as reality's understudy: *'That child has an over-active imagination'* or *'You're just imagining things!'* However, it is only imagination that can connect us to reality. Without our ability to make images we would have no means of accessing the outside world. The senses crowd the brain with sensations, the imagination sweats both to organise these sensations as images and also to perceive meaning in these images. We forge the world within our heads, but what we perceive can never be the real world; it is always an imaginative re-creation.

The imagination is not a fragile piece of porcelain, but rather a muscle that develops itself only when properly used. It was an eighteenth-century view that the imagination was an abyss that might swallow the unwary, and this mistrust persists; but to shut down the imagination, even if possible, would be like refusing to breathe for fear of catching pneumonia.

The dark

Everything we see in the outside world is manufactured in our heads. We do not develop the imagination by forcing it into prodigious and self-conscious feats of creativity; we develop our imaginations by observation and attention. We develop the imagination when we use it and pay attention; the imagination improves itself when we simply see things as they are. But seeing things is not so easy sometimes, particularly when it is dark. How then can we light up the darkness? Actually there is no such thing as the dark; there is merely an absence of light. But what could be casting this shadow over everything I see? There is a clue. If I examine this darkness I will see that it has a familiar outline. It has exactly the same

shape as . . . me. We make darkness by getting in the way of the light. In other words we can only nourish our imaginations by not getting in the way; the less we darken the world, the clearer we see it.

1

‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT I’M DOING’

The spider’s legs

Actors often use precisely the same words when they feel blocked. Nor does it matter if the words are French or Finnish or Russian: the problem transcends language. These cries for help can be classified under eight headings, but, as we will see, the order is of no importance, because they are no more different than the legs of the same spider:

‘I don’t know what I’m doing.’
‘I don’t know what I want.’
‘I don’t know who I am.’
‘I don’t know where I am.’
‘I don’t know how I should move.’
‘I don’t know what I should feel.’
‘I don’t know what I’m saying.’
‘I don’t know what I’m playing.’

It is strange to discuss each of a spider’s legs in sequence, as if each leg could walk independently of the other seven.

The actor’s imagination, text, movement, breathing, technique and feeling are essentially inseparable. Yes, it would be convenient if there could be a logical step-by-step progression, but there isn’t. These eight apparently different problems are utterly interlinked. We cannot pretend to deal neatly with one difficulty, finish that and then go on to tidy away another. The damage spreads from one area to another and cannot be quarantined.

However, the main cause of an actor’s problems is far simpler than its many effects, just as a bomb is simpler than the havoc it wreaks. But although this particular ‘bomb’ is simple, it is hard to describe and isolate.

Before we can identify and defuse this bomb, we need some tools. These tools take the form of choices and rules. Rules should be two things: a) few, and b) helpful. So a) this book will not lay down many rules, and b) you will know whether they are helpful only if they work for you in practice. We normally test rules by considering whether or not we believe them or agree with them. But these rules do not claim to govern a country or save life; they just help us make-believe. Whether or not we actually agree with these rules is therefore beside the point. They are not moral absolutes; they work only if they work.

‘I don’t know what I’m doing’

This is the mantra of the blocked actor and can prise open a trap down which all can tumble.

Rather than consider the content of this spider’s leg, we might think laterally, and examine its form. The structure of the statement is important. The word ‘I’ is repeated. The cry implies that: ‘*I can/should/must know what I am doing; it is my right and duty to know what I am doing which I am somehow being denied*.’ But this reasonable-sounding complaint has entirely ignored something crucial. What is this ‘something’ that has been airbrushed out of the photograph like Trotsky?

This ‘something’ has been demoted, denied and finally obliterated. ‘*I don’t know what I’m doing*’ mentions one word twice: ‘I’. The attention that was due to this ‘something’, its personal share, has reverted to the banker, ‘I’. The central importance of this forgotten character is what this book is about, because this oversight is the chief source of the actor’s misery.

It is crucial to see that the demands of ‘know’ and ‘I’ cannot be resolved unless we deal with the nameless one first. So we will start with the ‘something’, so neglected that it hasn’t yet been given a name.

The nameless one I will baptise **THE TARGET.**

Unlike the arbitrary order of the spider legs, here the sequence in time is absolutely crucial. The target must be dealt with before ‘I’ and ‘know’. The ‘I’ is so hungry for attention that it demands to have its problems solved first. It barges right to the front of the queue, closely followed by ‘know’ and the target gets flattened in the stampede. This vulnerability of ‘I’ and ‘know’ is quite ruthless. Indeed we have to cover our ears to their screaming for a while, otherwise we will never be able to help them. We mustn’t look back, although they are very good at making us feel guilty. Lot’s wife looked back and was paralysed.

2

THE TARGET

Irina
Let us meet Irina who is playing Juliet. She is rehearsing the balcony scene with her partner, and feels that she doesn't know what she is doing. It seems unfair that she should feel so stuck, because she has done all her research. She is bright, hard-working and talented. So why does she feel like a piece of wet cod? In fact, the more Irina tries to act sincerely, the more she tries to express deep feeling, the more she tries to mean what she says, the more she freezes over. What can Irina do to get out of the mess? Well, if she cannot push forward in her work, Irina may have to go sideways, think laterally, and consider the following.

If you ask Irina what she did yesterday, she may reply: '*I got up, I brushed my teeth, I made some coffee . . .* ' etc. As she begins to answer your question her eyes will probably look straight back at you. However, her eyes will stray as they try to picture the events of the previous day. But the eyes never lose their focus on something. Irina is either looking at you or at something else, the coffee that she drank. She is either looking at something real or something imaginary. But she is always looking at something. The conscious mind is always present with this 'something'. While she digs for a memory: '*I went to work, I wrote a letter*', her eyes still focus and refocus on points located outside. Although common sense insists that all her memories must be contained within her brain, she still must look outside her head to remember them. Her eyeballs do not rotate inwards and scan her cerebellum. Nor do her eyes look vaguely outward, but they focus on a specific point, and then on another specific point where the events of yesterday are recalled and re-seen:

'*I read the paper.*'
'I had some coffee.'

Each finds its own specific target. Perhaps she finally gives up and says:

'*I can't remember any more.*'

But her eyes still will search in different places for the elusive memory. What may appear to be a general sweep is really a finding, discarding and re-choosing of a multitude of different points. This gives rise to the first of the six rules of the target:

1: There is always a target

You can never know what you are doing until you first know what you are doing it to. For the actor, all 'doing' has to be done *to* something. The actor can do nothing without the target.

The target can be real or imaginary, concrete or abstract, but the unbreakable first rule is that at all times and without a single exception there must be a target.

'*I warn Romeo*.'
'I deceive Lady Capulet.'
'I tease the Nurse.'
'I open the window.'
'I step onto the balcony.'
'I search for the moon.'
'I remember my family.'

It can be 'yourself', as in:

'*I reassure myself*.'

The actor can do nothing without the target. So, for example, an actor cannot play 'I die' because there is no target. However, the actor can play:

'*I welcome death.*'
'I fight death.'
'I mock death.'
'I struggle for life.'

Being

Some things we can never act. The actor cannot act a verb without an object. A crucial instance is 'being': the actor cannot simply 'be'. Irina cannot play being happy, being sad, or being angry.

All an actor can play are verbs, but even more significantly, each of these verbs has to depend on a target. This target is a kind of object, either direct or indirect, a specific thing seen or sensed, and, to some degree, needed. What the target actually *is* will change from moment to moment. There is plenty of choice. But without the target the actor can do absolutely nothing at all, for the target is the source of all the actor's life. When conscious, we are always present with something, with the target. And when the conscious mind is no longer present with anything at all, at that very point it stops being conscious. And the actor cannot play unconsciousness.

A double-take

Dissecting the venerable 'double-take' makes the target clearer. To 'take' is old theatre jargon meaning 'to see'. And a 'double-take' is when you see something twice for comic effect.

An example: you are pruning your chrysanthemums, when the vicar runs in:

Step one: *'Good morning, vicar!'* – you look at him.

Step two: You then look back at the chrysanthemums.

Step three: While still looking at the chrysanthemums, you realise that the vicar is not wearing any trousers.

Step four: You look back at him aghast.

Where does the first big laugh come? Learned international authority is unanimous: the first big laugh occurs during step three. Step three is the moment when the image transforms before the actor's eyes. Let's reconsider the four steps.

Step one: You 'look at' the vicar but do not truly 'see' him. Instead you imagine he is his usual respectable self.

Step two: You think you have finished with greeting the vicar and so set about pruning the chrysanthemums.

Step three: The false image of the modest vicar is replaced by the true image of the vicar in his spotted shorts.

Step four: You look back at him to confirm that the knobbly knees quake there in embarrassing reality.

You expect a trousered vicar and 'see' only what ought to be. The audience waits in gleeful suspense for reality to force you to see the target as it truly is. One target transforms into another before your eyes and the audience howls with laughter. But most importantly, the audience does not laugh because you change the target. The audience laughs to see the target change you.

2: The target always exists outside, and at a measurable distance

As we have seen, the eyes have to see something, whether real or imaginary. And the impulse, stimulus and energy, to announce

'I had bacon and eggs'

or even,

'I don't have breakfast',

come from specific images outside the brain and not inside. The eyes refocus on different targets, as if trying to find not just the memory, but as if trying to uncover the specific location of that memory. Indeed, the very place where the memory is hiding, the site where the memory already exists, can feel as important as the memory itself.

What happens, however, if the target seems to be inside the brain, as say when we have a deep headache? How can this be located outside?

Whatever pain we have, however intimate the agony, there will always be a difference between the patient and the pain. And people who suffer great pain will tell you that they feel themselves strangely separate from their pain. The more intense a migraine becomes, then the more it seems that only two entities exist in the world, the pain and the sufferer. The ache may invade the brain, but it remains outside the consciousness. There is always a crucial distance.

3: The target exists before you need it

If you go on to ask Irina how she might like to celebrate her birthday next year, something interesting happens. Her eyes still flash around trying to discover something, i.e. what she would like to do next year. But, in a way, this is rather strange. Because what she wants to do next year cannot already exist. Yet her

eyes hunt this future event as if it already existed. Logically, she must be inventing on the spur of the moment what she might want next year, a day by the sea perhaps, or some party, an event that does not as yet exist. However, she still has to search as if it already did exist. It is as if she has to find or uncover what her wish for next year already is, rather than invent something new.

And this is significant, for, as we shall continue to see, 'discover' always helps more than 'invent'.

Sense and sight

The words 'sight' and 'seeing' will be used from now on as a metaphor to refer to all the senses, of which we can name but five. On this point, the blinding of Gloucester may be appalling, but there exists a fate grimmer than having your eyes torn out – and that is tearing your own eyes out. The terrible fate of Oedipus was self-inflicted blindness. Sadly this is not such an exotic affliction; blinding ourselves is the common cause of block.

A place for seeing

If Irina feels blocked, if Irina feels that she 'doesn't know what she is doing', it is because she does not see the target. The danger is extreme, because the target is the only source of all practical energy for the actor. Without food we die. All life needs to take something from outside itself to inside itself in order to survive. Actors are nourished and energised by what they see in the world outside. In fact, the very word *theatre* comes from the Greek *theatron*, which means 'a place for seeing'.

But surely we are nourished by what is outside *and* what is inside? That is possibly true but it is not useful. It will help Irina more to transfer all inner functioning, all drives, feelings, thoughts and motives, etc. from inside and relocate these impulses in the target. The target will then energise Irina just as a battery that gives power when needed.

When something moves us deeply, psychology tells us that these strong feelings must come from inside ourselves. But the opposite principle is more helpful for the actor. In other words, it helps Irina more to imagine that it is the target that gives her these strong reactions. Irina gives up control and entrusts it to the thing she sees. The actor abdicates power to the target.

There is no inner resource that will make us independent of other things. There is no internal dynamo independent of the outside world. We do not exist alone; we exist only in a context. Imagining that we can survive without the context is rash. The actor can only act in relation to the thing that is outside, the target.

4: The target is always specific

A target cannot be a generalisation. A target is always specific. We know the target can be an abstraction as in: *'I try to blind myself to the future.'* Here, although the 'future' may be abstract, it is not generalised. For it is to specific elements of the 'future' that *'I try to blind myself'*.

We have seen before that '*I struggle for life*' has 'life' as a target. And the wounded soldier fighting to live will have a very specific image of the next living moment that he needs. He doesn't fight for a generalisation. There is nothing general about the trying or the struggling. The push, the effort, the cough is propelled by the image of the next living moment that he sees and needs, and if only he clears his throat this time, or takes another deep gulp of air or endures just this next spasm of pain, then perhaps there will be hope.

We each see different targets, even when we happen to be looking at the same thing. So Rosalind sees a different Orlando from the Orlando who is seen by his jealous brother Oliver. The specificness of the target is different for each of us. We will discuss this later in Chapter 5.

The external world is always specific. The thing that is outside, the target, can only be specific.

5: The target is always transforming

We have seen that it is not enough for Rosalind to love 'Orlando'. She must see a specific Orlando. However, that specific Orlando will change into another specific Orlando. She may start seeing a desperate young braggart who takes on the Duke's wrestler, then she may see a romantic David who defeats his Goliath, then perhaps she sees a lost young man. Orlando will mutate again and again through the course of *As You Like It* into countless different 'Orlandos'. Rosalind will have her work cut out for her trying to deal with these changing Orlandos. Does she kiss him, fight him, tease him, mock him, seduce him, confuse him or heal him? And not only Orlando, Rosalind also has to deal with all the other metamorphosing targets of her world. Simple shepherds wax into neurotic poets, aristocrats change into outlaws, and her own body gradually transforms into an ambivalent object of desire and love. Rosalind's universe and all the targets in it do not remain the same, they change and change again. Seeing the target transform will free the actor to play Rosalind.

6: The target is always active

Not only is the target always mutating, the target is always doing something. And whatever the target is doing must be changed – by me. Instead of teaching Orlando what love is, let Rosalind see an Orlando who sentimentalises love, so she must try to change this. Instead of wanting to murder Desdemona, let Othello see a wife who is destroying him, and he must try to change this. Instead of defying Goneril, let Lear see a daughter who is humiliating him, a daughter he must change.

The external target

The active target locates the energy outside us so that we can then bounce off it, react to it and live off it; the target becomes an external battery.

So, instead of always wondering '*What am I doing?*', it is more helpful to ask '*What is the target doing?*' Or better '*What is the target making me do?*'

The first question robs energy from the target and hoards it in 'I'. It is worth observing here that 'I' tends to be a dangerous word for the actor and is best used with caution. 'Me' is usually more helpful.

The more energy the actor can locate in the target, the greater the actor's freedom. On the other hand, stealing energy from the target actually paralyses the actor. If Irina tries to take power from the target and keep it in herself then she will become blocked.

Irina can imagine all the different things that her character wants, all the different things that Juliet might want to do to Romeo. Listing what Juliet wants from Romeo may indeed help in the early stages of rehearsal. But it will help Irina more if she can open her imagination to see what Juliet sees. And what does Juliet see? A father to be feared, a mother to be dealt with, a future to be avoided and a Romeo to be wooed, tamed, supported, warned, frightened, cheered, discovered, reassured, opened, scolded, protected, spurred, ennobled, chastened, heated, cooled, seduced, rejected and loved. For Juliet, the scene is not about her and what she wants; the scene is about the different Romeos that she sees and has to deal with. Irina's energy does not come from within, from some concentrated internal centre; it comes only from the outside world that Juliet perceives: the breeze that caresses her cheek, that marriage she dreads, the lips she desires. The target is all.

It clearly follows that the actor playing Romeo needs to make the balcony scene more about Juliet and less about him; and Irina needs to make the scene more about Romeo and less about her.

For all practical purposes then, there is no inner source of energy. All energy originates in the target.

More than one

Nor do Irina's eyeballs need to be glued to her partner. Talking to friends while walking down a long

beach, I will fall over if I keep looking at them. We can talk to each other through the things we see, the seaweed, the gulls, the rock pools. Breaking difficult news, we may scrutinise how we stir our coffee to avoid uncomfortable eye-contact. Does this mean we are only looking at the coffee? No. Does this mean that we do not see the coffee, but only imagine the other's falling face? No. We see both at once. How we achieve this we need not know. What we do need to know is that there is always a target, although there may be more than one at the same time.

A digression: an experiment with hypnosis

Even when we are unaware of the specific target we will supply one. Our imaginations shun the general and the unknown. Even if there were no target we would have to invent one. Sigmund Freud described experiments where patients, under hypnosis, were instructed to flick their ears at a given signal. When the suggestion was complete, the subjects were woken up, the signal was given and the patients duly flicked their ears. Of course they had no idea why. What fascinated Freud was that when questioned why they had flicked their ears, the subjects always invented a specific reason. They would explain: *'Because my ear was itchy.'* This suggests two possibilities. First, we may lie rather than admit to being irrational. Secondly, and more usefully for the actor, we can only think in terms of a specific target . . . and will even supply one if it appears absent.

What the target is not

The target is neither an objective, nor a want, nor a plan, nor a reason, nor an intention, nor a goal, nor a focus, nor a motive. Motives arise from the target. A motive is a way of explaining why we do things. Now 'why' we do things may be interesting. But relentlessly asking 'why' can tie the actor in knots. Why does Juliet fall in love with Romeo? Certainly if Irina can answer the question fully, she has fully missed the point. We cannot fully know why we do some things. But we will deal with the dangers of 'why' later.

Nor is the target my 'focus'. Focus is a misleading word. Focus sounds as if it has a lot to do with the target. But saying: *'I focus on something'* is utterly different from saying: *'I see something'.* And it is worth taking time to ponder the difference. The target needs to be seen: my 'point of focus' implies I can decide whether to focus on that point or not. The target is the master. But the 'point of focus' sounds more like a servant. For the actor it may seem more comfortable to choose points of focus rather than react to targets. Indeed 'choosing where to focus' may help the actor feel more in control. But this particular control is not a long-term friend; this particular control tends to return Irina neatly inside herself. Choosing a point of focus can conceal the outside world and all its nourishing stimuli, for it tends to relocate inside the actor those energies that are more helpfully located outside.

Before we think about control, it will help to consider an uncomfortable choice.

The first uncomfortable choice:
concentration or attention

This is the first of the actor's uncomfortable choices. The dilemma is between elements that seem to be friends, but in fact, must destroy each other. They seem so similar, can't we have both as a sort of insurance? Sadly, no. To have one, we must renounce the other. To begin with: concentration or attention. But remember that concentration destroys attention. You cannot pay attention to something and concentrate on it at the same time. This is the first uncomfortable choice: concentration or attention. You choose. You just can't have both, that's all.

But before making that choice it is worth considering the following. Attention is about the target; concentration is about me. If I concentrate hard on an external object, or if I concentrate very hard on another person, something strange happens. I gradually see that other less and less and wind up seeing how I see the other person. In other words, it ends up being about me. Concentration masquerades as

being about the other; but it isn't. Concentration pretends to be about the outside world; it isn't. We choose concentration above attention because we can switch on concentration. Attention is quite different. It is given and has to be found. We excrete concentration by the cartload and think we can control its coming and going. That's precisely why it's not much use. We cannot control attention, that's why it is so useful, and so alarming. But concentration can also be frightening. The effect of concentrating is like escaping the horror house of *Uncle Silas*: however far you run, you always end up mysteriously back home.

There is nothing that Irina can manufacture within herself. There is no core centre of creativity that she can stimulate to fabricate a solution to her difficulties. She can construct no feeling, engineer no thought. Then what can Irina do? All Irina can do is see things and pay attention.

Maddeningly, Irina cannot force herself to see things attentively. Like the rest of us she can only force herself 'not' to see. She can blind herself. She may however force herself to 'look at' things. But 'looking at' is quite different from 'seeing'. This difference between 'seeing' and 'looking at' is crucial for the actor. 'Looking at' implies that I choose where to place my focus. 'Seeing' pays attention to what already exists. I can look at something without seeing it, like the trouser-less vicar. Seeing implies that what is seen will have freedom to surprise me, to be different from what I expected.

Hunger

Imagine you are hungry and have no food in your flat. It doesn't matter how often you search the fridge: it will remain empty. The only place to get food is outside. If you stay in, you'll starve, no matter how often you rummage round the wire racks. For the actor, 'seeing' is like going outside. It seems so safe at home, it seems so frightening on the streets, but this is a delusion.

It is not safe at home; it is only safe on the streets. Don't go home.

3

FEAR

If, then, the target is so important, how do we get cut off from it? The answer is simple. It is Fear that cuts us off from the target. Fear severs us from our only source of energy; that is how Fear starves us. No theatre work absorbs more energy than dealing with the effects of Fear; and Fear is, without a single exception, destructive. The more Fear stalks the rehearsal room, the more the work suffers. Fear makes it difficult to disagree. Fear creates as much false consensus as strife. A healthy working atmosphere, where we can risk and fail, is indispensable. Fear corrodes this trust, undermines our confidence and clots our work. And the rehearsal must feel safe so that the performance may seem dangerous.

But what is this particular capitalised 'Fear'? It is hard to define because it is a personal amalgam of countless shifting emotions, always changing shape like a shoal of fish. It is not to be confused with the feeling that any one of us might have if a lunatic rushed into the room waving a rifle. Sometimes, this Fear comes wearing a mask: arrogance is a favourite disguise and mannerism is another. Sometimes we know we are possessed by this Fear, but often the parasite is invisible to the host. We can always infer that Fear is fat and healthy whenever we experience 'block'.

However, Irina can take heart, because ultimately the actor's Fear is a paper tiger, a Wizard of Oz who crumbles when dragged into the open. '*Don't worry!*' is easily said, and may rank high as a piece of counterproductive advice. But in fact there is no actual need to worry. Well, how can there be, when 'worrying' is the cause of the problem? It is normally prudent to take precautions. But worry is always imprudent.

Fear can be dealt with. But first of all our Fear needs to be acknowledged and seen. And it is better if we can prepare ourselves when cool, rather than when we are choking in its grip. Only by seeing Fear can it be thought about, objectified and overcome. This may help.

A fable: the Devil

Fear is like the Devil. The good news is that he doesn't exist, the bad news is that that is precisely why we can't get rid of him. The Devil derives his power by flickering at the sides of our vision. He splits in two and winks at us from right and left, neither fully in our vision, nor fully out of it. His overwhelming desire is to divorce you from the target: *'Don't bother looking at anything,'* he whispers, *'because we're all looking at* you. *All you should worry about is you. Will you, the actor, fail or not? Will you, the actor, be judged good or bad? Seem talented? Look good? Be wanted? Get dropped? Be humiliated?'*

If this miserable stage is reached, we may remember what Christ told the Devil in the desert: *'Get thee behind me, Satan!'* The Devil's power is that we only ever glimpse him. Therefore the best place to stick

him is behind. Only behind us is he fully out of sight and then we can go forward. He will, however, try and try again to invade the periphery of our vision. We panic that he wants to leap in front of us, but that is his great bluff. If the Devil jumped in front and faced us, he would vanish. He rules by pretending that, like the Gorgon, the mere glimpse of him would paralyse us. But no, to see him fully would be to destroy him fully. Similarly, we can never get rid of Fear. But we can keep booting him behind us.

The division of time

All problems of block get cured in the 'now'.

Fear does not exist in the 'now'. So he has to invent a pretend time to inhabit and rule. He takes the only real time, the present, and splits it into two fake time zones. One half he calls the past, and the other half he calls the future. And those are the only two places he can live. Fear governs the future as Anxiety, and the past as Guilt.

So the actor is deluded into leaving the target in the present, absconding with Fear into the past and the future, and the result is block. In fact, although its effects are felt in the present, block can only start in the past and the future. An obvious example is the fear of 'drying'. Actually actors rarely forget their lines when they remain present. However, as soon as Irina has the thought: *'Oh my God! I don't think I can remember my next line',* she is predicting what will come; she quits the present. *'I will forget my text'* anticipates the future, but actually tricks Irina into forgetting her text now.

Another classic recipe for disaster is to think: '*The bit I have just done was dreadful but I will try to make the next bit really good!*' The second I snub the present to flirt with the past or the future gives Fear his chance. Fear cannot breathe while the actor remains present.

Presence

Does the actor have to try to be present? The answer is no. We cannot try to be present, precisely because we already are present. So what can we do? Can we work with the double-negatives? For example, can we try not to make ourselves absent? The difficulty is that any 'trying' tends to make the actor concentrate, which congeals the flow of attention and cuts off the target.

'*Being present seems so hard, remaining present seems even harder!*' These are both delusions of Fear.

In reality we are present, we can do absolutely nothing to alter that. But we can fantasise that we are somewhere else. In fact we have evolved such ingenious devices to delude ourselves that we are absent that it is extremely difficult to switch them off. But certain principles can always help. First: as I am already present, I cannot actually become present. When I try to be present, it is a brilliant scam of Fear. For trying to do anything makes us concentrate and sends us home. Fear often uses this particular trick to confuse us, by getting us to struggle to become . . . what, in fact, we already are. Imagine you are a guest, comfortably seated on a sofa, when your host suddenly rushes in and starts insisting that you sit down. When you remonstrate *'But I am already sitting!'* he just yells: *'Well, try harder!'* And if you decide that he is the sane one and not you, and if you do try to oblige him, and if you do try to 'sit' more because somehow you are not doing it well enough . . . and if you go on trying . . . and if he gets more and more frustrated and starts to shout, crazy as it sounds, all this is precisely what happens when we try to be present.

We get so confused that we knock ourselves out. Then Fear can drag us off by the heels.

Part of the cure for block is to remember calmly that you are present, and that no one and nothing can kidnap you. No, not even you yourself can run in with a chloroformed gag and abduct you. The worst that can happen is that you delude yourself that you are not present. We cannot struggle to be present. We can only discover that we are present. Being present is given to us, like a gift, like a present. It cannot be

stolen from us, but we can fool ourselves otherwise.

The hiding of the rules

Fear has no power over the target, but he can make you believe that the target has abandoned you. To do this he has to delude you that the rules of the target do not exist, and so he tries to hide each of them in turn. He attacks the first rule, that there is always a target. '*That is a lie,*' Fear whispers. *'You are all alone. You can only depend on you.'*

The destruction of space

Distance enables because we need space to see. If we stand in the same place as something we will never see it. So fear must now conceal the second rule: that the target always exists outside in measurable space. He destroys a sense of distance and space by pretending that the imagination takes place exclusively within. *'Everything I can imagine must take place inside my head. My imagination is internal. Everything I imagine takes place right inside me.'* The grim logic takes its toll. There now seems to be no enabling distance between you and the target. That helpful gulf has vanished and now you are jammed up with the outside world, like a face against a wall. No distance: no sight.

The destruction of time

Fear also undermines the third rule, that the target already exists. He manages to confuse you by splitting time in parallel mirrors, as in a lift which multiplies you infinitely as you wait for your floor. These mirrors, the past and future, distract you till you cannot see the target there waving. Then Fear calls up his old friends in the Government: Blame, Obligation, and Punishment will help control you. Responsibility he heaps on your shoulders, Duty he chains round your neck. *'It is up to you,'* they all murmur, *'to invent things; nothing is waiting to be discovered. Your duty is to manufacture all, energise all and control all. You are solely responsible for absolutely everything. You are even accountable for what is not happening and you are letting everybody down. Why are you so lazy/useless/empty/thoughtless/unimaginative/talentless?'* There is no stricter moralist than Fear; and no moralist is a stranger to Fear.

The destruction of the specific

Fear now must blur rule four, which states that the target is always specific. Now, the thing we irrationally fear certainly appears specific. But that phantom disaster only *seems* hideously real. So hideous in fact that we never let ourselves get close enough to examine it. So we are terrified that we will . . . what? It is worth asking the simple question. So obvious that sometimes we never give ourselves time to answer it. What might we do? Fall off the stage? Act badly? So far as I know, no one has ever died because they gave a poor performance. The terror that appears so frighteningly real diminishes under closer scrutiny. Of course it is sad to do poor work. But then, we inevitably do a lot of bad work and we all have to deal with that. But it is Fear that gets us to do bad work, so the fear of working badly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rather as guilt makes us irresponsible.

The fear that things might go badly has to be kept in proportion. Will the earth really implode if I give a duff performance? Steeling ourselves to examine the face of the thing we fear will diminish that fear. Fear's ploy is to stop us looking at him, or indeed anything else, closely and attentively. When panic strikes it helps to remember that the simple act of paying attention is calming. In fact only attentiveness brings peace. If we are so terrified of what we might see that we never pay attention to anything, we abandon ourselves to chaos.

The destruction of movement

Fear also tries to undermine the fifth and sixth rules: that the target is always transforming and active. *'Wrong!'* says Fear, *'the target is passive, immobile and unchanging!'* Fear then is probably alive and well and tunnelling away when I complain that my partner is wooden, and doesn't play the scene live. *'I get nothing back from him!'*

An unyielding partner may be uninspiring; but there 1s something seriously wrong if I am able to monitor my partner's quality of performance. It is more useful to ask if the person who does not yield is, in fact, me.

The actor who is disappointed by his partner's performance – *'I don't believe Juliet loves me enough for me to play the scene'* – needs to see the Juliet who does love him enough. It is the actor's challenge to believe, more than his partner's problem to convince him.

Similarly, whenever I complain that: *'I keep hearing my voice echoing back at me, droning monotonously away!'* I can also infer that Fear is busy at his sabotage. Because, of course, whenever I listen to how my own voice sounds, it must sound strange. The voice is a tool for doing things. It is not a tool for generalised self-expression. To use words well I need to imagine what my partner hears and does not hear. I need to imagine what is heard and what remains unheard. I need attend only to the target. My only business is with the target. When, in the midst of talking, I stop to listen to how I am speaking, I invariably confuse both whoever I am speaking to – and also myself. My own words start to sound fake. Indeed, my words must become fake at the precise moment I detach them from the target. The cleverest words become gobbledygook when they are divorced from a target. It is hard for this to happen in real life, because, on the whole, in real life, when we lose the target we run out of words.

The danger is that, when acting, we can memorise huge chunks of words from a script that someone else has written. But that does not let us off the hook of having to attach these words to the world outside. We may imagine that the words mean something of themselves. But even the most brilliant script is unintelligible if it is not connected to the outside world, if it is detached from the target. Every word, in fact, needs to be caused by the outside world. Perhaps this sheds some light on why our recorded voices often make us cringe.

When all around seems dead, it is a delusion. Fear has doped us till we no longer see the target changing and moving.

The rogue eye

Fear splits you into another delusory double: you, and the other 'judging' you, the 'doing' you and the 'watching' you. This second, monitoring you is a harsh critic and beams back a relentless progress report. *'How am I doing? . . . OK? . . . As bad as that?'* And you can neither hide nor escape from this rogue eye.

So you believe that you are your own target, nothing exists save you and your rogue eye, soaring outside your body, distracting you from any other target. You're apparently all alone, with nothing but a fake target for company. And that is merely a split part of you, dancing behind the audience's heads, winking and taunting: *'You're useless'* or, more occasionally: *'You're brilliant!'* You become your own best friend, and so your only friend. *'Who else do I need when I have me?'* No space for a third in that steamy relationship, and all the time Fear is smiling and beckoning.

A digression: Narcissus, Echo and Medusa

Narcissus and Medusa suffered from the rogue eye. The gods punished Narcissus for gazing at his own reflection in the water. He was turned into a flower and condemned to stare at himself for ever. But the gods punished Narcissus neither for ignoring Echo nor for his obsession with his looks. Indeed, if he could have seen his own true beauty perhaps Narcissus would have been a lot better off.

So why did they punish him? The problem was that he saw something else in the water. Narcissus

caught his own gaze looking back. He saw himself seeing. And as he saw himself seeing, the action of seeing was transformed into a deathly state. He stumbled on a way to blind himself – by perverting his sight and turning his gaze neither on the outer world, nor on himself, but on his own seeing. He managed to paralyse his own sight.

The Gorgon Medusa suffered a similar fate. Her gaze froze her victims into stone. But in Perseus' shield she also saw her own eyes seeing. Her petrifying stare bounced back and she paralysed not Perseus, but herself.

The actor makes exactly the same mistake by believing that his relation with the outside world is an inner, ownable state. My sight is not a valuable possession. My sight is an essential resource I share with whatever I see. Poor Narcissus has to freeze in gardens every March; we can remember his story when we feel paralysed too. It is more constructive to throw ourselves on a target than to monitor ourselves.

The myths of Echo and Narcissus did not originate as pretty stories for a fresco. Stories, however, never do quite what we want, as we shall consider later.

The second uncomfortable choice:
freedom or independence

We now need to consider the second uncomfortable choice: freedom or independence. You choose. You can have either, but not both, because one must destroy the other.

Freedom is everything, but independence is nothing. Independence is born of fear. The desire for independence is common. We don't want to depend on things that might let us down. But trying to renounce all dependence is folly. We need the outside world. We need oxygen, food, and stimulus. We need targets. Freedom is a mystery. Like presence, it is a given. However oppressed we may be, we can still retain a spark of freedom that makes us human. Strangely, we often find the prospect of real freedom quite frightening. Like presence, freedom seems too big and alarmingly undependable. '*I don't make my freedom, so I can't control it. But the thing that I myself make, that thing I can control not to leave me. So I'll invent a synthetic freedom, call it "independence", and keep it on a lead. And it will do everything I say.*'

Professor Frankenstein thought the same . . .

Need and hate

Many acting problems derive from the simple paradox that we hate the thing we need. The most useful things are given; but we fear the supply will dry up. Consequently we reject these gifts and manufacture substitutes. These inferior replicas are at least ours, because we made them. And our creatures wouldn't dare drop us or hurt us . . . would they?

Reality, it is true, has a lot to answer for, so on the whole we make sure we don't live there. We cannot control reality, but we can control our fantasies. Except our fantasies don't exist; so we're not really controlling anything at all. But the illusion of control is deeply reassuring. And the price we pay for this reassurance is unimaginable.

4

AN ESCAPE

All this is grim news. What can the frightened actor try to do? Unfortunately, 'trying to do' is itself part of the problem. 'Trying' leads to concentrating and . . . '*I don't know what I'm doing!*' We need to think laterally, because Fear has us careering in a circle, increasingly blind to the outside world.

The rules of the target will hold good for you however much you try to break them. The rules are there for you, not you for the rules. You can try to defy them, but you cannot change them. They are beyond your control; and only because they are separate from you, outside you and free from you, can the rules help you.

Now they come to the rescue.

The rules are inseparable, but if block strikes it helps to remember them in a sequence, in order to separate one fear from its multiplying other:

1: There is always a target
How can this help practically, when you are blocked? Well, this must also mean that you cannot be alone, however hard you try. Even if you abandon the target, it won't abandon you. There are plenty of targets out there; all you have to do is see them. You cannot annihilate the target; you cannot destroy the world.

2: The target exists outside,
and at a measurable distance
There is a measurable distance between you and the target. You and the target cannot fuse. You are separate. You cannot find the target inside you. We may not like the taste of this rule, but the medicine works, particularly when inside seems to be in darkness or chaos. Space and time do exist. Fear cannot destroy them. Fear pretends that space and time are our enemies. Indeed this may be the case for the characters: perhaps Romeo and Juliet dread separation and crave total, unachievable union.

Bad news and good news

This is the first example of a useful principle: bad news for the character is always good news for the actor.
There is a distance in space between Juliet and Romeo. When bidding farewell, she may yearn to cling to Romeo. But for Irina, the indestructible distance between Juliet and Romeo is immensely useful. For Irina can reach and reach to prevent her new lover from leaving. This unbridgeable distance may be Juliet's

enemy, but it is Irina's friend. For Juliet may want there to be no distance. Juliet may want to unite with Romeo, but she can't, and not just because the balcony gets in the way. Romeo is different, separate and therefore out of her control. Juliet can reach towards Romeo; she can try to bridge that gap between their bodies and their minds. But Juliet will fail; whatever Juliet wants will always be just out of her reach. But Juliet's frustration is Irina's hope. For Irina, on the contrary, this distance is the best possible news, an all-important space that Juliet can keep trying to span, and keep failing. This enabling distance is crucial for it ensures that Irina can let Juliet try as hard as she likes, and Irina can rest assured that Juliet can never accomplish what Juliet wants.

This enabling distance provides the actor with an obstacle to overcome. If there were no obstacle to overcome, there would be no quest. No quest: death. Every living moment contains an element of quest. Irina can rely on the unalterable rule that there is me and there is the other and that there is a measurable, changeable yet ineffaceable distance between the two of us.

It may help to unknot the following principle: the actor can never complete what the character wants because the character can never complete what the character wants. In other words, Irina can play the scene for all she is worth and Juliet will still have something left to need and some distance left to be covered. Juliet never gets all that she wants. Juliet never achieves her goal, or finishes her journey. Incompleteness or separation may be the character's enemy, but they are always the actor's friend.

The point and the path

Creation keeps us apart, however much we may try to unite. We are not fused, and can never become fused. Fear often makes us believe we are fused. We must never forget that a specific distance always separates us from the target, and this gap can never be destroyed. The space opens a distance, a distance that enables. As soon as there is a distance, there opens a potential path.

And even the most rudimentary path has two points, the beginning and the end: me, and where I can go. Fusion paralyses; distance moves.

As the God of Genesis cleft the abyss into night and day, so we can split the scary nothing into two points. Where there are two points there is a possible path, and we can always imagine moving along a path. And as soon as we can move, we can also breathe.

Belief in the specific distance helps conquer the two great symptoms of Fear. *'I can't breathe'* and *'I can't move'* are the twin products of Fear, and they go into business to manufacture Fear themselves. Fear then sells the franchise to make little factories to create more of himself; like a retrovirus that confuses the protecting cell into behaving as a destroyer.

3: The target exists before you need it

We cannot create a target. The target does not need to be created. As soon as we feel lost, the target is already waiting to be found. As we have seen, this does not mean that a target can exist in the past. Nothing exists in the past because the past does not exist. This is comforting because the target is ready and waiting for you to see it. The target is already there on the surface; it is not buried in some deep place where only clever people know to dig.

When I am asked what I would like to eat tomorrow, my eyes focus, shift and refocus trying to discover what is already there. All I have to do is find it. I have to find tomorrow's beer and pizza in the 'there and now'. I have to see what is already there. What I see is already there, I cannot fabricate it. I can neither create nor invent; I have to find.

4: The target is always specific

Fear attempts to blur the outlines of what we see. Fear smudges the differences between things. Fear insinuates that we must never see things too clearly otherwise we will see the bogeyman. Of course, this

is a lie. Fear makes us scared to see the specific, because the specific will diminish him. We know then that what we are looking for is specific.

If the face of the thing that is feared seems to have a smudged outline, we need to brace ourselves and study the scary blur. Oddly, we will find that the face never seems to get any clearer. The more we examine it, the more the face smudges itself to avoid scrutiny and exposure. Indeed, were we to dare analyse the face, it would disintegrate in our hands like a mask made of dust.

5: The target is always transforming, and
6: The target is always active

As we have seen, the target must always be changing and the target must always be doing something active. If it doesn't change or if it is completely still, it's dead. If it can't move, it isn't a target. So the blocked actor knows to search for something that is:

specific
moving
outside
changing
active
waiting to be discovered
needing to be changed

This helps Irina narrow the field. She knows now not to look for something that is:

general
still
internal
constant
passive
needing to be created
unchangeable

– which is precisely what Fear has led her to expect.

But what happens if the target appears to vanish? What happens if the target seems to abandon me to the clutches of Fear? If all six rules fail, then what is to be done? Fear has made the specific seem general, movement frozen, and all distance in time and space welded into a new and horrible alloy. More devastatingly, Fear has split the saving present into a delusory double, the past and the future. What can I do?

Well, you can copy the enemy's strategy. Fear uses the delusory split into two, so why not you? You must first find a target, the 'night' or the 'future', or Romeo, in panic anything will have to do – and then split it. These are 'the stakes'.

5

THE STAKES

The stakes open to offer the best escape from block. The actor must first see a target, and before it vanishes, that target must be split into two.

As we have just seen, every living moment has an element of quest. Every living creature at every moment of its life has to deal with a situation which will either get better or worse. This better or worse might be infinitesimally small, but there will always be some degree of better or worse. All we can be sure of is change.

Similarly, Juliet faces a situation that cannot remain the same. Even if Juliet were to abandon Romeo to stay with her parents and remain for ever dreaming from that balcony she would still find her universe changing. For one thing, she will get old. Even if she wants to kill hope and remain for ever a little girl, she can never defy the great flux of things.

For you, for me, for the tiniest amoeba and for Juliet, there will always be something to be lost and something to be won. And whatever we say or do will be in order to make the situation better and to prevent it from getting worse. This quest motors the actor.

The more closely we examine the target, the more we will see that it splits. And it splits into two halves of equal size. The target always divides into a better outcome and a worse. Romeo splits into the Romeo that Juliet wants to see, and the Romeo that Juliet doesn't want to see. His words split into the words she wants to hear, and the words she doesn't want to hear. Juliet, like all of us, lives in a double universe: she has double vision. Juliet sees a Romeo who understands her, and also a Romeo who cannot understand her, a Romeo who is strong and a Romeo who is weak.

The stakes are so important they have their own double rule. The unbreakable double rule is as follows:

1. At every living moment there is something to be lost and something to be won.

2. The thing to be won is precisely the same size as the thing to be lost.

Two and one

It is not enough for Irina to say that the situation is important for Juliet. It is not enough to say that Juliet's life depends on what she does. Irina needs to see what is at stake. And that is something very different. The stakes are not woolly or vague; the stakes are specific and they must come in perfectly paired twos. Remembering this shape of 'two' rather than 'one' is crucial for the actor in difficulty. For example, if

Irina asks: '*What is at stake here?*', and she replies: '*I want to run away with Romeo*', that is an example of expressing herself in 'one'. Irina has unknowingly removed the negative. This may seem like nit-picking. But the simplified answer in 'one' may confuse Irina in the long run. It may tease and frustrate the actor to dig for this double, both the positive and the negative, but the positive in friction with the negative is precisely what sparks the actor.

What is at stake cannot be simply:

'that I will run away with Romeo.'

What is at stake is:

'that I will run away with Romeo
***and** that I will not run away with Romeo.'*

Both the positive and the negative are present at the same time, both the hope and the fear, both the plus and the minus.

Indeed a better question than *'What is at stake here?'* is *'What do I stand to gain and what do I stand to lose?*'

'*My Nurse will protect me*
***and** my Nurse will betray me.'*

'All will be well
***and** all will be a disaster.'*

'*If I show how keen I am, Romeo will be attracted to me*
***and** my forwardness will repel Romeo.'*

It is even more constructive for Irina to try to see through Juliet's eyes:

'*I see a Romeo who wants to run away with me*
***and** I see a Romeo who doesn't want to run away with me.'*

'I see a Romeo I want to run away with
***and** I see a Romeo I don't want to run away with.'*

'*I see a tomorrow with Romeo*
***and** I see a tomorrow without Romeo.'*

Actors often experience paralysis because they have been looking for a 'one'. The search for 'one' is a wild goose chase; there is no magic 'one' that will solve everything. Life comes in opposed 'twos'. Trying to simplify, cut corners and get things done in 'one' blocks the actor. This rule of 'two' is as easy as riding a bicycle and equally difficult to explain in words.

It is better felt through example. There is no night without day. There is no honour without shame. And a declaration of love is terrifying because the joy of being loved back must exactly mirror the terror of being rejected. To some this idea will appear straightforward and elementary, to others perverse and Byzantine. But we are not dealing with spiritual revelation or the truth. All that matters here is that such an idea may help the actor move forward.

Pain

Why do we have an inbuilt resistance to seeing the world in these twos? One answer is very simple. We don't like pain. We don't like pain in our bodies. And we don't like pain in our heads. And these 'twos' make pain. For example, we tend to see the good in people we like and we tend to see the bad in people we dislike. It makes for a more comfortable world view. It isn't an accurate world view. But it is less painful. And we are prepared to pay a lot for our comfort.

To see that people we love can do bad things and that people we hate can do good things is painful. But to be near Juliet, we need to be near not only her joy, but also her pain.

It is a sad irony that a lot of blocked acting results from the actor being all too aware that the stakes are low. So the actor tries to 'play higher stakes'. If Irina feels that what she is doing isn't sufficiently exciting, compelling, fascinating, important, then she may try to make her words, her actions seem more exciting, compelling, fascinating, important. And an actor may feel that the best way to do this is to disconnect from the outside world and press harder on the pedal.

The result is that 'push' when the audience thinks that the actors are shouting. But this shout only sounds like a shout. This 'push' may not be loud, but it is just as meaningless as shouting for no reason – and just as grating on the ear. The actor becomes progressively more forced and generalised, the actor feels the stakes are dropping, and the actor pushes even more. Misery.

So really the actor cannot play the stakes, in the sense that the stakes are one thing that can be created. Instead the actor needs to see the big two, both what may be lost and also what may be won. So remember that whenever the expression 'the stakes' is used, it never describes a state. The stakes are always two directions in conflict. There is always something to be lost and always something to be won.

Even the title of this chapter is potentially misleading. Even the expression 'the stakes' is a false friend, if it implies that the stakes are one thing.

The glass of water

Say we could magically serve the same glass of water both to a millionaire in a restaurant and also to a Legionnaire crawling through the desert. Simply to say the glass of water is 'less important' for one than for the other, however true, is useless for the actor. For the double stakes have been blurred into a 'one'.

How can the actor cleave the paralysing 'one' into a dynamic 'two'? Well, what might be at stake for the Legionnaire could be: *'Will this glass of water spill, or not?' 'Will someone steal the water, or not?'* What this character does will depend upon the stakes that he sees. Who the character is will also depend upon the stakes he sees.

For the millionaire, there may be very little at stake in the glass of water. He may notice the glass because he is mildly thirsty or to better savour the Chateau Margaux: '*Will the water clear my palate or not?*' There may be very little at stake, but if the millionaire notices the water at all there must be a tiny amount for him to win or to lose.

Logic may insist and the scientist will agree that the molecular structure of the water does not change. But as far as the actor is concerned, the glass of water actually does change its substance. The Legionnaire and the millionaire do see different glasses of water.

Acting is not a question of how we see things; acting is a question of what we see. For the actor, we are what we see.

A rehearsal story

Imagine we are rehearsing *Macbeth*, and after desperate days of uninspiring work, all at once life breaks out, the scene explodes with power and danger, and everyone in the rehearsal room is riveted: Macbeth has glimpsed something horrible, and the hairs stand up on our necks as he cries: *' . . . Line, please!'*

The stakes soar; for a brief moment there is a glimpse of real life and danger and all because the actor has forgotten a line. The bathos makes us ask: how can the stakes be higher in a rehearsal, than in plotting the assassination of the Head of State? The moment is absurd and we laugh – not only are the stakes in rehearsal ludicrously out of proportion, so are the stakes in the assassination, each in different directions. Such a moment is useful for it shows how much further we are from where we need to be. We fool ourselves that we are playing high stakes when we are not even remotely near where the situation demands.

Passing on the problem

As Irina will know too well, when panic strikes, the stakes soar for her. But as we will see, Irina can actually reduce the stakes for herself by increasing the stakes for Juliet. So she can win both ways. But how can the actor shift the soaring stakes onto the character? Let us think about three people in turn: Romeo, Juliet . . . and Irina: two fictitious people and one real. What is at stake for each? For Juliet the stakes are located mostly in Romeo, whereas for Romeo most of what is at stake is in Juliet. Will the strange beauty return his love, or doom him to a life of despair?

Now for Irina, the stakes are also high, but quite different! If Irina feels blocked, the stakes will seem to lie in her very performance. In other words, instead of seeing what Juliet stands to win or lose, Irina will be overwhelmed by what Irina stands to win or lose. For example, will Irina act well or badly, will Irina make a fool of herself or not? Once again, the obvious differences between actor and character only seem obvious. These differences are all too easily blurred. The stakes for Irina and for Juliet must be distinguished and carefully separated. The stakes for Irina and Juliet are quite different. How can Irina make the stakes low for Irina and high for Juliet?

The journey through

First, the actor needs to transfer all that is at stake from what the actor sees, into what the character sees.

Because the stakes for Juliet do not live inside Juliet. Instead, the stakes for Juliet are in what Juliet sees. So Irina needs to travel through Juliet to see what Juliet sees in the outside world. Irina must not stop in the character. Instead Irina must see through a transparent Juliet to see on the other side what matters to Juliet.

What matters to Juliet is Romeo. So Irina needs to see through Juliet and see what is at stake for Juliet in Romeo. Irina must stop looking into Juliet, for all that Irina will find in Juliet is what is at stake for Irina! The actor must not see into the character but instead sees through the character. The actor's sight must pass through the character as if the character were transparent. As if the character were a mask.

The actor sees through the character's eyes. Only if the actor sees what is at stake for the character will the character live.

A digression: unequal stakes?

The double rule states that at every living moment there must be something to be lost and something to be won. Fear can do nothing about this. It is an unbreakable rule.

It is not provable that the thing we stand to lose has the same dimensions as the thing we stand to gain. But the notion is valuable. Such symmetry underpins the actor's universe for all practical purposes. We need not be discouraged that we can never find the exact antonym, the precise opposite word. The idea of symmetry is powerful, even if the ideal cannot be achieved. Experiments have shown that symmetry underpins even a baby's notion of facial beauty, yet no face is perfectly symmetrical.

Sometimes the stakes do appear to be unequal. Dermot is invited by Kevin to the Curragh. Will he have a bet? Dermot takes a shine to a bored-looking horse called 'Unlikely', at a hundred to one. He puts on ten punts, so he could possibly win a thousand. When Kevin asks: *'How do you feel?'* the novice gambler

replies: *'Well, I would love to win a thousand, but I don't mind so much losing ten.'* Does this mean that what Dermot stands to win is far bigger than what he stands to lose?

No, it doesn't. In fact the symmetry is still present, because the positive outcome, the joy at winning a thousand, is watered down by its unlikelihood, and the misery of losing is watered down by the smallness of the amount. They both even out.

Irina needs to assume that this precise symmetry exists as a given, and then undertake the task of finding it. It may be a crucial prerequisite of research that the scientist never begins from the conclusion. But we are not scientists. The splitting of the one into two can release energy in the actor as it does in nuclear fission.

A digression: the moving stakes

We might also notice that the attention may wander to wherever there is more at stake. What is at stake involves anxiety and hope, and to exactly equal degrees. *'Will the girl in the library look at me today? Or won't she? Or do I care?'*

And, if not, I will tend to shift my attention to where it is more stimulated. But there is an exception to this rule. Sometimes the reverse happens, and we retreat from the real world because the stakes are intolerably high. When the stakes soar painfully, we can turn our gaze from reality to an imaginary world where imaginary stakes replace the real ones, and we can live more comfortably. In this delusory world we can exercise our powers of prediction and control. Take the case of a father who washes the dishes rather than deal with his son's drug addiction. He has convinced himself that the most important thing for him to do is to make sure that the saucepan is really clean, while his son stares vacantly at the coffee. The father can only replace one set of stakes with another. That last bit of gravy, will it scrape off, or not? Even the father in denial of the real stakes must create in his parallel universe yet another set of stakes.

However, one of the principal reasons we go to the theatre is to see people face situations where the stakes are toweringly high. Theatre helps us explore extreme feelings in a controlled situation. We may not like the stakes so painfully high in our private worlds, but we go out of our way to see other people experience these polarised intensities. We can witness what we dare not live in the security of a group and the reassurance of make-believe.

The target is not how we see things. The target is what we see. The split target is the stakes. At every living moment there must be something to be lost and something to be won.

6

‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT I WANT’

The second spider’s leg is intimately linked to the first. ‘What I want’ comes from the target. I have to see something before I can want it. ‘Wanting’ comes from the thing I see. What Juliet wants comes from what Juliet sees. Seeing what Juliet sees is what matters. ‘Deciding what Juliet wants’ misses out the crucial step of seeing. Working out ‘what my character wants’ is different from ‘seeing what my character sees’. And this difference is helpful for the actor.

Irina needs to play as if from the inside of Juliet looking out. Irina does not want to play Juliet as if from the outside looking in. In a way, working out ‘what Juliet wants’ is a job for someone who knows Juliet or who is writing about her. But this is not how Juliet experiences things. From inside Juliet, the world looks very different. And Irina is playing as if through Juliet’s eyes. Irina is an artist. Irina is not delivering a lecture on Juliet. Irina needs to experience what Juliet experiences. Irina needs to see what Juliet sees in the moment – and not with the benefit of hindsight.

In any case, ‘wanting’ is not always a helpful word for the actor. The question: *‘What do I want?’* implies that I choose what I want, in other words, that I can control what I want. That is unless we think of this word ‘want’ in its older English usage as meaning ‘lack’ or ‘need’. The word ‘need’ helps the actor far more:

Irina can play that she wants to kiss Romeo
or
she can see the lips that need to be kissed.

The second is more likely to help.

As we have seen, for the actor, desire originates in the target and not in the character’s will.

Many characters may see that they have no choice, although observers may well see that the character has a choice:

›salind sees the Orlando that needs to be taught.
:atrice sees the Benedick that needs to be ignored.
hello sees the Desdemona that needs to be strangled.

Want and need

‘Need’ makes it clear that the target has something that we cannot do without, whereas ‘want’ can imply

that we can start and stop wanting with a concentrated effort of will. 'Want' I can turn on and off like a tap, 'need' turns me on and off at its will. 'Need' more usefully reminds us that we do not control our feelings. There may be very little need if I ask for a cup of coffee. But there will be some. I may need the coffee to reassure me, to cure my hangover, or to pass the time and give me something to do because somewhere I am afraid of having absolutely nothing to do. Mere wanting the coffee may disguise a more interesting set of needs. Normally, we prefer to want because wanting is less mortifying if we are rejected. If we merely want, it isn't so shaming not to get; but not to get when we need is humiliating. Need thinks it has an ugly face and sometimes uses Want as a mask.

We can always find some degree of need. Instead of merely wanting to take fresh air on the balcony, perhaps Juliet needs fresh air or needs peace from the Nurse, or needs quiet from the clatter of the cleaners. There is great need for Juliet when she asks Romeo not to swear by the '*inconstant moon*'. She needs him to be constant, mature and thoughtful. So much is at stake for Juliet in Romeo that it becomes inadequate to say that Juliet merely wants Romeo to be these things; her future depends on it. Juliet's need passes wanting.

The central danger in asking '*What do I want?*' is that it demotes the target. The question implies that I can create and control my desire within some sort of concentrated centre.

'What Juliet wants' may seem to come from what Juliet feels inside. But it only seems that way to someone looking at Juliet. To a person on the outside it is obvious that Juliet has a great deal of choice in her fate. From the first meeting with Romeo to the final minutes in the tomb. But to Juliet it will probably seem that all these are forced on her. She loves Romeo, what choice does she have? To Juliet it will seem that she has very little choice.

A digression: choice

When we say that someone is 'adorable' or 'irresistible', we disguise the fact that we choose to adore or not to resist them. Beauty, we are frequently told, is in the eye of the beholder. But why do we need to be reminded so often? Because in real life we forget this principle all the time. There's no room for choice in the old songs 'You Made Me Love You' or 'What Else Could I Do?'

But it is also odd that when we talk about other people or discuss a character, we often ask why they 'chose' something or someone. We easily forget that in similar crises, we thought we had no choice. Martin Luther said *'I can do nothing else'* and then started the Reformation. Actually there were a lot of other things he could have done. For example he could, with considerably less effort, have remained an obscure monk. But it didn't seem that way to him. He felt he had no choice. He saw a Catholic Church that needed to be changed. The corrupt church took his choice away from him. Of course he was tormented by the decision, but at the end of the day he felt and saw that: *'Ich kann nicht anders.'*

On the other hand, one of the chief reasons we go to see a great play is to see someone making a choice that will change their lives. What happens in the balcony scene? Juliet makes an extraordinary choice to defy her family and marry Romeo. And that choice moves us. But what does that choice feel like from inside? What does Juliet feel at the time? In a way, if the stakes are low, there seems to be an abundance of choice. '*How would you like your coffee? Black/white/expresso/cappucino?*' You can change your choice on whim. But to make a great choice, Juliet, like Luther, has to imagine that she has no real choice. Do I marry Romeo or stay with my family and marry Paris? Does marrying Paris seem to be a real option? To the Nurse? Yes. To Juliet? No. Not after the balcony scene. Juliet chooses by imagining her options have been reduced to one.

The agoniser, however, finds it hard to make up his mind. Like Lady Macbeth's cat in the adage who lets *' "I dare not" wait upon "I would" ',* or Hamlet with *'To be or not to be'*. But as long as Hamlet perceives he has a choice, he cannot make one. Not until the final act does Hamlet choose to kill Claudius. But to him it seems as if he has left it until he has no choice.

Needing and doing cannot be divorced. Before we can finish with want/need we must reconsider ‘doing’ or ‘action’.

Mere wanting tends to diminish the stakes until the situation can be acted both comfortably and falsely.

7

ACTION AND REACTION

Human beings are animals that take things personally. A student sees a girl in the library reading *Anna Karenina*. His attention will automatically wander to another target if he is not interested in her. But the more his interest is aroused by the girl, the less he may see her reading Tolstoy, and the more he will see her actively ignoring him at the next desk. In reality, of course, the girl may be quite unaware of this change in her action. He coughs, brushes past her. Still she ignores him. He wants to change what the girl is doing to him. The girl may well not even have noticed him. But he sees an indifference that is highly active – an indifference he must change.

A reaction follows an action, because a reaction is the consequence of an action. As Newton explained: '*To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.*' Indeed whatever we do must be a reaction to something that has happened before.

We have seen that the target is never passive; the target is always active. All our apparent actions are in fact only reactions to what the target is already doing.

Does this really mean that we never start anything? Precisely. And the principle is exceptionally useful for the actor. When I seem to start off something, in fact I am merely responding to something else. In fact I cannot originate something by myself, whatever I do has to be as a reaction to something else that goes before. So when I act, this 'something else that goes before' is crucial.

The actor cannot play in a void

Irina may feel blocked right at the beginning of the scene: '*O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?*' She has a clear target, presumably an imaginary Romeo. But why does Juliet address these first words to him? Is it to tease him? Is it to seduce him? Is it to destroy him? Is it to re-create him? There are many interesting choices for Irina, all dependent on the target. But the idea of choosing is a reduction of what we actually go through in real life. What will always help Irina is to play a reaction.

So Irina first needs to see what this imaginary Romeo is already doing. Because it is 'what Romeo is doing' that makes Juliet do things. Juliet sees Romeo doing something, and she tries to change what he is doing. Is this imaginary Romeo teasing Juliet, talking about his father, explaining that a Montague can never marry a Capulet, telling Juliet that he is proud to be called Romeo Montague, simply ignoring her, or making inconsequential love? What is Romeo doing that Juliet needs to change? What can Romeo be doing that makes Juliet say: *'O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?'*

Text and reaction

'*A rose by any other name would smell as sweet*' is not a horticultural observation tipped into a vacuum. We know that it is targeted on Romeo. But on which specific Romeo? On Romeo as the son of Montague? But even this is not specific enough to help Irina. Irina needs to see what the target is specifically doing. Irina needs to see what Romeo is already doing so that Juliet may react to it. Here it may help Irina to see a Romeo who is actively defending his identity, so that Juliet must react with: '*A rose / By any other name would smell as sweet*' to stop him defending his family name.

'It is nor hand nor foot / Nor arm nor face nor any other part / Belonging to a man.'

At this moment Irina might imagine that Romeo is insisting that his name is as much a part of him as is his body. So that Juliet has to interrupt him, to contradict him, to change him. Then if Irina imagines that Romeo has just said: '*My name is as important to me as my body!*' it becomes more likely that Juliet needs to name parts of the body to change Romeo's point of view.

In short, it makes it easier for Irina to see what Romeo is doing. Let Irina see that the action is something that is already being played by Romeo.

The actor reacts to an action that is already occurring somewhere else. The actor never originates a totally independent action. In other words: '*I see the target playing an action, and as a reaction, I try to change the target's action.*'

This construction may sound complicated, but it helps when Irina steps onto a balcony and feels she has a horrifically wide choice of emotions to show or states to embody. Let Irina see the action that she must change. Let Irina not be creative and imagine from the sum total of infinity all the exciting things that she might do. It is far more helpful for Irina to rely on her curiosity, open her eyes and see what is already being played outside her that she needs to change.

Romeo

Let's give Irina a rest and pay some attention to Alex who is playing Romeo and who also feels stuck.

'*It is the east and Juliet is the sun!*' Alex addresses the audience directly. He tries hard to be sincere but he pushes and pushes and feels frustrated. The more epic feeling he tries to pour into the words, the worse he feels. Of course, if Alex uses this line to describe what he feels, he will block himself. The actor who describes merely emotes and shows. But he has another problem and that is that he thinks the line is about his love for Juliet. The line may refer to Juliet, but the line can only be 'about' whoever he is talking to.

So the line must be 'about' the audience. The audience is therefore doing something that Alex wants to change. What must Romeo see first before he can utter: '*It is the east and Juliet is the sun!*'? Perhaps he sees a dull, passionless audience. That would then force Romeo to kick-start their prosaic imaginations into appreciating the full splendour of Juliet. So although this line may seem to be about Juliet, it is not. Romeo is trying to change the audience's perception of Juliet, which is something entirely different.

Creative independence will not help Alex as much as seeing an audience that is already claiming: '*We don't see anything very significant. We only see a young girl on a balcony. That's all!*' Then Romeo has to change what the audience is thinking: '*It is the east (are you blind?!) and Juliet is the sun!*'

To reiterate, the line is emphatically not a description of Juliet. The image of the East and the Sun is not 'about' Juliet. If Alex plays this line to be 'about' Juliet then the energy will snap like elastic back in his eye. The image is 'about' who or what he is addressing. All text is a tool to change what the target is already doing.

Romeo's words are a reaction to what he sees the audience thinking. Therefore Alex needs to work on what Romeo imagines that the audience is thinking. We will consider all this more practically when we come to the pre-text exercise in Chapter 17.

What we say is never about what we say; what we say is about who we are talking to. What we say is a tool to change our hearers.

The forgetful businessman

A businessman is ransacking his flat for his passport. In playing that situation, the actor may feel that he has to originate something, but, in fact, the actor can play only a reaction to what he sees. That must mean that the changing target, his passport, his briefcase, his chest of drawers, is already perpetrating an action. As we have seen, what the actor does – throwing jackets over his shoulder, etc. – is merely a response to this originating action. But what can that passive little passport be doing?

Well, the passport can be actively hiding from the businessman. Or at least that is how it may seem to the businessman. This may seem crazy from a cool and collected distance, but such paranoia seems less absurd when the minutes tick by, the taxi is hooting outside, and you rip through your pockets one more time.

As the second hand jerks round the dial, the stakes rise, and the businessman grows increasingly enraged and helpless. This emotional state cannot be acted. But what can be acted is the businessman's reaction to what he sees. And what does he see? He sees an infuriating world out to frustrate him again! It is the fault of whoever tidied up; it is the fault of himself, his increasing disorganisation; it is the fault of the cushion that is hiding the passport; it is the fault of the crammed briefcase; it is the fault of the hostile universe that is conspiring to make him miss the plane.

Everything he does, tearing out drawers, emptying pockets and shaking out books, seems quite active to the observer. But, as we have seen, it is more practical for the actor to see through the character's eyes, as if the businessman were a lens. For his part, the businessman sees a maddening, stubborn, all-powerful universe. And in this universe lurks a vengeful little passport, or obtuse cleaner, or fussy cushion, or snarled-up pocket. The frantic searching is not an originating action at all but merely a response to a highly active set of targets.

The passport hides; so he tries to find it. The taxi hooting makes him hurry; so he shouts to make it wait. The universe frustrates him; so he tries to control it. He sees the target doing something to him, and the businessman tries to control or mitigate or deal with this.

The character's reaction is to change the target's existing action, which is directed towards the character.

The split reaction

If I always have something to win and something to lose, then presumably what I am doing must also split in two. For I must always be trying to bring about what I want to happen. And at the same time, I must always be trying to prevent what I don't want to happen. An example will make this clearer.

The unexploded bomb

Say Alex has taken time off rehearsals to be in a film. He is playing an unexploded-bomb expert in a war epic, and it is his big scene. The director has very little time and says to Alex: '*You crawl through here, this is your tool kit, these are the tweezers and that is the bomb.*' Now Alex might prepare by telling himself what he is doing: '*I am trying to defuse the bomb and I am trying not to blow myself up.*' Very good. However, if he were to ask: *'But exactly which of these two am I trying to do at any given time? Defuse the bomb? Or save myself?*' it would be absurd. The answer must be both. '*But, precisely which am I doing at which time? Am I now trying to defuse the bomb? Or am I now trying not to blow myself up? Which?*' The answer must still be: '*Both, at the same time.*' All these questions demand an answer in our old enemy, 'one', and therefore mislead.

Instead let Alex see the bomb directly through the eyes of the expert. The expert knows the minutiae of

the wires and springs, and Alex needs to have done his research. Which fuse connects where? But rather than work out what he wants from the wiring, Alex needs to ask '*What do I see?*' And he will see in doubles. '*Will those shaking tweezers save me or blast me to eternity?*'

Thinking in doubles
So it will also help Irina to think in doubles as follows:

try to teach Romeo, and I try not to confuse him.'
try to seduce Romeo, and I try not to repel him.'
try to amuse Romeo, and I try not to frighten him.'
try to understand Romeo, and I try not to misunderstand him.'
try to warn Romeo, and I try not to trivialise the situation to him.'
try to tell Romeo the truth, and I try not to lie to him.'

Again, the words are clumsy that we use to describe these split reactions, but, as we know, symmetry is only a useful ideal. What matters is that the more I am trying to do something then the more I am trying not to do something else, and each to the same degree. This becomes more apparent as the stakes rise.

The split reaction is obvious and inevitable once we are accustomed to the duality of the stakes. It is useful because when we are very blocked, this splitting releases energy like a split atom. The split reaction clears, refines and defines what the actor sees.

It is not true that the actor cannot play two things at once. We are always playing two things at once. But these two things are highly specific and precisely opposed. We must play in doubles because there is always something to be lost and something to be won.

A digression: is there only conflict?
Surely there are exceptions to this perpetual friction? Surely the stakes can shrink to nil? Doesn't peace ever break out? Let us take a more placid experience. Imagine you see a birch tree in May and its shivering, filtering leaves induce deep calm. The birch gives peace and you take it. If you feel profound peace to see the leaves flicker yellow in the sun, what is the problem? But you cannot possess that attention as a state. I would imagine that most people who have experienced rapture would be the first to tell us that this moment of total unity is all too temporary. The state invariably dissolves; it is unstable – '*Please let me stay this happy for ever! Please don't let this feeling end!*'

Living friction
Life is about uncomfortable twos and not safe ones. The conflicting energies in the target will decide what we feel and do. The action is what the target is doing. The reaction is how I try to change the target so that instead it does what I need it to do.

At every moment there is something I stand to lose and something I stand to gain. There is something I need and something I must avoid. There is something I need to do and something I must avoid doing. There is an outcome I need and an outcome I must avoid. There is an effect I need to have, and an effect I must avoid having.

If it doesn't move it's dead
A living being is always in flux, because all life moves. But we are not talking about any old generalised movement. Living movement may seem haphazard, but never is. This flux is specific and generated by opposites, rather as electricity when it sparks between positive and negative terminals. A character is not a fixed point but rather a series of journeys in opposite directions. But these opposing journeys are down

highly specific paths.

Actors can unleash tremendous energy after grasping that humans must play these doubles. Not only are they logical, they help.

8

‘I DON’T KNOW WHO I AM’

‘*Who am I?*’ is often the first question asked in creating a character but it can be unhelpful. Trying to answer ‘*Who am I?*’ is a lifetime’s work for the individual, and indeed the more we discover ourselves, the more we realise that we don’t know ourselves at all. If, then, we cannot properly answer the question about ourselves, how can we possibly answer it about someone else? ‘*Who am I?*’ is an Everest of a question, unlikely to empower the actor in the short span of rehearsal.

Even worse, the innocent seeming ‘*Who am I?*’ is laced with a paralysing anaesthetic. Why? Because it implies an answer in ‘one’ – ‘*Who is Juliet?*’ The daughter of a Veronese aristocrat? A fourteen-year-old girl? The fiancée of Paris? And each of these answers, though true, is static. Each of these answers can paralyse because no description that arrives in ‘one’ can move.

Irina needs answers that are alive. She needs questions with answers that shift.

A flux between two poles

What questions would help Irina more? ‘*Who would I like to be?*’ is more useful because it implies an answer that moves. ‘*Who would I like to be?*’ is even more useful when asked with a near opposite such as: ‘*Who am I afraid I might be?*’

So Juliet may start to imagine simply: ‘*I would like to be the wife of Romeo, I am afraid I might become the wife of Paris.*’ And on to: ‘*I would like to be someone loved by Romeo, and am afraid I might become a mistress betrayed by Romeo.*’

Transformation

A crucial thing to remember about character is the simplest: the actor cannot actually transform. This seems more obvious than it is. Sometimes actors punish themselves because they have not achieved a ‘transformation’. But the quest for transformation is as vain as the quest for perfection. It is important to knock the idea of transformation square on the head. We cannot change ourselves and we cannot transform ourselves. We stay still, only the target moves.

The only thing that can transform is the target. And the target is permanently transforming.

Of course Juliet changes throughout the play. But Irina cannot depict that change. Although Irina can directly show no transformation in Juliet, she can remember the fifth rule that the target is always transforming. Consequently, although Irina cannot make Juliet change, she can see through Juliet’s eyes all the things that seem to change around Juliet. For example, Irina can see that Juliet’s bed starts to metamorphose. It may help release Irina if Juliet sees:

The bed that she wakes up in before the ball.
The bed she tries to sleep in after the balcony scene.
The bed in which she makes love to Romeo.
The bed she might have to share with Paris.
The bed she will drug herself in.

These beds are different throughout the play. It is better for Irina to let the bed transform, rather than try to transform Juliet. It will help Irina more to see that Juliet does not change throughout the play, but the bed does.

Seeing ourselves change

Like the rest of us, Juliet cannot directly change herself, but she can, of course, realise that she has been changed. And the moment that we realise that we have (been) changed is always a moment of distance from ourselves – I see that something does not enrage me that once would have – I see that something makes me sad I once would have laughed at. I have to see myself at a slight distance before I can see that I have been changed.

'Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny
What I have spoke. But farewell, compliment.'

Perhaps Juliet sees that she has been transformed this night. Perhaps once she would have dwelt on form, and pretended not to have felt such things. Perhaps there was a previous Juliet who was socially accomplished or at least well behaved, and this Juliet is dead, and a more vital Juliet is born. It helps Irina to trawl for moments when Juliet sees Juliet more clearly. But if Irina tries to show anything in Juliet, she will merely provide a neat essay on character development, as in: '*Here she is a young innocent, here she is sexually released and transformed by love, here she is a mourning widow*.' Neither the actor nor the director nor the author can fully control the audience's perceptions. All three may try to demonstrate a change, to show how the character has been transformed. But such showing is ultimately false. Even trying to actively change ourselves is hazardous. All we can do is see things ever more clearly, ever more presently, and ever more attentively. Change then may happen to us. Change, however, remains absolutely out of our control.

More importantly, Irina must remember that the audience has not come to see Juliet. The audience has come to see Irina. More precisely, the audience has come to see what Irina sees. Irina has no business trying to change herself. That is not only unfair on the audience; it is a heresy against her creation.

A digression: transformation and the state

When rehearsal bursts into life, we get a tremendous rush of exhilaration. This energy will bring excitement in its wake. Life has broken out, and Irina feels happy. All seems simple and relief rinses through the room.

However, Irina will also know what it is to skip in whistling the next morning, impatient for the same exciting moment, and to be bitterly disappointed. That same passage is dead; nothing remains, just an empty shell, and Irina cannot, for the life of her, remember what she had done to achieve that state. But it was never a state. It may have seemed like a state but in fact it was a direction. And it came from the target, and not from Irina. Irina was given some life but afterwards she imagined that she had made it herself. Perhaps she thought she had earned it through her hard work. But life isn't like money. We can earn money, but we can't earn life. It just happens, that's all.

Life is beyond our control, and we don't much like it. Life can drop us anytime; and we certainly don't

like that. Life cannot be created; and that isn't very popular either. So many of our structures of thought, word and story are designed to disguise these most uncomfortable of realities.

We can never make life. We let life pass through us by not blinding ourselves to the target. In any case, when life comes, it comes when it wants – it comes by grace. Vanity may fool us otherwise, but we never manufacture life. Our performances will not live if we imagine that we are creating something. We can only see the life that is already waiting to flow. We cannot even try to pass life on, but we can aim not to stop life passing.

There is no such thing as a state of life. There is no such thing as a state of grace. We can only hope to get back to a living moment by remembering how we got there. And then perhaps life will oblige. It normally does, but we don't call the shots. We did not get there by an effort of will. We got there by seeing.

The third uncomfortable choice:
to see or to show

We can either show or see, but we can never do both, for the one must destroy the other. We sometimes imagine in performance that we have to show things as a sort of insurance policy to make sure that the audience will 'get' what we are feeling. This is an unmitigated disaster. For Irina to show the audience what she feels for Romeo is fatal.

Seeing is about the target, showing is about me. Showing only seems to be about the target. Showing is in fact a false opening of oneself, because showing is about trying to control the perception of others. If Irina tries to show us something in Juliet, it will be as if she wrote an essay on the character, or underscored her own performance on a violin.

Acting and pretending

As soon as we show, we pretend. And pretending is not acting. Sometimes the difference is obvious; sometimes the difference is more subtle.

Certain things cannot be acted; they can only be pretended. States can never be acted. For example, states like death or sleep. You cannot act being asleep. You can only pretend to be asleep. You can only show that you are asleep. You can act falling asleep. You can act struggling to keep awake. You may be able to act having a bad dream however, because during the dream the brain flickers into a kind of consciousness. You can only act what is conscious, so you can act this little surge of consciousness. But the rest will have to be shown. Just as sometimes you may have to play dead. This is not really acting. It is something else, but it may be theatrically crucial for the audience that you do it. And pretending to be dead or asleep is very hard to do well!

There is of course more in acting than what is conscious. However, that part which is unconscious is in the invisible work, as we shall shortly see.

Visitors

It is practical for Irina to remember the following: nothing really worthwhile can be owned. There is life. There is love. There is grace. But we can neither create nor possess a state of any of these. These visitors breathe through us, with us and in us the more we keep ourselves open.

Irina cannot transform herself into Juliet. She cannot achieve the state of Juliet, some sort of still plateau of Juliet's character. She can never own Juliet. And Irina will become blocked if she punishes herself because she has not managed to 'become' Juliet in this way. If she tries to metamorphose, she will die artistically. Irina will end up merely showing Juliet.

We cannot change our state by an effort of will. When we concentrate on changing ourselves we end up

merely demonstrating. Change does happen to us, but we change only when we see things more as they really are. It is to do with a change in direction. When we see things more for what they are, we become realigned automatically. Change, transformation, metamorphosis are out of our control. The relentless rule is that whenever we try to be something, we merely show.

Irina can only do what Juliet does, and she cannot do what Juliet does until she sees what Juliet sees. As we have seen, Irina's apparent journey into Juliet is not what it seems. It is no less than a journey through Juliet to see what is at stake for Juliet in what Juliet sees.

The audience looks through the performance into the world that the actor sees, into the specific targets the actor sees, and into the relentlessly doubling stakes. Mere virtuosity gets the audience to see no further than the performer's cleverness and skill. The actor has a greater potential than the mere virtuoso, for the actor's senses and imagination open a lens upon an endless universe.

Theory and speculation

You cannot explain why acting is alive, because you cannot explain life. In fact, if you can explain it, it's dead. But block is mostly dead structure, as dead as any old ideology, and that is why it can be mostly explained. There is a maddening paradox here. When acting is free, it seems uncomplicated; when acting is blocked it all seems very complicated.

For example, block can result from a passing thought like: '*Does it look awful when I put my hand on the balcony like this?'* Trying to answer with*: 'I think it looks fine/dreadful*', Irina not only opens the door, but falls through, and the door only leads to one place, home; and home isn't safe.

Looked at in another way, answering the question is pure speculation, because none of us can ever know what we look like. None of us can ever be sure of the effect we are having. Consequently, wondering how we appear is always mere speculation and speculation is mere theory. So when Irina answers the question with: '*I think I look stupid*', she is theorising.

So Irina is intellectualising and spinning structure, which will eventually stifle the spark of life she was trying to protect. Irina may well not feel that she is being remotely intellectual; when we feel we look idiotic, it doesn't seem like a theory. But panic always has its origins in theory. To answer or even ask the question '*How do I look?*' must paralyse the actor. Vital acting has nothing to do with intellectual theory. But blocked acting always has its origins in theory.

Irina needs to step through Juliet's senses, to see, touch, hear, smell, taste and intuit the changing universe that Juliet inhabits. Irina must abandon all hope of ever being able to transform herself into Juliet, or show us Juliet, and instead set about the miraculous but realisable task of seeing and moving through the space that Juliet sees and inhabits.

No description of a human being is the truth. Imagining dynamically opposed contradictions will free the actor more. Whichever way we struggle to redefine and scrub the concept of 'character', it always gives off a slight whiff of permanence. Whatever claims to be both alive and fixed is telling a dangerous lie, so it is wise to accept that there is no such thing as character. The living thing can no more be fixed than a butterfly pinned to a board can fly.

I can see things, or I can try to control how things see me. I cannot do both at the same time. Who I am is what I see.

9

THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE

Who I am depends on the targets I see. We each see different targets. Our experience of life alters the targets that we see. Juliet sees one Romeo, and Tybalt another. The Legionnaire and the millionaire see different glasses of water. How does the actor prepare to see different targets? How can Irina make sure that the moon she sees is Juliet's moon and not Irina's? The specific target is prepared and refined in the invisible work.

The visible and invisible mind

The visible mind is that part of the character that an actor can play; and the invisible mind is that part that the actor cannot play. I can divide myself into two different people. I am the 'me' I see, and also the 'me' that I do not see. Both of these 'mes' are essential; one cannot exist without the other. How can the actor create this invisible part? The answer is that the actor cannot directly create the invisible mind of the character. All Irina can do is to prepare herself for performance.

The rugby team cannot create the match. The players cannot predict the outcome, or dictate how the match will go. But the coach and team can prepare themselves. There is no set period for training, but the match is strictly timed. There are no rules for the training, but there are several rules for the match. The team cannot make sure that they will play a good game, but the team can put themselves in the way of playing a good game.

Strictly speaking, of course, there is no cast-iron rule that the team must train. After a month stretched on a beach with fags and booze, the team might just send the ball flying elegantly down the line of backs. On the other hand, the team might spend morning, noon and night practising scrums and tackling and free kicks and line outs, and still play an abysmal game. All we can say is that the team that is trained well stands a far higher chance of playing well.

In a similar way, Irina cannot ensure a good performance. Irina cannot guarantee that she will act well. Indeed we all deal with the fact that we have no right to do good work. Irina can prepare and rehearse for months and still give a constipated performance. On the other hand, Irina could just read the words cold and shatter the audience with her insight and vitality. But such a fluke would be impossible to sustain. More sensibly, Irina will rely on her general training and specific rehearsal, which are far more likely to help her act with truth and vitality. Irina cannot demand to act well, but with careful preparation she can make it a lot more likely that her brief stage time will brim with life.

Irina needs to work on Juliet. Irina will discover more about Juliet's path than Juliet herself knows. Irina will certainly be able to see Juliet's future far more clearly. But this knowledge is only for the

invisible work. When it comes to the visible work, for the short duration of her performance time as Juliet, then Irina must know no more than Juliet. Irina must never be conscious of her invisible work during the minutes that she actually plays Juliet.

The actor must forget the invisible during the visible work, and trust that the invisible will remember itself.

Forgetting the obvious

Before we consider the invisible work further, it would be sensible to remember some basics. There are fundamental differences between the visible and invisible work, and between Irina and Juliet.

These are principles so obvious that they are easily ignored. Common sense can be the first casualty of exhausting rehearsal. However much Irina explores the balcony scene, she must not forget that:

Juliet has never played the balcony scene before,
although Irina will have several times.

Juliet has never heard what Romeo has to say,
although Irina will have heard it several times.

Juliet has never heard what Juliet has to say,
although Irina will have heard it several times.

Juliet has never seen what Juliet sees now.

Juliet has never felt what Juliet feels now.

Juliet does not know how the scene will end.

The invisible work

All actors do the invisible work, however peremptory their preparation may seem. The invisible work may take many forms. Some actors follow methods and systems where they write a biography of the character or where they connect that character's feelings and experiences to their own personal lives. Others may work in companies where large sections of rehearsal are devoted to finding collectively the world of the piece. Some will joke that they never do any preparation, but even they will make some sort of generalisation about the characters they are playing. For example, you may hear them remark: '*He's very clever*' or '*She gets what she wants*'. Some film actors labour to keep their heads entirely empty between takes to preserve spontaneity. But even that emptying is a form of the invisible work.

There are as many methods as there are actors. Most actors would agree that acting is not a science. There is no fail-proof system. Most actors feel grateful for any imaginative spark that ignites life and confidence.

Examples of invisible work

The rules for the invisible work barely exist apart from the rule that there must be some invisible work in some form.

The invisible work includes not only the rehearsal, but also the actor's training and, indeed, experience of life. There is not only one way to make theatre. There is not only one way to rehearse a play. There is not only one way to prepare a role. So some of the following suggestions for the invisible work take the form of practical exercises; some take the form of thoughts on the way we consider individuals. They are

not meant to add to the actor's burden. On the contrary, they are intended to ease the load. All examples are arbitrary and personal, and there are many more. Although each of these suggestions may help enrich and specify the target, ultimately the actor's invisible work is synthesised by the actor.

Preparation takes many forms; whatever ignites the imagination is useful. Whatever deadens the imagination is to be avoided. Certain rules will stifle Irina and certain rules will set her free; only Irina can feel the difference.

Research

It will help Irina to find out as much as she can about Juliet's world, her given circumstances. The big proviso is this: research is useful only until the actor starts to fret that 'something has to be got right'. We will never know the pressures on a young Italian aristocrat in the fourteenth century. This is not just a historical problem. Even if we lived round the corner in medieval Verona we would still never know for sure; we can only ever imagine.

Irina can research how Juliet was brought up – how she is expected to move, laugh, eat, sing, fight, dress, talk, pray, make love, think. Reading, discussing in rehearsal, group and individual exercises, experimenting with dance, dress, breathing and silence, may release Irina and increase her curiosity and vitality.

Other people

Irina will read all that is said about Juliet by other characters. This is important work but it needs one proviso. What other characters say about Juliet says far more about them than about Juliet. Whenever we talk about other people, we give ourselves away. We cannot necessarily assume that Juliet is beautiful just because Paris and Romeo say so. Indeed what these men say about her counts far less than what they actually do for her. Besides, all description is unreliable.

The Nurse has quite a lot to say on the subject of Juliet.

NURSE

'en or odd, of all days in the year,
›me Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.
san and she – God rest all Christian souls –
:re of an age. Well, Susan is with God;
e was too good for me. But as I said,
ı Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.
:at shall she; marry, I remember it well.
is since the earthquake now eleven years,
d she was wean'd – I never shall forget it –
˜all the days of the year upon that day.
r I had then laid wormwood to my dug,
'ting in the sun under the dovehouse wall.
v lord and you were then at Mantua –
y I do bear a brain. But as I said,
hen it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
˜my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
see it tetchy and fall out with the dug.
ake! quoth the dovehouse. 'Twas no need, I trow,
bid me trudge.

d since that time it is eleven years,
r then she could stand high-lone, nay, by th' rood,
e could have run and waddled all about;
r even the day before she broke her brow,
d then my husband – God be with his soul,
was a merry man – took up the child,
a,' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face?
ou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit,
lt thou not, Jule?' And, by my holidame,
e pretty wretch left crying and said, 'Ay'.
see now how a jest shall come about.
varrant, and I should live a thousand years
ever should forget it. 'Wilt thou not, Jule?' quoth he,
d, pretty fool, it stinted, and said 'Ay'.
LADY CAPULET
ough of this, I pray thee, hold thy peace.

Is this only good-natured fussing? The Nurse exudes warm, homely comfort. Indeed, so consummate is the Nurse's performance of the Nurse that it is hard to hear the events she describes.

The Nurse says that she was given Juliet to suckle following the death of her own daughter, Susan. We learn that Juliet was left by her parents on at least one occasion while they undertook a substantial journey. We hear that during their absence the Nurse was left alone with Juliet and attempted to wean her tiny charge by smearing her nipple with evil-tasting oil. The child's surprise and revulsion at the contaminated milk made the Nurse laugh. We learn that the baby asserted her independence by learning to walk very early. We hear the little Juliet was sufficiently unattended to be left to fall and crack her head. And we learn the crying baby was laughed at by the Nurse and her wise-cracking husband, who made sexual jokes at the little girl's expense. The baby's '*Ay*' even implies that she has learnt to control her feelings, and to deal with adults by agreeing with them.

Despite her apparent cheerfulness the Nurse is full of destruction with her talk of deaths and earthquakes. Her dead daughter was '*too good*' for her, and yet, for someone with such a low opinion of herself she takes up a lot of space. Probably none of the three women is conscious that the Nurse may hate Juliet and want to destroy her. Yet destroy Juliet is precisely what the Nurse does; in Verona men have no monopoly in violence. Perhaps the Nurse reminds Juliet of her dead daughter every day, and undermines the rich young survivor with guilt. Certainly Juliet's mother takes no interest in this weird and appalling story. Indeed earlier in the scene she seems nervous to be left alone with her own daughter. Lady Capulet and the Nurse discuss Juliet's age over her head as if she were not there. The daughter barely speaks to her mother, who talks back to Juliet with more mannerism than warmth in rather creepy rhyming couplets. We hear that Juliet was born at night to a mother who was herself a child. That makes Lady Capulet still in her twenties and easily young enough to be her daughter's rival.

Of course, this is only one version of Juliet's childhood. There are more, but of course none of these stories are for Irina to 'play'. However, these alternative narratives ask unsettling questions that may enrich Irina's invisible work.

Work like this can open huge vistas for Irina. However, with an excess of research, Irina may feel her head saturate and her imagination congeal. Then she must stop. This can be a good sign as it may show her instinctive side in healthy rebellion.

The world is never good enough

We live in one real world that we know but slenderly, and a whole host of fantasy universes we know rather better. But Juliet will also have a rich fantasy world. And Irina will empower herself not only by investigating what actually happened to Juliet in reality, but also by imagining Juliet's own world of make-believe. Rather than trying in vain to change herself into Juliet, let Irina instead imagine how Juliet would like to change things. Would Juliet have preferred a cosy mother smelling of lavender, to the sophisticate that strives to marry her off to the County? Perhaps Juliet wants to change not only her environment, including her mother, but also herself.

I am not good enough

However hard a hermit may try to escape all relationships, even an atheist hermit sealed in an isolation tank, he still has one overwhelming relationship: with himself. This principle is crucial for the actor. Juliet's first relationship is with Juliet. This turbulent love/hate affair is in a state of flux, and tends to be less about accepting herself than trying to change herself.

One of the best ways for Irina to learn about Juliet is to see how Juliet sees herself. Juliet will see things that she would wish were different. Is she too tall? Too bright? Too dependent? How would she prefer to be? Would she prefer to be less controlled? More spontaneous? Less impetuous? It is useful for Irina to imagine Juliet looking in a mirror. The two big questions for Irina are first, '*Who would Juliet prefer to see staring back at her?*' and second, '*Who is Juliet afraid to see?*' What Juliet actually looks like in the mirror is of comparatively less interest.

Irina may well ask: '*Yes, but how could I make all that clear?*' The reply is that nothing should ever be 'made clear' and particularly nothing in the invisible work. So Irina comes up with an idea, and then is told: '*But don't play it!*' Exactly. The invisible work manifests itself by grace, where it will, and when it will. Any attempt to control it by showing its workings, any attempt to expose it in public, and the invisible vanishes. The invisible never abandons us permanently, but returns when we stop trying to control it.

Exercises of extremity

There are several exercises that can develop and strengthen the invisible mind. In the exercises of extremity, the rehearsal room abandons all good sense, and an actor plays the scene with a given extreme purpose. So Juliet can play a scene with her mother, once as if she were trying to amuse her (extremely), again as if she were trying to frighten her (extremely), again as if she were trying to humiliate/seduce/teach/heal, etc. Sometimes the effect is merely strange, but occasionally a line or a look or a move can ring out with undeniable life.

In that moment, something living passes into the invisible work. Irina must then forget the exercise, but it is remarkable how traces persist. When Irina comes to play the scene, this invisible work will have affected what she sees. There will be more history and depth in the mother she eventually sees. There will be a greater quality of specificness in the image of her mother. The target develops itself without our conscious control.

Opposites

Another exercise for the invisible work is to consider who Juliet's exact opposite might be. She can use sources from real life or film or literature. And then having found the perfect opposite, to ask again if there is anything in common. Irina may well feel that Lady Macbeth is Juliet's extreme opposite. And then she might ask if there are any similarities. Well, these are both women who want their lovers to hurry home, they both plead for night to hide their actions lest they repent before they commit, they both see the strange connection between sex and death, and they both have a complex relationship with Time: Lady Macbeth feels '*the future in the instant*'. Both women conspire with their men to break a taboo, and both

commit suicide. It is confusing to compare these two women. And confusion is useful if it shakes off the dust of cliché.

The more Irina experiments with these and other exercises to feed her invisible work, the more the target refines itself. This rich and specific target is always ready when Irina needs its energy in her precious moments of stage time.

The way the invisible mind influences what the visible mind sees is mysterious. We have to trust this process and tolerate our ignorance. It would be unwise to stop breathing because we don't understand the minutiae of respiration.

Only attention will develop the targets that the actor sees. The actor cannot make the invisible work visible. The invisible work manifests itself without our permission. How this process works we do not know. Sometimes we have to relax and let ourselves not know.

A digression: the terracotta sage

A collector of ancient Chinese terracotta was furious that he had bought another expensive fake. He searched the world for the greatest expert on terracotta to teach him how to avoid another con. This ancient sage lived a simple existence but charged a great deal of money to the collector for his teachings. His teachings were to last six weeks during which time the collector had to do precisely what he was told. The collector travelled to the remote cell where the ascetic lived. He came with cameras and computers. The sage asked him to leave all these outside. He did so, but they were stolen by other ascetic sages. The collector was furious but he had to do what he was told if he wanted to be able to tell for himself the difference between real and fake terracotta.

On the first day he was blindfolded, the sage left him in a yak shed, and placed in his hand a piece of terracotta. The collector hoped for instruction, but the sage said nothing. He sat there for twelve hours, with only some hot yak milk for tea. The next day the same thing happened, the blindfold, the terracotta, and silence. This went on and on for weeks. Exactly the same ritual was repeated every day. The collector was furious, but had to bite his tongue, as he was determined to learn the sage's secret.

After six weeks, on the last day, the sage tottered into the shed and again tied on the blindfold. Once again the terracotta was placed in the collector's hand, who suddenly exploded, smashing it on a nearby yak. He tore off his blindfold and roared at the ascetic:

'This is the last straw! You have lured me here to a remote monastery, you have let your friends steal my computers, you have poisoned me with filthy yak milk, you have kept me blindfolded in utter darkness, and the final insult is that today, instead of giving me a real terracotta statue to hold, you give me a fake!'

10

IDENTITY, PERSONA AND THE MASK

If ‘character’ is monumental and misleading what other terms or tools can Irina use? Irina can sharpen some humbler but more practical tools. Specifically Irina can think in terms of three devices. These are Identity, Persona and the Mask. These three are no more real than character; they are only invented expressions, but they may prove more useful.

The identity

We have seen that trying to find things in ‘one’ can paralyse the actor. Rather than find a ‘one’, it is better to find two opposing elements that are in conflict.

If ‘*who am I?*’ is not a helpful question, ‘*who would I rather be?*’ and ‘*who am I afraid I am?*’ are more practical. Clearly these questions run in opposition to each other. ‘*What is my character?*’ is not a helpful question because it seems to want an answer in ‘one’. So Irina would be better off considering words, or ideas, that although similar to character, are more dynamic. She needs questions which glory in contradiction, rather than fear conflict. It is better for her to think of all characteristics as coming in ‘twos’. For example, the more we want to be rich, the more we must fear being poor, and the more we want to be strong, the more we must fear being weak.

Let us imagine, as before, that who I truly am I will never perfectly know. ‘*Who I am*’ is unknowable. But what is knowable, so that it might be of use to Irina? The identity is knowable. The identity looks like who I am, it seems like who I am, it smells like who I am, but it isn’t who I am. Being fully describable the identity is fully dead. But it may help the actor to consider its workings.

Basically our identity is how we want to see ourselves. In order to convince ourselves of who we are, we have to convince other people as well. Although of questionable benefit in real life, the identity can be a useful tool when acting.

The identity is a construction that helps me define who the ‘I’ is when I talk. But in fact it is an invention or a coating that we start to accrete at an early stage in our lives. It is the whole raft of ways I have of presenting myself and seeing myself. It is our very own private and personal institution. The workings of the identity are far clearer in others than in myself.

A short digression: institutions

All institutions have one thing in common: their number one imperative is preservation of self. And true to form, the identity fights like a cornered tiger if ever it feels it may be exposed to its host as merely an illusion. Indeed to preserve itself the identity may order its human host to commit suicide. But the identity

doesn't survive, for like many a parasite the identity is more clever than wise and never learns that it is dependent on its host.

I am

If I tell you 'what I am', it will not tell you very much about what I really am. But it will tell you a lot about my identity. If you really want to know 'what I am' then looking at what I do gives sharper clues.

Before this becomes too abstruse, let's take some practical examples. If asked to define the character of Othello, you might well say that he is:

Brave
Noble
Generous
Exotic
Loved
Patriotic
Proud
Big-hearted
Loving
Innocent
Loyal
Trusting
Manly
Assimilated
Straightforward

Othello himself might feel this list is reasonable and accurate. But there are no verbs in this list. This is not a list of things that Othello has done or will do. The list is composed entirely of adjectives, words that don't shift – enemy words.

Othello himself spends quite a few words on self-description. And much of what he says promotes this image of himself. However, if Othello believes that he embodies all of these qualities, there must also exist an alternative potential Othello. And this Othello will embody quite the opposite characteristics. Therefore Othello is hiding a very different identity, a kind of un-Othello who is kept firmly under wraps. If that is so, then this un-Othello must be:

Cowardly
Ignoble
Mean-spirited
Commonplace
Despised
Subversive
Snivelling
Small-minded
Hating
Guilty
Treacherous
Suspicious
Childish

Outcast
Perverse

Iago manages to sniff out this hidden un-Othello. He infers the existence of this monster by simply reversing the description of Othello that is trumpeted through the earlier part of the play. Furthermore, Iago senses that Othello may actually derive his immense energy precisely from suppressing this phantom. But we must remember that of course this un-Othello does not exist, any more than the official Othello exists. They are both spectres of Othello's imagination. All that matters to Iago is that somewhere Othello will fear that this un-Othello might exist. Like many of us, Othello squanders unknown energy in making sure that his 'bad' side, his Mr Hyde, doesn't slip out. Iago flicks the switch to make Othello flip into reverse and behave like the un-Othello.

The first list of attributes constitutes part of Othello's identity. The second list is also part of Othello's identity, or rather his un-identity. Iago, with some of the intuition of the psychotic, knows precisely which nerves to tweak to make Othello self-destruct. In a way, Iago blackmails Othello by threatening to expose to clean, public Othello the dirty, secret un-Othello. The plan backfires. When we play with the identity we play with fire. However, had Othello possessed a more accurate picture of his un-Othello, had Othello perhaps some sense of proportion, of humour, about himself, had he more insight into who he wanted to be and who he feared he was, then perhaps he would have been impervious to Iago's manipulations. Who knows? That is a question for the audience to answer.

Arkadina

Another example is Arkadina in *The Seagull*, who, when asked for money, exclaims: '*I'm an actress, not a banker!*' That gives us a clue to the un-Arkadina, who is indeed a banker, and not an actress. Her son, Constantin, frequently implies what a poor actress she is, and at one point remarks that she has an account in Odessa with 20,000 roubles. Constantin's sharp insights confirm what we might have guessed as the un-Arkadina. Again this is not 'who Arkadina *really* is', it is only the Arkadina that Arkadina fears she might be, the Arkadina who, tipping her servants, produces a single rouble and asks them to share it. But there is yet another Arkadina, unpretentious and kind who forgets that she ever helped some destitute neighbours, when she herself was poor.

To recap: my identity is not who I am. But neither is my un-identity who I am. All we can say is that both of these taken together offer a strong clue to a person's fears and hopes, both conscious and unconscious.

A useful dynamo

We can go much further and suggest that most of a human being's energy might be spent in promoting the identity and suppressing the un-identity. For the human being, the war between these two is bloody and exhausting; for the actor, considering this permanent suppression of one and promotion of the other releases vast hoards of imaginative energy.

It may help Irina, in her invisible work, to consider not only Juliet, but also an un-Juliet. We all have an identity, and for each identity there is an equal and opposite un-identity. Neither is the truth, but both, as long as they are considered jointly, can dynamise the actor.

Juliet and the identity

Intriguingly, Juliet is obsessed with the identity. Her first shattering question is so well known that we can hardly hear it any more. She suddenly grasps that identity is arbitrary.

JULIET
O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

Deny thy father and refuse thy name.
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.
ROMEO
Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?
JULIET
'Tis but thy name that is my enemy:
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand nor foot
Nor arm nor face nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O be some other name.
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.
ROMEO
I take thee at thy word.
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptised:
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.
JULIET
What man art thou . . .

This whole passage is obsessed with the identity, as Juliet and Romeo struggle to break its chains. Juliet offers to change her identity, entreats Romeo to change his, and Romeo offers to be *'new baptised'*.

Does Juliet see a Romeo who is the slave of his father? Certainly '*Deny thy father*' echoes with Christ's enduringly subversive decree that unless we leave our parents we will never come into life. So do we have to destroy the identities we have been given? If Romeo is too weak then she will renounce her family and redeem them both. With '*What's in a name?*' she shares with Romeo the great secret of the universe she has stumbled on this sacred night.

A digression: the structure of the identity

How we see ourselves is made up of perfectly paired opposites. It is one thing to do something that is kind. But it is quite another to say that therefore I am kind. For the moment I declare myself to be kind, somewhere there must also exist the equal conviction that I may be cruel. To say: *'I act'* is one thing. However, to say *'I am an actor'* is quite different, as I cannot say *'I am an actor'* without opening the possibility that '*I am not an actor*'.

Just as night cannot exist without day, honour cannot exist without shame, and life cannot exist without death, so we cannot describe ourselves or others without implying the existence, whether actual or potential, of the exact opposite qualities.

It helps the actor to imagine that the cynic and the idealist are the same person, the saint and the sinner, the successful and the failed, the clever and the stupid, the angel and the devil, etc.

This suppression of one identity and the promotion of another may exhaust us in real life, but considering this dynamic can release immense and useful energy.

A digression: sentimentality

It is an old and useful theatrical maxim that you must never play the character, only the situation. So if you are playing a bully, you cannot actually play the bully, only the situation in which he finds himself. Nor can you only play the un-identity, the fact that somewhere this person is a coward.

So how then can the actor capture the essence of this person, this bully? The answer is that we cannot 'capture the essence' of anyone.

When we try to capture the essence of someone we are being sentimental. Sentimentality is the refusal to accept ambivalence. Certainty is sentimental. We are sentimental not only when we say someone is nice. It is equally sentimental to assert that someone is nasty. To say that a race is good or that a people is bad is also sentimental. Such judgements may have terrible consequences; but then, sentimentality is terrifying.

We are being sentimental when we judge a character to be sweet, as we may Anfisa in *The Three Sisters*, but we are equally sentimental if we judge a character to be evil, as perhaps Richard the Third. What these characters actually *do*, of course, may well be good or evil or both.

Pronouncing a character to be either good or evil will block the actor. Only what we do can be good or evil. A character can be neither in essence. To hold that a human being can be good or evil as part of their intrinsic nature is the very depth of sentimentality. Moralising about what we do is one thing; moralising about what people are is quite another; such judgementalism is beneath the dignity of the actor.

We can never describe somebody truthfully, because we can never fully know. We mislead ourselves by asking what we are, which we can never know. We can never know, control or contain the essence of anyone, including ourselves. We can always, however, observe what we are doing. Even the physicist, when trying to analyse the nature of matter, ends up describing less what the particle is, and more how the particle behaves.

The persona

If thinking about the identity and the un-identity fails to help Irina, then she might try to think of 'who I am' in terms of the 'persona'. If my identity is both how I wish to see myself and how I wish to be seen, then the persona is the means I use to interact with the outside world.

In literature, the word persona refers to the person who tells the story. Maybe the author, maybe not – Jane Eyre was not Charlotte Brontë. With film stars we can say that Humphrey Bogart had one screen persona, while James Dean had another. Jung used the word 'persona' to describe the part of the person that is used to interact with the outside world. This persona was separate from the 'self', which he used to describe who we really are. 'Who we really are' may be a matter for psychoanalysis, but it is a quagmire for the actor.

In theatre the persona works mysteriously. As the physicist can only describe the particle by how it behaves, so it is easier to describe the persona by what it does. The persona can merely introduce us to the outline of a character, but how much we already know about this person can astonish us. It is almost as if we have knowledge from a previous life. Sometimes we complain that we don't have enough information about the world of the character; but occasionally we are alarmed to discover how much we do know of a world about which, strictly speaking, we ought to know nothing.

A practical example of persona occurs in *Commedia dell'Arte*, where different archetypal characters are available to be adopted, inhabited and played by the performer. The actor need not necessarily have done a wealth of specific research on the character of Pantalone. The actor who recognises the persona of the foolish old man will be able to adopt the persona of this well-known character. Incidentally, the actor adopts a persona; the actor does not adapt a persona. In fact, the more the performer is able to surrender to the persona, the more the persona will adopt and even adapt the actor. It is as if the persona itself has done the background research and lends its findings to the actor.

How is this possible? Only a few coordinates can make a new world breathe. Picasso could suggest a powerful and complex universe with a few slashes of the pen. A young man once asked the painter how long it took him to produce those few lines. Picasso answered: '*Oh, about forty years.*' Those forty years are like the actor's invisible work. They are not explicit in a drawing that took forty seconds to complete; but those forty years breathe invisibly. We can be sure that Picasso did not consciously use those forty years while scribbling those lines; perhaps in some strange way those forty years used him.

The persona works similarly. With apparently scanty information the actor can give a performance rooted in a make-believe world of great complexity.

The mask

The difference between the persona and mask is elusive. *Phersu* was the Etruscan for a masked man, the word was developed by the Romans into *persona*, which means mask. Finally, in modern English, the word becomes *person*. It is rather unsettling that 'mask', 'actor' and 'person' could be the same word; however, theatre demands that we dismantle all prejudices and certainties about who we are.

The mask is remarkably widespread amongst diverse cultures. The major difference between the persona and the mask is that the second must have a concrete element, normally a partial covering of the face. Types of performance or religious service that use the mask may seem very different but, in all instances, roughly the following is part of the process:

e performer sees the mask.
e performer puts on the mask.
e performer sees the world only through the mask's eyes.
e performer is released into performance by the mask's permission.
e mask enables the performer to see another world.
e audience sees what the performer sees.
e mask enables performer and audience to see something they would otherwise not have been able to see.

The mask of Juliet

What practical use is the mask for Irina? No director has asked her or the company to don masks. However, basic mask work can help actors even in the most realistic texts.

If Juliet has a costume, that might work as a mask. If Juliet wears make-up, that might also serve as a mask. Essentially, any concrete object, worn by the performer can be a mask as long as the performer only wears it when playing. In other words, Irina may have a special pair of shoes, which redistributes her weight, and so helps her to discover how Juliet moves. If Irina continues to wear the same shoes after rehearsal, then the shoes will be merely an accessory or a prop. But if Irina only wears the shoes when she is trying to see and move as Juliet, then the shoes have started to function as a mask.

If the shoes start to behave as a mask, each time Irina puts them on she will feel that she moves differently. The shoes become a kind of switch to turn on her performance. If Irina feels uncomfortable wearing the shoes during her lunch break, it is a strong sign that the shoes have started to acquire the power of a mask.

The mask has to be treated properly, and not because the mask will mind! For the mask will lose its fragile power for us if we use it indiscriminately. We abdicate power to the mask so that we can feed off it. If we deny the mask its power by disrespect then we cannot feed off it.

The mask and movement

The mask not only alters the actor's appearance – the actor's limbs start to respond differently to stimuli.

The mask actor studies the mask in his hands as part of the invisible work. Greek vases depict this same preparation 2,500 years ago. The actor will then practise in the mask and continue to discover who the mask is by seeing how others react to this new identity. Sooner or later the actor will move as the mask.

The mask's eyes

However, there is one part of the face that the mask does not obliterate. It does not obliterate the eyes. Indeed the mask changes what the eyes see. The target transforms.

Mask work is excellent for the blocked actor because the mask can destroy the actor's self-consciousness. The mask silences the actor's personal identity. The mask gives the actor permission to do forbidden things – it's not the actor's fault, the mask did it.

Recognition

The mask's power is only proportionate to the actor's ability to recognise it. If the actor doesn't recognise the mask, the mask will remain inert. To this extent the mask is parasitic. However, this recognition need not be conscious. What probably happens is that the mask acts as a trigger to a partially hidden or entirely unknown part of the actor. As long as recognition happens, putting on the mask appears to transform the actor. But this transformation is in fact a release of something that was already there. It is only an apparent metamorphosis, as the mask has activated a latent persona in the actor.

We can recognise things without realising. We may love or loathe strangers on sight because we unconsciously recognise in them a buried piece of ourselves. A similar process is at work when we are surprised at what the mask can make us do. A hidden persona recognises itself in the mask, perhaps in a split second, and the actor permits the mask to unlock the cupboard in which that persona is locked.

When acting a role, actors choose not to act themselves for a while.

When I see me

Self-consciousness can be the actor's deadliest enemy. Self-consciousness describes the moment when the fig-leaf of character shrivels. As usual, at times of Fear, it is worth remembering two things: first your problems can normally be shifted onto the character, and second that you can normally defeat Fear by copying his armaments.

Self-consciousness is another shovel Irina might use to dig herself out of '*I don't know who I am*'.

Let us go back to the first two rules: one, there must always be a target and two, that target exists outside. So what happens when I talk to myself? Well, then myself must be a target. For example, if I yell at myself when the shower doesn't work, the 'me' I am shouting at is another idiot 'me' who forgot to phone the plumber. There is a difference between the 'I' who rebukes and the 'me' who is guilty. Between the 'I' and the 'me' there opens an enabling distance.

We need to spend some time considering this distance and dynamic, and feel comfortable with this idea. I may see me as many different things. Perhaps I see me as someone who is weak, I may see me as someone who is brave, I may see me as someone who is bright or I may see me as someone who is stupid. In a sense the 'I' does not change, but the 'me' does. The 'I' who speaks is always the same, but the 'me' who I see is always different. I remain the same, but I see me changing. The 'me' is a target and will obey all the rules.

In the last twenty years I have stayed exactly the same, it's just that these days my legs feel stiffer if I run for a bus, my belt is tighter, hangovers are worse, a funny middle-aged guy stares back at me from the mirror, people seem different, different things irritate me, different things amuse me, different things make me sad, different things make me happy; but I assure you, I haven't changed at all!

Humans spend a lot of time seeing 'me'. Sadly the 'mes' we see are rarely accurate. As mentioned

before, the ‘me’ that Juliet sees in the mirror is a fluctuation between the ‘me’ she wants to see and the ‘me’ she fears to see. So Irina will do well to shift her self-consciousness onto Juliet. Juliet’s self-consciousness is a nightmare for Juliet, but a boon for Irina. Juliet does not want to see herself blushing. The maiden blush that bepaints Juliet’s cheek embarrasses Juliet and therefore provides a spring of release for Irina.

Irina can see what Juliet sees when Juliet sees herself. Irina cannot transform herself and become Juliet, but Irina can see the different Juliets that Juliet sees.

We should avoid spending time on the ‘I’, but the mutations of the ‘me’ are extremely useful for the actor.

Examples of ‘me’

Crises force us to see ourselves anew, and drama tends to deal with crises, so actors often play people who learn to see themselves anew. When Juliet meets Romeo she wittily refers to her hands as the hands of a saint; later, on her betrothal to Paris, she refers to her tear-stained face as if it were not part of her.

‘And what I spake, I spake it to my face.’

and she continues, before she drugs herself, to see wildly different Juliets. Juliet foresees a crazed Juliet careering in the tomb, with images worthy of Edgar Allan Poe:

‘O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
Environed with all these hideous fears,
And madly play with my forefathers’ joints,
And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud,
And, in this rage, with some great kinsman’s bone
As with a club dash out my desperate brains?’

This is a bizarre Juliet for Juliet to see. Undoubtedly this Juliet surprises Juliet. The final Juliet ‘me’ is a sheath for Romeo’s dagger:

‘This is thy sheath. There rust, and let me die.’

To make such a grim joke, Juliet must have changed. Yes? But from whose point of view? The modest girl on the balcony would never knowingly mix sex, violence and decay, picturing herself as a dead receptacle for Romeo’s rotting weapon. For us, looking at Juliet from the outside, of course she has changed. But for Juliet, the ‘I’ who speaks is the same person. The same person at a different address, that is, for now she has moved and lives in a world full of dark laughter and hideous irony.

If the actor feels blocked in searching for character, then it may be because he or she is looking in the wrong place; the actor may be looking for the ‘I’. We have to face the fact that the ‘I’ will never be found. But the ‘me’ can be.

11

THE MATRIX

It is sometimes suggested that the actor write out a biography of the character, e.g., where Juliet was born, her childhood, etc. However, if Irina feels alarmed by this type of preparation, intimidated by a tower of available material, she has alternative approaches. Irina can remember that biography is based on a past story, and a past story is a form of history. But our Western view of history is arbitrary. In the West, we tend to see ourselves as the product of the past and that the seeds of the future are already present. Thus we see a story or biography as a defined length of time with the future gradually becoming the present and the present gradually becoming the past. We can see history as a railway line with a train gradually advancing. Einstein's view was less reassuring; he would dryly ask: '*What time does this station leave the train?'*

The Asian Tantrics also take a different view and believe that history is being permanently invented by the present. It is as if we are on a ship looking backwards at the wake that is constantly being expelled from beneath the stern.

Well, say Irina has researched every stage of Juliet's development and still feels a queasy guilt that she has not done enough, or she feels intimidated by this type of work in the first place, then Irina can remember history or biography is not only linear. History is also describable as a *matrix*.

The matrix

'A happened then B happened then C happened' is only one view of history. 'A happened because B happened because C happened' is a more sophisticated version. In both these cases, events happen in a sequence. Time exists in a straight line and things happen one after another on that line. However, we can also see that 'A happens and B happens and C happens.' This is a substantially different view. This shape is not a pattern in a line with time as a catalyst between events. This is a view in which time and sequence are different.

Do we pass logically from childhood, through adolescence, through maturity to old age, in sequence? Well, yes. But sometimes, if we are honest, we know we can experience each of these phases during a single day. We may invent a path to navigate a forest, but soon forget that the path we have cut is arbitrary. The path is for us and not for the forest. The forest will go on, with or without our path. The story of our personal lives is as provisional as any path. How anyone sees the past is always tricky. The upshot of this is that Irina may get as much release imagining Juliet at the age of fifty as at the age of five.

A matrix view of a role acknowledges that we can fly off the handle for no apparent reason, fall in love for no apparent reason, get on with someone for no apparent reason, or feel frightened for no apparent

reason.

In rehearsal Irina may hear a question such as: *'Why do you think that Juliet falls for Romeo?'* And some possible answers:

Because he is good looking.
Because she wants to punish her father.
Because she wants to get out of the house.

Each of these replies, that range from the superficial, to the clever, to the cynical, may be of interest in the invisible work. But 'why' is a word that insists all things have their knowable cause. 'Why' implies that something happens and because of that, something else happens. Each of these three answers imply that there is a knowable reason why Juliet falls in love with Romeo.

But real life is not so well organised as we would like. One of our mistakes in rehearsal is to insist on a rationale and a coherence that real life simply does not possess. Life is more random and chaotic than we dare to see. There are many reasons why we fall in love; there are many reasons why we do many things. Some of these reasons we will never know. Maybe, for some events and feelings, there simply are no reasons. However unsettling for us, this possibility can unblock an actor who is frozen with character research.

Image and character

The matrix can also help Irina mine Shakespeare's imagery. Shakespearean imagery is not linear; patterns of images emerge, disappear, re-emerge transformed, echo, die, and are reborn. Irina can search for clues as to what Juliet really sees in these rich interconnections of ideas and pictures. Shakespeare's images resonate and feed off each other to nourish the actor's imagination.

'Hist! Romeo, hist! O, for a falconer's voice
To lure this tassel-gentle back again.
Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud;,
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine,
With repetition of my Romeo's name . . .

'Tis almost morning, I would have thee gone,
And yet no farther than a wanton's bird,
That lets it hop a little from his hand
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silken thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty . . .

Sweet, so would I:

Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.
Good night, good night. Parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.'

First, Juliet wishes she could sound like a falconer to lure back Romeo. In the next sequence the bird is no longer the trained and hooded falcon, but a pet bird that a small child has tied with string so that the beloved possession can never hop too far. Finally Juliet mentions the bird only by implication. We sense that the bird may have been suffocated by the child's adoration. It is remarkable that a fourteen-year-old debutante fathoms the dark side of love deeper than that grizzled war-hero Othello.

Irina can do sense-memory exercises to help her mine those feelings.

'hen did I ever feel that my possessiveness and jealousy could kill?'
'ow precisely did I feel at that specific time?'
'ave I had feelings like these before?'
'ow did I feel when something like this happened before?'
'ow can I use these past feelings in the present?'

Although some actors find this personalisation effective, these techniques may actually block others. If Irina finds these sense-memory devices unhelpful, she might remember that the past is something being generated in the present. More specifically it is extremely useful for Irina to observe that the rising stakes play tricks with time. Or more precisely, we see time very differently when the stakes soar. An example might make this clearer.

A car accident

For the witness to a car crash, something very odd happens to time. He hears a long screech of brakes and a never-ending scream as a bicycle hits a car straight on. The cyclist is thrown into the air and seems to float and circle above the car before rolling through the cracking windscreen. The bystander finds himself slowly turning to telephone the ambulance. The screaming blue lights take ages to come, but finally the paramedics pronounce the cyclist and driver scratched but intact and the bystander realises that all this complex slow-motion choreography took only a few seconds to complete, so the cyclist must have shot into the air and he must have raced to the phone.

Perhaps Irina has had a similar feeling when time appears to slow down or stand still. Perhaps she has met someone at a party and suddenly found herself talking to him or her in a strange way. Perhaps she has had the odd experience of telling the truth to a stranger; one of those strange moments when, for no apparent cause, we start to speak from the heart; one of those moments when something odd happens to time, and we realise we are full of more 'something' than we ever knew. If Irina can pay attention to those moments when they occur in her private life, and have faith in them in her work, she may learn that Juliet can in fact reinvent all of Juliet's personal history on the balcony. Perhaps Romeo releases her from the common dimension of time. The target may also release her from her character. For example, who could actually utter the bizarre lines:

'Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud,
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies . . . '

Irina can analyse the minutiae of Juliet's biography to discover what Juliet means by this strange image. Or Irina can simply say: *'Actually, Juliet didn't say these words; it was someone else.'*

How is this possible? Who else could be speaking through Juliet's mouth? But as the stakes rise, my sense of who I am starts to change. As the stakes continue to rise I can come out with ideas, visions and words that I did not know I held within. Sometimes I can wonder who is speaking, and realise it is me. The stakes can climb so high that I no longer know who I am. If the stakes fly higher, my manicured identity will drop away like the skin of a chrysalis. As the stakes soar it seems inside less that we are incorporating imagery from the past and more as if we are discovering something that from now on will always exist – and, in some strange way, will always have existed.

For instance, it is possible to feel that we have always known someone we have just met. Indeed, if you cross-examined Juliet, she may have no idea where *'the boundlessness of the sea'* came from. Perhaps Juliet has never seen the sea. Perhaps the first time that Juliet sees the sea is when she utters that line.

Then Juliet plunges into a series of bird images yet may know little ornithology. Yes, Juliet and Irina do need to know what '*tassel-gentle*' literally means. But crises disinter all sorts of vocabulary and information buried within us. Recognition kick-starts research, as we have seen with the persona.

'*Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud,*
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies . . . '

Is Juliet conscious of the violence in this imagery? Is she aware that if she equates herself with Echo then she implies that Romeo might be Narcissus? Is she conscious that the torn cave is a graphic picture of lost virginity? Probably not at this stage, but each of these considerations may help Irina's invisible work.

Intimacy, like trust, is said to depend on time. Trust, love and intimacy, we are assured, always need time to develop. However, experience does not quite bear this out. When the stakes go up, Time disobeys the rules we have invented for it. For example a sensation of falling in love can be: *'I love you, I will always love you – and I always have loved you.'*

History has nothing to do with the past. History is how we perceive previous events now. History is only a sequence of reinventions. History isn't exactly bunk, it's just highly subjective. Juliet (and therefore Irina) is quite capable of totally reinventing both Juliet's past and character in the living moment as she steps onto the balcony. There is nothing as unpredictable as the past.

12

‘I DON’T KNOW WHERE I AM’

Like all the spider legs, *‘I don’t know where I am’* repeats the same word twice: ‘I’. Structuring things around ‘I’ doesn’t help. Again we can think laterally and reread the assertion not for its content but for its form. Like the rest of the spider legs it repeats the same word twice: and it doesn’t matter whether it is I, Ich, Je, Ya, Io, Yo or Я.

Before we throw ourselves on the rules, let us dissect this word ‘where’. ‘Where’ refers to the space. The balcony is not the space. The balcony is in the space. The balcony divides the space. The balcony consequently makes a rule. The space is not neutral, and Juliet cannot do whatever she likes in the space.

During a television debate for the US presidency the candidates were invited to check out the set for their coming duel. One arrived, glanced at the position of the lectern and chairs and said he was satisfied. The other also looked at the position of the lectern and the chairs, but then took considerable time to practise sitting down, standing up, running up to the lectern, walking to the chair, picking up his water from the table, sipping, putting the glass down again. The producers smiled patronisingly at the insecure candidate. He won both debate and election.

Irina can discover the space in an exercise for early rehearsal. Like many exercises it seems deceptively simple. It is important first for Irina to discover all that *Irina* can do in the space. Run, jump, kick, lean, leave, re-enter, thump, balance, dance, creep, roll, etc. etc. And once Irina has discovered the opportunities and limitations of her body in the space, only then can Irina set about the quite different task of discovering what the space will permit *Juliet* to do. Irina has one space and Juliet has another. Irina must not be a victim of the space, but Juliet must be the space’s victim. Irina needs to discover what liberties and constraints the space permits and imposes upon Juliet.

Juliet comes into the space: ‘*Romeo, Romeo, wherefore’,* etc. What space does she see? Darkness? Moonlight? A well-known balcony? An unfamiliar moon? A balcony that has got smaller as she’s grown taller? A moon that changes? And a Romeo she sees only in her imagination.

What will all these targets permit Juliet’s body to do?
Will the space force Juliet to move?
Will the moon make her reach to it?
Will the balcony make her lean on it?
Will the floor let her pace on it?
Or make her run on it?
Will the door let her swing on it?

Will the night force her to defy it?
Will the cold make her shiver?
Will her dress make her body big?
Will the stars make her body small?

The space will find you

If Irina's fear blinds her limbs to the space, the space will still be there. It is a target after all, and so must uphold all the laws. Because the target is un-creatable, it is also indestructible. All Irina has to do is see the space that Juliet sees. Sometimes this seems impossibly hard. But seeing isn't complicated; it is only block that is complex. How can Irina help her body see?

First Irina must stop Irina getting in the way of what she sees. Then she must stop Juliet blocking what Irina sees as well. Irina must see through Juliet into what Juliet sees. As always, Irina cannot see who Juliet is; Irina can only see what Juliet sees.

'*I don't know where I am*' seems like a gut reaction, a simple and emotional expression of fear. But looking closer, we can see that the cry is a reaction to a theory. This theory implies that 'I' could know where I am, with no reference to the space.

Even if Irina doesn't know where she is, the space knows where Juliet is.

Furthermore, that useful word 'me' has been erased from the panic cry. Constructions with 'me' provide more release. For example:

he balcony stops me.'
he night emboldens me and makes me reach for it.'
he image of Montague infuriates me and makes me lash out at him.'

The balcony, the night and the image of Montague each impose rules on Juliet. Irina may be able to do what she likes in the space, but Juliet may not. These targets restrict, constrict, mould, limit and impede all that Juliet wants to do. And out of this conflict is born the energy of the performance. Taken together all these targets constitute Juliet's space, whether these elements are the balcony or the image of Montague. Irina must let Juliet's body depend upon the balcony, the night, the image of Montague, before Irina can be free to move as Juliet.

Irina may think she wants to be free, but fear often makes us substitute independence for freedom. If Irina lets Juliet do whatever she likes in the space, if Juliet is independent of all the targets that constrict her, then Irina will block herself.

The actor must renounce all independence of the space, and search instead for all the constraints and escapes offered to and imposed upon the character's body by the space.

You cannot be lost in space. There is no such thing as a void.

Space and conflict

Juliet's body is always in conflict with the space. She can obey the space or try to disobey it. The space imposes a rule, which Juliet may or may not try to break. The character's prison is the actor's freedom.

'*I don't know where I am!*' may sound like the cry of a victim. But the double 'I' construction betrays that the opposite is also true. It may also be the cry of someone who wants to control everything. It is because somewhere Irina does not want to be the victim of circumstances that she unknowingly declares her independence of them.

The world doesn't always do what we want, and we don't much like it. But this capacity of the world to act independently helps Irina. The target must be independent of Irina in order to release her; Irina's

freedom resides entirely in acknowledging that the target is her master, her servant, and her guide.

A crustacean

'Character' and 'space' have a surprising amount in common. In fact, my 'character' is a kind of space I inhabit. It may help Irina to imagine that character is external, like the protective shell of the crustacean, as opposed to the inner skeleton of a vertebrate. So Irina should search for what is already there outside, rather than try to build things inside. Let Irina find rather than invent. Let her imagine that the decisions have already been taken; she only has to discover them. Again, curiosity is a closer friend than creativity.

How might this work in practice? Say there is a chair on the balcony, then Irina can discover whether Lady Capulet sat in it or not. The only person Irina can ask is . . . Irina.

But rather than invent an answer, it is more useful for Irina to pretend that she is remembering what she already knew. Is it her mother's chair? Her father's chair? Was it always here? Or has it been moved? What memories are there for her to remember, rediscover, resee? For each of those meanings will restrict how the chair needs to be sat on. Let the chair decide. Let Irina investigate what the chair demands. What precisely does she see when she sees the orchard wall? Rather than inventing a story, let Irina see the walls and ask why she knows they are *'high and hard to climb'*. Did the Nurse thrash her as a toddler when she tried to leg it to freedom? Again, there is nothing as unpredictable as the past.

Of course, Irina can change all her discoveries once made. She may discover later in rehearsal that it was not her mother's chair after all but, in fact, the chair the Nurse suckled her on. Or, if Irina sees the chair her father used to sit in, that specific chair will also ask her to sit on it in a specific way. It will make concrete demands on her body. The chair will tell her how to move in respect of it – languorously, nervously, expansively, tightly, square in the seat or half-committed on its arm. Juliet may sit on it with tenderness or reverence or suspicion.

It will help Irina to see herself less as a creator and more as an intrepid explorer out to solve the mysteries of the chair. The artist finds, rather than creates and controls. To say we discover rather than invent is not humble; it is realistic.

A digression: obedience and disobedience

The space presents rules. Some of these rules Juliet may obey – it may be unwise for her to fling herself over the balcony. But other rules Juliet may try to disobey. Juliet knows the balcony presents an insuperable barrier but she may try to touch Romeo all the same, by reaching and stretching over the parapet. Characters often try to break the rules of the space. Macbeth tries to clutch an imaginary dagger. Cleopatra tries to caress a venomous asp. Pyramus tries to see through a wall. When the stakes go up we often try to transcend the bounds of our space. There is no reason why the character should want to obey the rules of the space. In real life we try to break unbreakable rules, and continual failure doesn't stop us trying.

For the actor the space is artificial. Even the most realistic set with sturdy doors and glass windows separates Irina not from Verona but the stage-manager's desk. But the actor has to enable the character to believe utterly in the space. Juliet needs to be completely convinced by the reality of her surroundings. Otherwise Juliet cannot exist. For Juliet cannot exist outside a context – a context in which Juliet fully believes. A space which Juliet can love and hate, cherish and try to destroy.

At all costs the actor must never let the character invent the space. The space must be there ready for the character to see.

Disobeying the space

It is an old theatrical adage that you cannot play the king: the court has to play that you are king. For the

king, the court is part of the space. If the king does not believe that the court sees him as king then the actor will have to keep making himself king, stick his nose in the air and wander around very slowly dragging ermine. Instead the actor needs to believe that were he to sit on the floor to play with the fool, the court would be shocked. If the actor does not believe the court sees him as king then he will never be free enough to play the king.

The space always says 'no'

The space through which we move always resists us; even the air is in conflict with our bodies. These resistances create friction and friction produces fire, with both heat and light. It is important for Irina to experience as many of these resistances as possible. However, the more we concentrate, the more we lose ourselves inside and become insensible to these tiny resistances. Juliet is moulded by her space as the coast is sculpted by the wind and sea. The cliff does not decide its form alone.

We know that Irina cannot achieve some internal change of her state into Juliet. However, Irina can see the elements, spaces and resistances that have formed Juliet, that have nourished and deformed her, and that still try to rule how she moves. For the actor the space is never empty, the space is always charged with meaning. For the actor, the space is never neutral; otherwise the actor would become neutral and lose energy. But then, of course, neutrality is only another theory.

Life and death

Our conflict with the space ends only when we are dead. And when we die we merge with the space. Distance from the space, difference from the space and conflict with the space are all crucial dynamics for life. Physicists have discovered that no two surfaces can be so smooth that they can pass without any friction. So let Irina discover how much resistance the space exerts on Juliet's body. Uncovering these resistances will help Irina move as Juliet. But if, instead, Irina makes consciously creative decisions about how Juliet should move, irrespective of the space, then she will block herself.

The changing space

Like everything else, the space is in flux. So when Romeo reveals himself beneath the balcony, the space changes for Juliet. Of course the space doesn't actually change, but that's just another truth that isn't useful. For Juliet there is a space when she enters that is already full, full of the night, the stars, the balcony. And when Romeo is suddenly added to that space, she sees not the space plus Romeo, but a new and entirely different space. Romeo's sudden presence alters not only the rules of the space but also the nature of everything that Juliet saw in the space before. The night is now a different night; it conceals and exposes; the night is at once more concealing, and yet more dangerous. The night is different for Juliet because the stakes in the night have suddenly soared. Not only has the night changed but also the balcony has transformed into another stranger. Suddenly the balcony is more protecting, more frustrating, more silly, more important, and how the balcony demands to be touched or rejected, leaned on, stretched over, sat on, or hidden behind, will all have changed utterly. Irina never transforms, Juliet never transforms, the 'I' never transforms; it is everything else that changes, like the inconstant moon.

Early astronomers insisted that the universe revolved around the stable earth; and the principle is still useful to the actor. We do not transform, the space does. We are not in control, the situation is.

Juliet's dress changes for her, Juliet's fingers change for her, Juliet's face changes for her. There is now more at stake for Juliet in whether or not she blushes, whether or not she feels the wind blow colder as her cheeks get hotter, whether or not the air is more difficult to breathe, whether or not her lips phrase the right words. Juliet's limbs and gestures are increasingly at the mercy of what her senses relay to her. Perhaps she wants Romeo to see an angry young woman, an intelligent girl, or a Juliet who isn't ruffled.

Space comes before character

Why does the balcony scene remain our most enduring image of romantic love? The answer has little to do with character, but everything to do with the space. The reason is not the lovers; the reason is the balcony. The two lovers in the same space would move us far less. Their passion needs the obstacle to express itself. The balcony makes an action: it separates the two. The lovers' reaction is to try to bridge that divide. This struggle to reach the one we love is recognised throughout the world, for it is the barrier that helps us to feel what they feel. There is no love without separation.

Acting and disobedience

Much of an actor's work is to distinguish between what is to be disobeyed and what is to be obeyed. For example, Alex will know it is physically impossible for Romeo to jump up on the balcony. That is a physical fact. But that need not stop Romeo from trying.

Reflecting on Juliet's disobedience will give Irina a fast route through Juliet's eyes. First Irina needs to ask: '*How does Juliet disobey?*' Does she flout rules that are social, sexual, religious, political, domestic and/or personal? Before too many hours get squandered in fascinating rehearsal discussion it is worthwhile concretising, or earthing, these generalities. Will she hurt her father? Will she hurt her mother? What is the difference? Presumably Juliet finds out a lot more about herself, her family and her society when she is forced to ask these questions during the course of the play. And so, of course, will Irina. Irina needs to reflect on the nature of Juliet's real disobedience.

A digression: theatre and disobedience

Drama deals with disobeyers. It is interesting that Shakespeare was obsessed with the daughter who disobeys the father. Either disobeying the living father or struggling to obey the dead father motors many of his plays. Hamlet manages to do both at the same time. But filial obedience/disobedience is a major theme for Oedipus, for Orestes in the *Oresteia*, for Haemon in *Antigone*, for Rodrigo in *The Cid*. Constantin is caught between obeying and disobeying Arkadina in *The Seagull*. The Gospels often preach filial disobedience, with an interesting exception at the Cana wedding when Jesus, against his better judgement, yields to his mother's catering anxiety and alters reality. Most of the fiction we read, films we watch, and newspapers we buy are about people who disobey authority. But when finally we ourselves are called upon to disobey, it is seldom as imagined. Drama is obsessed with this adult act, perhaps preparing us like the mother hiding behind the pillow.

A digression: anaesthesia and obedience

Civilisation has a difficult time dealing with disobedience. However, we need to disobey, and it is a part of humanity that no civilisation has fully broken.

Civilisation manufactures anaesthetics that are useful and anaesthetics that are highly dangerous. Anaesthesia deadens the senses till we no longer recognise stimuli.

Civilisation uses anaesthesia to make an act of abject obedience appear like its exact opposite. The anaesthetic befuddles us till we think an act of submission is revolutionary or subversive. Disobedience can come masked as obedience and vice versa. For example, the narcotics trade seems to destroy the social order, but the drug dealer is a true conservative; for energy that might be used to alter society is channelled and doped till it supports the given order. The addict commits a massive act of obedience each time the needle penetrates. This anaesthesia makes slavery seem like power. Whether we believe all this or not, it helps us to question and explore what constitutes true disobedience.

A digression: panic

As the stakes rise, we engage in a private war between concentration and attention, seeing and showing,

me and the target. When the mugger pulls the knife it slices me in two, long before it ever touches my flesh. When the knife first flashes, adrenalin surges through my veins to increase strength and alertness. This extra attentiveness can give the sense of time slowing down. I know I must rely on myself but I also know my life depends on all the information I can scan. I judge what I see: the slide of his eyes, the hesitation of the blade, the clench of his wrist, the precise distance between me, the door and the people walking away behind his back, the strength of my arms, the speed of my legs and the force of my will.

At the same time another feeling jostles for attention, which we loosely term panic but instantly recognise as our enemy. We instinctively sense at such a dangerous moment that if we surrender to this feeling we might well die. The adrenalin gives me heightened awareness of the target, but the panic is about concentration. In order to survive I must forget about the panic, I must forget what 'I' feel. There is a struggle between these two, and it is a bitter struggle. If I abandon myself to the attack of panic, then I will lose the struggle with the real threat.

The actor discovers where the character is by seeing the space as the character sees it, as a set of rules to be obeyed or broken. Only the changing target locates the character. The world is discovered rather than created, found rather than imposed.

13

‘I DON’T KNOW HOW I SHOULD MOVE’

Where I am and how I should move are indivisible. As we have seen, the space will force you to move in a specific way. For this to happen you need to have not just an attentive mind, but also an attentive body. Of course, the mind and body are not separate entities.

The body needs to be kept in good condition. It helps to be fit, and to keep the body flexible. The actor’s body is maintained in condition not to feel or look good, but to remain vigilant and sensitive to outside stimulus. The body needs to connect fluidly to the senses so that the target registers immediately. For example, when Romeo jumps out from the shadows and cries ‘*I take thee at thy word*’, Irina may have the idea to start back into the shadows. But if Juliet jumps, it cannot be because Irina has made that conscious decision in the rehearsal; it must be because Juliet reacts in the living moment. Ultimately Irina will digest all ideas so that in performance her body can automatically respond to what Juliet sees. Irina’s body needs to be so vigilant that it seems her central nervous system immediately and automatically connects her muscles to the target. Ideally she will respond without actually thinking. Her very muscles must be open to the target.

Movement and the target

Without distance there can be nowhere to go. If I am perfectly where I want to be, I can have no journey. If there is no distance there is no path and therefore no potential movement.

How we move, like everything else we do, is entirely dependent on the target. We do not move in a vacuum. We move only because of something else; we move only in the context of something else. A move or a gesture is as much a reaction to an action as any piece of text. We move to achieve something. We move to change the target. We move first and foremost because we see the target, and, more precisely, because we see what the target is already doing, as we saw with the forgetful businessman. *‘I shift in my chair*’ may help less than: ‘*the seam in my trousers makes me so uncomfortable that it makes me shift in my chair!*’

Actors see with their entire bodies.

The message exercise

These exercises are to be used rather than understood. They can release a bound actor if the few rules are closely followed and the observer is alert.

Irina takes the words: ‘*No! There’s you, there’s me, and there’s the space*.’ This is the ‘message’. A rule of these exercises is that, once decided, the words of the message can in no way be altered. Irina

must respect the integrity of this fragment as if it were poetry of the highest order.

In the scene Irina is trying to unlock, the 'you' becomes Romeo, the 'me' Juliet, and 'the space' the balcony, the orchard, the family within, Verona beyond, everything, in fact, in Juliet's concrete world. Irina repeats these words to Romeo, bearing in mind the situation, and plays the message for all she is worth. Irina sees a Romeo who does not understand the specific distinction between these three, and she must make him understand. She will become frustrated that her text is so banal, and this frustration will push Juliet's body and imagination. She will use more and more inventive and persuasive means of making Romeo grasp this vital difference. Bit by bit, Irina will forget to express Juliet, and instead try to influence Romeo with every weapon at her disposal, her voice, her tone and her gestures.

When Irina first plays the exercise, the observer may notice that she 'sees' the same thing for each of the three different entities; she may have unwittingly welded 'you', 'me' and 'the space' into a one, and annihilated the distance between them. But 'you', 'me' and 'the space' must be different from each other. This rule is so obvious that it is easily taken for granted. It is as invisible as oxygen and, for the actor, precisely as important.

In real life we rarely have to distinguish between these three; the difference is already clear, and fundamental. However, in performing we may overlook fundamentals in trying to grasp something more sophisticated. Irina can never take for granted that she must always separate these three entities when she acts. Smudging these particular distinctions is all too easy and makes huge problems.

The exercise can expose controls that sabotage the actor. This invisible control blocks the actor's instinct to interact with the outside world. This control is one of Fear's children, and is particularly lethal for the actor.

Passing the buck

Irina can use her own frustration by converting it. Instead she imagines her frustration to be Juliet's frustration. Let Juliet be frustrated that Romeo fails to see the obvious difference between these three entities. Let the struggle be all Juliet's; let the 'trying' all be for Juliet to try. She then sees a Romeo who needs to have these distinctions explained, underlined, and hammered home.

For example, behind the banal message Juliet might be trying to say:

'No, Romeo, you are a Montague but I am a Capulet; we can never bridge that gap, this balcony does not separate us as cruelly as our names.'

Or, the message:

'No! There's you, there's me, and there's the space.'

might also mean:

'No, Romeo! You are a man, I am a woman and people gossip; there is more at stake for me in this relationship!' etc.

When the stakes go up we all start to 'try': we try to keep utterly still as the bear lumbers past the tent. But only Juliet should be 'trying', and not Irina. Irina will see through Juliet's eyes a Romeo who needs to be told that the world, in its three entities, is in reality different from how he sees it. His perspective is simply wrong. To Juliet, her perspective is right . . . and crucial. And so she must change what Romeo sees; Juliet must try to change what Romeo believes.

All text changes belief

All text attempts to alter a perspective. Are there exceptions to this rule? No. Say someone says to you: *'I look dreadful, don't I?'* and you reply: *'Yes, you're right. Actually you do look dreadful',* you are bolstering their feeling of fatigue; for even to confirm is also to change.

Indeed, *'I want to change what you believe'* is the foundation of all text, as we shall see later.

Irina needs to see a Romeo who continues to misunderstand the precise and specific difference between these three entities, and its overwhelming importance. And in order to make him understand she will do everything she can. She may point, gesture, flail, run, stand fixed to the spot, yell, whisper, crouch; still he doesn't understand and she tries again to find the right gesture or intonation that will make Romeo grasp what he must. Juliet can 'show' as much as she likes to get what she wants. But Irina cannot show anything. This exercise can help to make this separation.

The observer

When Irina has lost herself in what Juliet is trying to do, when she starts to see these three things as essentially different and is indicating, signalling, demonstrating this difference to Romeo, then an observer should shout: '*Text!*', whereupon, immediately and without preparing, Irina launches into Shakespeare's script. It is important that her body continues to move and her eyes continue to see as when the stupid message bound and frustrated her. Irina's body and imagination remember the ways she reacted in the message. The maddening inadequacy of the message has forced Irina to scour her imagination to convince her partner.

The first few times the exercise is played, Irina's body may return to being over-controlled after the observer calls '*Text*'. Although she may have discovered wonderful things in the exercise, she may drop them all again in the panic of returning to the text. Repeating the exercise brings both frustration and relaxation. However, bit by bit, Irina will feel freer when she is forced to use her whole body, and everything outside her body, to make these distinctions vital for her uncomprehending partner. It is important that Irina never knows when '*Text*' will be called, so that she cannot plan the transition from message to text.

The space

As we have seen, Juliet cannot do anything she likes. She is always constrained by the specific given circumstances. For example, Juliet probably cannot shout for fear of rousing the house. But this injunction can be built into the message sequence. How is this built in? The 'space' is the key word here. Perhaps her parents' bedroom is two windows along. Perhaps on the word 'space' Irina indicates this window to Romeo. Perhaps she must make him understand the immense significance of the window and the snores of doom percolating behind. When Irina tries to make Romeo see the window and its meaning she will find herself unable to shout. Irina doesn't stop Juliet shouting; the window stops her from shouting. The space starts to impose itself actively.

Similarly 'the space' can refer to the orchard walls, or the balcony. The use of the words 'the space' helps Irina see and explore concrete targets and their significance. And she must make Romeo see these concrete targets as she sees them. As far as Juliet is concerned, Romeo must see the world as she sees it. In particular he needs to see the precise differences between things in the same way as she sees them. For example, he does not quite see the precise difference between himself and Juliet. Sure, he may see certain differences between them, but not the precise and specific difference that Juliet must get him to see now. Juliet must struggle to get him to see things as she sees them, to see differences as she sees them, to prioritise as she prioritises.

A way of looking at the message exercises is that the message is invisible work and the text is visible work. The call of '*Text*' is the threshold between the two. The observer's call makes this threshold sudden and unpredictable. The more sudden and unpredictable the threshold, the more likely it is that the

message will influence the text, the more likely that the invisible will affect the visible. As we shall see later, the text is best seen as an inadequate tool; when the stakes go up, even the most sublime poetry fails to express what we feel and need.

Examples of the message exercise
Other useful messages can be invented such as:

'o! It's not your scene, it's my scene and this is my space!'
'o! It's not my scene, it's your scene and this is your world!'
'o! It's not you who is in control, it is me who is in control and this is my room!'
'o! It's not me who is in control, it is you who is in control, and this is your room!'
'o! You are the victim, not me, and I can touch these walls!'
'o! You are not free, I am free and I can move on this floor!'

To recap: message exercises are normally played by actors in pairs. Each actor takes the identical message, and interrupts the partner with the '*No!*' – for it seems the partner does not understand. And the partner must be made to understand. There also needs to be a third person, an observer, to oversee the exercise. This observer will shout *'Text'* so that the actors never decide for themselves when to revert to the original scene. If the actors are able to choose when to transfer from the message to the text, then a gap of control will return them neatly home. This threshold between message and text needs to be out of the actors' control, so that the actors can empty their heads and let their bodies and eyes fill with what they see, secure that there is an external observer. The actors must be free to see their partners, to change their partner's point of view. The outsider, the observer, shouts '*Text*' as soon as the actors' heads and bodies are sufficiently empty of concentration, open in attention, and lost in their reactions to each other.

As we have seen, the space is vital in the message exercise. The actor touches or indicates something in the space each time the corresponding word is used. The need to touch wakens the tranquillised body. Of course, some gestures will be useless in the actual scene with the text. Perhaps most of the energy released in the exercise will be discarded. But often something alive remains.

In any event, it is crucial for Irina to experiment with movement, for Irina needs to know how to move in order to know how to be still.

A digression: sit-com
As we have seen, space and character are oddly interlinked. You cannot work on character independently of the space. And relationships have their spaces too. Indeed relationships transposed from one space to another can change surprisingly. Changing rehearsal room affects rehearsals intensely. Another curious example occurs in television 'situation-comedy'.

The most successful of these take place in only one or two spaces, say a pub, a room in a flat, or a family kitchen. Now it is obvious that the audience learns to love the characters, less obvious that we love the dynamic between the characters, but can it really be that we learn to love the space? Those faceless sofas and studio doors? But indeed we do. For occasionally the producers decide to jazz up an episode by, say, sending all the characters on holiday so a whole episode takes place in unfamiliar surroundings. And the writing is as good. The story is as good. The acting is as good. Except we just don't laugh as much. The same relationship is somehow less funny in a different environment. But how can one sofa be funnier than another? Of course it isn't funnier. But the familiarity, the intimacy, is crucial.

All good sit-coms have a controlled number of spaces. The audience takes these prosaic environments for granted, until they are removed. An invisible intimacy is built up with the specific kitchen counter, the specific position of the front door, the specific ring of the door bell.

A digression: life moves

For the living being, behind apparent immobility there is always movement. However, this principle does not work the other way round. Stillness does not lurk behind life. Behind apparent movement there will be yet another movement, perhaps something quite different from what we see, for nothing alive is ever totally still. Even if Irina decides that Juliet is physically repressed, under her apparent stillness the desire to move will always boil. The Japanese hostess serving the serenest tea can be observed to move slightly as she speaks, even if it is the tiniest vibration of her fingers on the table.

Yet stillness and silence are tremendously powerful. Like symmetry they are ideals for which we yearn but never find in their purity. Irina may discover inklings of stillness and silence in her rehearsal and rediscover them in performance. But it is risky to start immobile; it is dangerous to begin from inertia. Stillness is discovered in movement. And movement does not originate within. We move because of what we see.

A digression: mannerism

As has been mentioned, although the expressiveness of the body is crucial, 'expressive' is a loaded word for the actor. We cannot actively 'express' anything in general. So when we see an actor who seems to be expressing something fluidly, what we are actually seeing is an actor who has the grace, or talent, or training, not to block.

However, when the actor actively tries to have an expressive body independent of the space, then alarming things can happen. Unhelpful techniques spray on a superficial body charge, and the body's truthful flow gets masked beneath a seeming flow. We excel at these double-bluffs. To cover her ageing skin, Elizabeth I is said to have had her face and bosom caked in thick white paint. Afterwards the Queen had thin blue veins drawn to mimic the real ones millimetres below.

Mannerism often seems to be highly specific. We may lampoon our colleagues' slurred sibilants, drawled vowels or extravagantly relaxed gestures. Other people's mannerisms are so much funnier than our own. Whether endearing or irritating, these baroque performances share one thing in common. The root of mannerism is always the same: the mannered actor is cut off from the target. Mannerism afflicts naturally talented people when Fear cuts them off from the unpredictable target.

The studied performance that, with the best possible intentions, appears artificial, results from the boring old fear that the outside world will not be there when we need it. And so the actor declares his independence of what he may or may not see in the heat of the moment, and seals himself off. He wants to leave nothing to chance – he will prepare everything, so that he won't be caught out of control. He will defend himself from the unpredictable. Quickly, however, his fortress becomes his prison.

14

CONTROL

No one has a perfectly responsive body, but this is not so much because we are unfit and inflexible. The body is fettered by unconscious control. Control is a sensitive issue. Some control is crucial; some control is destructive. It all depends.

Basically there are two aspects of control: the control that we see, and the control that we don't see. It is this second invisible control that hobbles the actor. We walk like wardrobes not because we are genetically wooden, but because we are afraid. Fear normally produces two physical symptoms:

1. We can't move, and
2. We can't breathe.

Like fire, Control is a good servant and a bad master. Control can be a curse to the actor, yet it looks so helpful and friendly. Control whispers: '*If you use me I can help you escape from the clutches of Fear.*' But this is merely a brilliant set-up, a 'sting'. When we try to escape from Fear by using Control, we end up more and more ensnared with Fear: '*They pretended they were enemies but they were in it together all along!*'

Fear threatens, Control conspires. And we get deeper and deeper embroiled. Fear runs its own KGB where you no longer know who your real friends are. Control is a double agent: '*I am your tool. You can use me to do whatever you like, even to conquer Fear and any other unpleasant feelings.*' But this is Control's biggest lie. It is Control that exclaims: '*I don't know what I should feel!*'

Control hates to be controlled.

The Boeing 747

Fear prefers us to be in a state of unthinking control. Fear does not like us to think sensibly. When the 747 bucks up and down in the turbulence perhaps catastrophe will be forestalled if only I manage to keep very still and not breathe. Or I can chat frantically to the puzzled stranger in the next seat. Either method tries to control and censor the reception of outside stimulus: *'If I study my in-flight magazine, perhaps I won't notice the wing dropping off.'*

These are conscious decisions. But more frightening are those invisible controls that tirelessly edit not only our physical reactions, but also the very stimuli that we are allowed to receive. Sometimes they behave like a gaoler who locks up our bodies. Sometimes they behave like a wartime censor who cuts out bits from letters. We may be unable to remove these controls, but we can see how they work. So instead

of asking '*Why can't I move?'* let Irina ask instead: *'What is blocking my body?'* or, more helpfully: *'Why am I blocking my body?'*

Life is in permanent flow; something else slams on the brakes. This 'something else' needs to be exposed. The principle is simple: we stop ourselves moving because Fear maintains us in a state of control.

The blocked body

The first step in liberating the body is to acknowledge the degree to which we keep it caged. Accepting the seriousness of a problem is the first step in changing it. Fear maintains his status quo by encouraging us to deny that the problem exists. Refusing to accept our limitations may seem defiant. In fact it is an act of slavery. Fear is brilliant.

Irina can use the following exercise. She stands by a table and picks up a glass of water. She repeats this simple act over and over again while paying attention to what her body actually does. The glass is in easy reach. Perhaps she only has to move her arm. Precisely which muscles does she use? Her finger muscles? Which exactly? Her neck muscles? Which exactly? Irina becomes aware of those parts of her body that she is using to pick up the glass.

So far so good. But now Irina pays attention to the muscles that she is not using. There will be many. Her foot muscles, for example. Now she might ask why should she use her foot muscles? The table is not so low that she has to bend. But a better question is: '*Would the movement be even slightly easier if I slightly used my feet?*' Let Irina see if those foot muscles might help. Irina's reach might be a fraction easier if she slightly inclines her ankles.

Using your toes to help pick up a glass of water seems strange, but whenever a muscle feels another one moving, it wants to join in. Like a child locked indoors on a sunny afternoon who sees the children next door kicking a football.

The more muscles that are used to perform a single act the less strain there is on any individual muscle, but this is only a utilitarian explanation. The simple truth is that muscles just want to move; that is in their essence. Just as it is in our essence to want to live.

We control our muscles far more than we know. This invisible brake needs serious examination and dismantling as it is one of the greatest blocks on vital performance. We prefer to think we stop our muscles working because we are lazy. The truth is less cavalier; we stop our muscles working because somewhere we are afraid of what they might do.

So if Irina goes back to the glass of water, let her not ask '*Why should I move all my muscles, when my arm alone can pick up the glass?*' Let her ask rather why she is denying her other muscles the pleasure of participating. Why does she lock them out of the party?

Irina can devise many movement exercises for herself and perhaps many more will be organised for the group. The exercises can examine reaching, touching, walking, every possible activity. The exercises are repeated so that greater attention is paid to each movement. This is very different from concentrating on each movement. For if we analysed how we managed to stay standing, we might well fall over. You can't ride a bike by thinking.

The exercises draw Irina's attention not so much to how her muscles are working, but to what Irina is doing to stop her muscles working. The exercise is not to wake her sleeping muscles, but to help her to recognise that she is secretly injecting them with anaesthetic, like a crazed nurse.

We squander masses of energy braking, suppressing, curbing, limiting, deadening and confining the muscles. We need every scrap of this wasted energy to pay attention to the developing situation. These exercises draw the attention to secret inner locks. The only key we can use is attention, but attention fits all locks like a miracle skeleton key.

Ground energy

'Ground energy' can also help. Imagine that all energy wells up from the ground. The actor lies down and senses the floor supporting the back and gradually pays attention to each of the points of contact between the floor and the back. As the actor becomes more relaxed, more parts of the body come in contact with the floor. The spine relaxes and lengthens. Soon, he or she can speak the text as if it is coming up from the floor and up through the diaphragm, the lungs, then through the thorax and finally resonating through the entire body. Slowly the actor can build up to standing, when the only route for the ground energy will be to rise through the soles of the feet, via the ankles and so upwards.

It is important that as the actor stands, the knees remain flexible. We have many pressure points in the body where we can lock off the flow of energy. The knees and the neck are only two of the busier junctions. The neck needs to be kept free of tension and the knees need to be kept unlocked.

This exercise cannot be performed in the head. Like all exercises it can only be experienced sensually, like the wiser presidential candidate who needed to feel the space. Particularly if the rehearsal has started with the actors hunched around a table, then ground energy exercises can help to correct the resulting imbalance in energy.

It helps to imagine that the energy wells up from the ground because far too often the actor unconsciously believes that all useful energy trickles down from the brain. This invisible assumption limits the actor's freedom. But sadly, it is all too easy for civilised us to imagine that energy radiates down from the head; it has been drilled into us. Even if we attended schools that taught nothing but dance and sport, it is still buried deep in our culture to perceive control as a) always a good thing and b) as physically radiating downwards within the body. Of course this is unconscious, but it helps explain why so many of us, even athletes and dancers, do not move as well as we might.

Breathing

Like movement, respiration is one of the seven characteristics of all living things. Breathing is crucial for life. We breathe naturally – otherwise we would all be dead. We breathe naturally according to the thought. That is simple. What is not so simple is why we interfere with this process. Why do we force ourselves to breathe at odd times? If you want to know when to breathe, the answer is simple: '*When you want to*.'

How then does Irina decide when Juliet wants to breathe? She cannot; nor should she ever attempt such a hair-raising venture. But then even Juliet herself doesn't decide when Juliet breathes. Because Juliet breathes when the target tells her to. The target always decides when we breathe, how deep our breath should be, at what speed and how completely the breath should be exhaled. For example:

A painful meeting

Say you have something painful to say to a friend. The moment comes for your carefully prepared speech. You look at the said friend and take in a deep breath. But when the time comes, it is not you who decides when and how to breathe. It is the sight of your friend plus the thought of what words you must use that decide. Is he happy, anxious, relaxed? You see him, collect your thoughts and then inhale accordingly without thinking of the breath. Because the target tells you precisely how much breath you need. And the target seems to communicate this more or less straight to your lungs. To take another example, imagine that quite unexpectedly, a stranger in a pub staggers to his feet, looks menacingly around, smashes a bottle, lurches in your direction, waves the bottle in your face and then . . . slams out of the door and onto the street. You breathe out automatically and probably in unison with everyone else. Although the other customers are still shaken, they no longer need the uncomfortable reserves of breath retained lest they had to intervene. For we retain breath when the situation is dangerous. Flight and fight may empty our bowels but they force us to reserve oxygen. This is a reflex; it is not a conscious decision. So we breathe

according to the danger we perceive in the situation, in other words, according to the stakes we see in the target.

A secret murder

When actors do not take in enough breath, they savage their text and butcher the longer thoughts. Rather than run out of breath, an actor may cut the long thought into little segments. The words are all accounted for, as the text has been chopped up into easily disposable morsels. The problem is that before it could be dismembered the long thought had first to be murdered.

A thought is a target, it needs to be recognised before it can be acted upon. A thought must be seen before it can be uttered. And like any target, a thought must obey all the rules. In particular the thought is always transforming itself. A thought never remains fixed; a single thought will modulate itself, will continue to change, as a variation on a theme. A verse play like *Romeo and Juliet* has plenty of prolonged thoughts expressed in extended sequences of words.

Breathing and the imagination

If Irina begins a passionate speech with her lungs only half-full it is dangerous for her to say '*Next time I must take more breath*', although that is perfectly true. Irina needs to see why she had not taken enough breath originally. The paucity of breath is only a symptom; its cause starts earlier. Irina runs out of breath because she has not properly seen the specific stakes in the target. Lungs half-full are alright to remonstrate with a boyfriend that has turned up late for a date. Lungs half-full are not alright to confront a lover who may destroy her.

But this is not a decision for either Irina or Juliet. This decision is taken by the target. The decision is taken by the sight of Romeo. Neither Juliet nor Irina communicate directly to the lungs. Consciously deciding when to breathe can scupper the actor and sink the imagination. It is only what we see that makes us breathe appropriately.

Irina, then, needs to be doubly equipped. First, her imagination needs to be acute enough to see the target that will make her react with that many words. Like the body, the imagination needs patience, training and endurance. As we have seen, we train the imagination only by letting ourselves see. Attention is our best coach.

But second, she needs to train her breathing technically to support any long thought. Her breathing muscles need to be fit.

Part of Irina's invisible work needs to be the training of her body. She needs the physical capacity to meet any of these demands on her breathing whenever they might occur. Irina needs to be free of the worry that her body is not ready to do what she wants it to do. This work has to be done early in her invisible work and as part of her general training as an actor. Sadly there is no pill to keep us fit, so Irina's training can never be completed. The actor needs discipline in order to be free.

The fourth uncomfortable choice:
certainty or faith

Before we continue, let's consider another uncomfortable choice. Like the other choices it needs to be considered in the invisible work. The choices work in parallel. Of course they cannot be directly used, but they help us realign in a more useful direction. An addiction to certainty will paralyse the actor. For example, Irina wants to be certain that she will not dry. But we can be certain of nothing. Going over and over lines in the wings is a fairly reliable way to forget them on stage. All the actor can do is to have faith that, when needed, the lines will be there. An obsession with certainty destroys faith. We cannot have certainty and faith; we can have either one or the other. Nor can Irina be certain that her feelings will be ready on cue. But she can have faith.

15

‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT I SHOULD FEEL’

We cannot express emotion. Ever. Emotion, however, expresses itself in us whether we like it or not. We cannot ‘do’ an emotion. We cannot ‘make’ an emotion. We cannot ‘show’ an emotion. Our emotions express themselves only through what we do. For example, in order to express my hatred for someone I have to do something else, say, give them a black look or hit them. We have no control over our hatred of someone, but we can choose what to do about it. We can ignore our hatred. Or we can choose to see it. And then perhaps it will change of its own accord. But only perhaps.

‘Emotions’ and ‘feelings’ are imprecise labels for a wide variety of somethings. More confusingly, our names for specific ‘feelings’ or ‘emotions’ often mislead deliberately. Fury may be love rebaptised, a desire to nurture may conceal an urge to destroy, and the self-destructive teenager may be protecting others from his violence. We can hide their names but our feelings are out of our control. They happen to us without our permission and we are not responsible for them. What we can control, however, is what we do.

Emotions are diverse and fight each other, like the gods of Ancient Greece. This means we are in a state of inner war, or at best an unstable truce. This inner conflict pains us so much, that we only permit ourselves a partial glimpse of the battlefield. Given the choice, we would far prefer the conflict to take place well outside us. Indeed this is one of the very reasons we go to the theatre.

What is my character feeling?

So it is dangerous for Irina to ask: ‘*What is Juliet feeling?*’ The question seems obvious and even generous, but actually it constricts the heart. The question is infected with the subtle vanity that I can ever be totally sure of what I feel. And if I cannot be certain about what I feel, how can I be certain about what Juliet may ‘feel’? ‘*What is my character feeling?*’ has no practical answer for the actor, and so is useless to ask.

Enormous, conflicting and changing feelings discombobulate Juliet throughout her encounter with Romeo, but it is unlikely that Juliet will be able to interpret them or even count them accurately. How then could Irina, a director or anyone else claim to pinpoint all the emotions that battle within her? Some hold that our feelings are completely knowable. It is a dictum of English law that ‘*a man’s state of mind is very much like the state of his digestion*’, and the principle has hanged many. Simplification may make the judge’s job easier but not the actor’s. In any event, Irina is an artist and her job the polar opposite of passing judgement. Any attempt by Irina to know what Juliet feels is doomed. So anything that Irina has managed to manufacture within herself from working out what she thinks that Juliet feels must also be

false. Exhausting maybe, but still false.

However, many of us, myself included, go to the theatre precisely in order to watch extreme emotions, and loathe passionless performances. Then what Juliet feels must be central to Irina's performance. So what can it mean that 'the actor cannot produce emotion'? In this respect, feeling is horribly similar to character. Both are crucial to Irina yet both seem hideously independent of her; they simply won't do what she wants. What can Irina do with the frustrating fact that she has no control over what is most important for her?

Feeling and the target

First of all, Irina must face the hard fact that she can never directly control character or feeling. She has to walk away from the twin delusions that we decide who we are and that we decide what we feel.

We have to turn our backs and put this tempting lie squarely behind us. These two delusions seem so real, but they always lead us firmly home. What then can Irina do, paralysed by the dread that she will feel nothing? She can help herself, as always, by remembering the target.

Generalisations die fast

We may well be in a general state of wanting but this feeling demands to be experienced in a specific image. Sexual desire needs flesh to know itself. Whatever the stimulus may be, it is always a target; the target is the catalyst for the release of feeling. No feeling can be triggered without a target. For example, we may wake up feeling grumpy, see our bad humour for what it is and deal with it. Or we may see another concrete reason for that mood – the weather, the job . . . or maybe go and pick a fight with someone. The more a feeling builds and demands to be released the more indiscriminate we may become about which target we see to precipitate its release. The one thing worse than being frightened of something is being frightened of nothing.

The target in conflict

Let us see where the text provides examples of emotional war, where the target is in conflict. We won't have to look far:

'My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep: the more I give to thee
The more I have, for both are infinite.'

With '*boundless*' Juliet may see a Romeo who must be warned of what he is getting into, but she may also see a Romeo she loves, whom she doesn't want to confuse, frighten or reject. And all of these Romeos that Juliet sees simply don't add up to a coherent Romeo. He is a mass of contradictions. These pictures contradict and fight each other; the targets make for conflict. Irina can never sum up Juliet's attitude to Romeo. And even Juliet herself could never define and number all Juliet's feelings for Romeo. All Irina can do is see the different Romeos that Juliet sees.

So when Juliet cries: '*O swear not by the moon*' perhaps she sees a Romeo she wants to hit and also a Romeo she wants to kiss. As always, the target must be specific. Juliet may see a Romeo she wants to hit hard, and a Romeo she wants to kiss equally hard. Ultimately, seeing the image will generate all the feeling that Irina needs to play Juliet. But of course trying to feel what Juliet feels will destroy Irina's performance.

Practically speaking, all of the actors' feelings are generated in what they see. Feeling cannot be generated by itself. The feeling will follow the target, but the target will never follow the feeling. Any attempt to generate feeling independently of the target will paralyse the actor.

The absence of feeling

We are appalled to hear that someone we know has committed suicide. But the question that tends to flash first through our minds is not '*why?*' but '*how?*' And this need to know how in some way shames us. Surely we ought to be able to feel this tragedy immediately and purely. We want to be able to feel compassion for the pain and loss of everyone affected. And we want to feel that compassion instantly and to order.

But no. Instead we want to know '*how?*' and then, perhaps, '*who found him?*' We are embarrassed to pry into the macabre detail. We need to see the empty bottle or the tight rope, and feel uneasy that we cannot feel without the image. We may feel ashamed that we want to know the trivial details of the mechanics, before we can start addressing such 'better' questions as '*why?'* We feel mean-spirited beside the magnitude of the event, and all we want to know is '*Was he tucked up in bed or slumped over the steering wheel?*'

But did we once feel things to order? Was there once a golden age when primitive but clear, intense and unequivocal feelings were delivered spontaneously? Has some pure innocence of emotion been degraded by this modern urge to sniff the dustbin detail?

The messenger

Sophocles' *Antigone* ends with a description of three suicides. The messenger first tells the Queen that her son and niece have taken their own lives. The messenger spares Eurydice nothing in concrete detail. She learns that the material her niece used to hang herself was silk; she is then told exactly how and where her son plunged his sword into his own body and precisely how his blood spattered her niece's cheek in his death rattle. Eurydice then kills herself in the palace. When Creon arrives, bearing the body of his son, the messenger reports the terrible news of his wife's death. Again the widower is spared no circumstantial detail. He is informed precisely that the knife penetrated his wife '*beneath the liver*'. The messenger knows that Creon's entire family has been wiped out; why does he torment the survivor with this surgical detail? But the messenger is not stupid. He knows that Creon must see. Creon must see in order to feel. Creon must feel in order to recognise what he has done. It is not a question of punishing Creon. Creon must see what he has done when he was blind.

Sophocles wrote extraordinary plays because he saw that we do not see as well as we might. More specifically he knew that we do not see accurately what we feel. He knows that feeling needs seeing. He sees that human civilisation is not as emotionally articulate as it imagines. He wants to wake us up from our anaesthesia, if only in the brief interlude of the protecting theatre. He wants to tear off our blindfolds in the sacred space before we lash them on again outside. He knows that it is a great vanity to believe that we can feel to order. He knows that even Creon, suddenly and violently bereft of his entire family, does not know what he feels. Before he can truly begin to feel her death, Creon needs to see his wife's liver.

Pain has no name. Nor has joy. Nor has any feeling because all feelings are as specific as fingerprints. But the unnamed frightens us. We name things in order to be able to think about them. We cannot think or feel properly until we have named our thoughts and feelings. Just because the names are inaccurate does not mean we should try to stop thinking and feeling. Feelings do not come waving passports. They come under pseudonyms. This is bad news for real life, but good news for the actor.

The emoted centre

Irina may feel frustrated that she cannot 'feel' Juliet's love for Romeo, that she feels nothing, and cannot express her love. But insofar as love is an emotion, Juliet can never directly express it.

'My bounty is as boundless as the sea,

My love as deep: the more I give to thee
The more I have, for both are infinite.'

If Irina tries to feel great love for Romeo during these words and expects that somehow she will then be able to ride on this feeling and somehow thereby express Juliet's tremendous feelings, then her performance will be passionless. In trying to be hot she will become as cold as death. If she tries to stimulate some imaginary 'emotion centre' she will produce absolutely nothing for herself but misery; Irina will emote, show and lock herself in at home.

Emotion and control

As we have seen, trying to show emotion obliterates the target. And, ironically, trying to show emotion empties the performance of all emotion. But perhaps we should think a little about why we try to indicate feeling. An indicated emotion is a desperate gesture of control. This desire to control feeling is born of fear. If, as a safety net, Irina decides to show the audience that her love for Romeo is deep and sincere, she may show off her technique, but she will stifle her vitality and her capacity to react in the moment. She will go home.

We may claim: '*I want to control this, but not that. I would rather lock up this, but let that run free*', but control never quite works out like that. However clever we think we are, however subtly we try to use control discretely and specifically, control always wants to take over. It is not possible to control only what we want to control. When we try to control what is 'bad', we often control what is 'good' too. All control has a habit of running out of control.

Monitoring

Monitoring is a form of control. Spies monitor. Irina may want to monitor how the audience sees Juliet, but as soon as she tries to monitor what the audience sees, she will also depress her own talent to see. As we know, control can be helpful and control can be destructive; it all depends. However, a useful principle is that:

The actor does not control, while the character does.

We have encountered this idea already in the message exercise, where the actor must not try, but the character must.

A digression: murdered emotion

Whenever we try to show emotion, it immediately becomes fake. We often notice that when we try to show our love to others, it doesn't really work. Love manifests itself through what we do. Love happens when we pay attention. But 'love' is another highly inaccurate label to cover a multitude of feelings and connections. For example, Juliet may truly love Romeo, which is about him, or be 'in love' with him, which is more about her.

A digression: taboo

On the whole, unconscious control is destructive. However, a taboo is an example of an unconscious control, and our cultures appear to thrive on them. This group unconscious control is as basic to society as theatre. A taboo is a collective unconscious control that organises social relationships within a law that appears instinctive rather than imposed. Drama can question all these laws both legislated and unconscious, which is why theatre often finds itself on the wrong side of politicians and priests. Medea, Gertrude, Oedipus, Creon, Angelo, Macbeth, Desdemona, Romeo and Juliet all transgress both law and taboo.

The character's control

Although Irina must not control how she is seen and understood, Juliet must try to control how she is seen and understood. Irina does not try to control the audience's perceptions of the scene, but Juliet must try to control Romeo's perception of Juliet.

Juliet probably has to fight a similar duel as the one fought by the man threatened with the knife. Is this going to be attention or concentration or fluctuate sickeningly between the two? There is a lot at stake for Juliet in Romeo; she has to glean a lot of information from what he says and from what he leaves unsaid. She must learn to interpret his face and his gestures, she needs to see if he is lying to her, or lying to himself, or genuinely trying to tell the truth. She needs to see if he is generous, shallow, bright or constant. She will feel these things by observing them. And it will hurt her head because all these things just don't add up. All these things simply do not make for a unified policy.

Irina can neither create nor control the complexity of what Juliet feels. All that she can do is see through Juliet's eyes. Juliet has some important things to say to Romeo. For example, Juliet must teach Romeo who she is. And she needs to pay attention to Romeo in order to succeed. She needs to search his face and his words, to discern what he understands, and what he only thinks he understands. But if she just expresses herself at Romeo he will understand little. So Irina is faced by the paradox that although Irina cannot directly express any of Juliet's feelings, Juliet's feelings still need to be expressed. So what can Irina do?

Emotion always hinders what we do

This principle can give Irina considerable release. What we feel always makes what we do more difficult, never easier. So Juliet's feelings for Romeo must impede what she does to him. So that whatever Irina plays on these lines – whether to amuse, seduce, teach, warn, confuse, possess, reassure, caress, soothe, frighten or excite Romeo – her love for Romeo makes doing these harder.

For example, say you are so angry with someone that you roar at them, '*Get out!*' you may feel that this shout perfectly expresses your feeling of rage. But this is not helpful for the actor. The actor must separate what the character feels from what the character does. Here the character may feel anger, but the character cannot do 'anger'. Let the actor imagine that the character's rage actully impedes him from getting the other to leave. To get the other to leave, the character must control his anger. Perhaps he may try to force his voice into a whisper, or enunciate very coldly.

The principle can be expressed as follows: an actor can never play an emotion, but an actor can play as if impeded by emotion. In fact it is impossible for an actor to act anything without emotion obstructing it. Love for Romeo makes it more difficult for Juliet to express her love towards him.

Not only does the actor need to polarise feeling from reaction, the actor actually needs to set these two at loggerheads.

Emoting

When Juliet speaks of the boundlessness of the sea it may tempt Irina to 'paint' the words wide and large, to parallel the immensity of the ocean. This is 'emoting'. Irina may be overawed by the sheer magnitude of the words and the implied emotion; this can have the dangerous side-effect of making Irina feel inadequate. She may panic that her emotional reserves are inadequate to fill the big moment. She may feel she has to match the scale of the writing. If Irina feels that she has to pump up her inside she will only paralyse herself. Or she would burst her performance, as would a balloon that flew high enough to escape the earth's atmosphere. If there were no more gas outside pressing in, the gas within the balloon would expand till it shattered the fragile plastic.

The feeling is always bigger than the word

As we saw with the love-sick adolescent, what we feel is always larger than our means to express it. This becomes more evident the more that we feel. The more the stakes go up, the bigger the pressure within and the bigger the pressure outside.

In other words, when Irina panics that she may not feel enough, she can remember that the more she controls what Juliet does, the more Juliet will feel.

The critical stages in jet flight are take-off and landing because during those minutes the greatest pressure is exerted on the aircraft. The more that we have to win or lose, the more what is inside increases in size, and the more what is outside increases in size. The British House of Commons is deliberately designed with too few seats to accommodate all the MPs at once. This odd economy is to increase the sense of occasion when the house is jammed full for a crucial debate.

The actor never manufactures what the character feels. The character always tries to control what the character feels.

Even when people appear to express intense emotion, what we actually see is not that person expressing feeling but rather their desperate controlling of it. The Arab mother keening over her dead son is controlling and shaping her grief into a ritual form so that it might express itself. The father appealing on television for news of his missing child must control his tears in order to make his plea articulate and heard. The child who jumps in delight to see her soldier father return is controlling her joy in her leap; nothing can perfectly express her wild joy, so she just leaps. It's the best she can do, she feels more, but this gesture will have to do.

The gesture is always smaller than the feeling that precipitates it.

A digression: lying

When we lie, we can get this relationship the wrong way round. Then the inside is smaller than the outside; the content shrinks within its form, like old polish in a tin. Whoops of joy at meeting sound phoney if there is not enough affection to fill them.

When there is a gap between the inner and the outer, when the frame of control is larger than the impulse of feeling, then there is a lie. It may not be a serious lie, but it is a lie all the same. All this of course would be useful if you were acting someone who is lying badly!

At a far more serious level, in time of war, when positions get taken and issues become simplified, it is all too clear that the louder the abuse, the bigger the lie.

Life loathes a void. And there is no life without some pressure. And the same must be true for living feeling. It needs resistance to be seen. Emotion needs to be restrained before it becomes visible. You may forget the train is moving till the driver slams on the brakes.

Phaeton's chariot

Another image can help Irina exploit the conflict between what we do and what we feel. Phaeton, whom we will meet again later, took the reins of his father's chariot and the horses ran out of control. The image for Irina is that the runaway horses are what she feels, and steering is what she does. The more our feelings rise, the more we pull on the reins. Irina knows that although she cannot manufacture what Juliet feels, she can do what Juliet does. Consequently although Irina cannot create the horses, she can pull on the reins. She cannot make the feeling but she can exert the control.

Speed, emphatically, is not the problem for Phaeton; he wants to steer the horses and tries to slow them down. Phaeton wants to bring the horses under control. Only if Phaeton were mad would he whip them on. There would be many ways of playing Phaeton, but none would include his getting out of the chariot to push the horses. Pushing the horses is absurd but that is precisely what Irina does when she pushes on a feeling. Showing emotion is like Phaeton trying to make the horses go faster.

A digression: un-knowing or the need to be stupid

The following ironies often astound us: people who are contained can erupt in violence; inveterate smilers can burst with bizarre rage; the warm can freeze when needed; the unassuming can show extraordinary bravery; the shy have immense egos; the gifted often put their achievements down to mere luck; the self-righteous are often corrupt; the neurotic can be the strongest in a crisis; those who come late hate to be kept waiting; the sentimental are invariably cruel.

Actually these observations are not in the least remarkable. What is highly remarkable is that we claim to be surprised by such contradictions, despite the overwhelming evidence of our experience. We invest immense energy re-persuading ourselves that people are only ever what they appear to be. Each time we hear of a fundamentalist minister embroiled in a corruption scandal how very surprised we are. One of our most extraordinary characteristics is our ability to un-know. We would prefer to be shocked when our real problem is that we are not. Our ability to un-learn the simple fact that we are all a mass of contradictions is truly fascinating. To forget the ambivalence of feeling takes a tremendous effort. It is as if the same enzyme that sluices the waking brain of dreams also purges awkward acquired knowledge.

Freud and Stanislavsky are only two who strove to dig to the unconscious mind with our only shovel: the conscious mind. We may feel the conscious mind finds it hard to reach the unconscious. But that is not the problem. The true obstacle is subtle and treacherous. The disturbing fact is that the conscious mind is the deadly enemy of the unconscious, and would prefer that the unconscious did not exist at all. Our only ally hides a personal interest; the loyal servant is a saboteur within. The conscious mind is so compromised in its relationship with the identity that it may pretend that nothing else exists. '*There was no rustling downstairs. Honestly! There is no one else at home.*' Why else would the awakening consciousness fight to scrape the last scrap of dream from our remembrance each morning?

Perhaps, within, we each conceal a Penelope, who crept downstairs each night to unravel the day's weaving, and keep her tapestry unfinished. Homer's Queen always returned her work safely to the starting point, to 'home', so that she need never commit to her suitors.

But why do we keep ourselves in the dark? Presumably if we admit that others have feelings they do not know, then we too could be feeling things without knowing it. How alarming that we could keep secrets from ourselves – and what secrets might they be? '*No, the whole idea is preposterous!'* Perhaps this explains why we would sooner condemn someone as an outright liar, than see that he believes the lie he peddles. We readily admit that an organisation may be undermined by a saboteur from within. '*Of course, that's simple, that often happens!*' But an unconscious saboteur from within? '*Never! Now you are suddenly confusing me! Now, that sounds far too complicated!*'

Hidden stories

More disturbing than rebaptised emotions is the idea that we conceal hidden stories. Not just spontaneous emotions that we would rather rename and un-feel, but entire narratives, histories and versions of events of which we are entirely unaware. Can there really be an unseen plot within me that derives its power from its very invisibility? Certainly we are fascinated by secret and invisible conspiracies in the outside world. As long as the plot is not located inside us, we feel fine. During the Spanish Civil War, General Mola claimed that five columns were ready to take Madrid – not just the four that were besieging the city, but a fifth column inside, and about which most of Madrid knew nothing. But how awful if we were like Madrid, if we had some invisible saboteur hiding within our heads? We are experts at unknowing, and our dreams suggest we know many worlds we do not wish to see when awake.

It is alarming for normal us to consider what we are quite capable of doing, and merely choose not to. Only the thin film of our choice stands between us and chaos. This knowledge undermines our carefully manicured identities. We do not like to see that we cannot control our 'bad' feelings, like murderousness or envy. We do not like to feel these things at all. But we do. We are not in charge of what we feel. We are

only in charge of what we do.

What practical use is all this for Irina? Irina may feel inadequate beside Juliet in terms of experience. Irina may fear that she cannot truly know what it feels like to risk her entire future, and that such feelings are foreign in their intensity. It is not a foolish fear. Juliet has never done it before either. Juliet plays for immensely high stakes.

Before we became innocent

If Irina fears that she lacks the experience of Juliet's emotional intensity, she should relax. The more likely problem is that somewhere, unconsciously, she knows all too well, and would prefer not to know. Irina will have experienced many huge feelings in her childhood. In fact Freud felt that our dearth of memories from below the age of five proves that we block out our earliest feelings precisely because they are so engulfing and subversive. We do not like to remember the envy and rage of childhood. Perhaps this is why children who kill are hated and feared more than their adult counterparts.

Somewhere we all know everything; the principle may not be true, but it may help the actor overawed by the emotional experience a role demands.

A digression: the imagination police

We cannot act on all our feelings; sometimes we have to say 'no' to the impulses we feel. But this conflict hurts our heads. We hate the pain of conflicting feelings; so inevitably we try to control what we feel. Except we can't. However, it is exhausting to keep saying 'no' to ourselves, so we pretend that we are free of certain awkward feelings. We delude ourselves that certain thoughts and impulses do not exist inside us. Screening what we feel seems to be a by-product of civilisation.

We police our imaginations all the time. Our thoughts and feelings are part of us. Certain feelings and thoughts we learn to hate, and we do not like to hate part of ourselves. But we can always lie, and have a variety of techniques to help us believe that lies are truth. For example, we can rename our feelings, or imagine that it is not ourselves but others who harbour these 'bad' emotions.

The police who organise this repression have special powers: no crime need have been committed. These police can arrest feelings simply because they might possibly lead to a crime, or imprison a thought simply because it might create a breach of the peace. The police give the new prisoners new clothes, a new name, a boring job, mindless entertainment, moral rehabilitation classes, a tiny cell and tranquillisers.

Everything seems so well run that it takes these thoughts and feelings a long time to realise that there will never be a trial. No *habeas corpus* here, just permanent detention without charge. Occasionally frustration overflows and the prisoners riot. We get only the whiff of tear gas and distant gunfire, but the police repress the insurrection with ferocity. They lock the mutinying thoughts in smaller cells, encourage spies and double the sedatives.

When we go to the theatre we expect to see at least a few of these cells given an airing and the inmates slapped awake – it is always useful to remember what we keep under lock and key. At the theatre we see others feeling what we dare not admit we feel. The process of theatre may be a mystery, but it is a process we can in some way supervise, rather like a controlled fire. We can begin and end a performance, rather like lighting and dousing a bonfire. Life's vicissitudes are not always so compliant. We like our homes to be safe, so we need our theatre to seem dangerous.

A digression: censorship

Censored feelings are normally a great problem for the actor. But admitting and accepting that we each carry around the memory of unacknowledged and unowned intensities is useful. It helps the actor to imagine that we each have the potential if not the experience of all feelings. Each of us is capable of

feeling everything. Perhaps each of us has felt everything, sometime, somewhere. Maybe these unbearables merely got renamed. The actors playing the Macbeths need not fret that they do not know how to want to kill. The problem is that somewhere they know only too well.

Concluding doxology

It is no more possible to express emotion than it is to shit through your ear. You can push and push as hard as you like and it will still never come out. The tubes don't connect, that's all.

As we have seen, a common cause of panic is that our inside does not measure up to our outside. But the map is clear and the rule is simple: it is not the inside that is inadequate, but the outside. The outside is always smaller than the inside; the word is always smaller than the feeling. Does this mean that great Shakespeare's text is inadequate to express feelings? Absolutely, and we must investigate why.

16

‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT I’M SAYING’

Words don’t work. Words do not do what they are supposed to do. Measured against our expectations, words are inadequate and even banal. Trying to express in words what we need or feel is like knitting a scarf with tree trunks. We may want to tell the truth, but words lie; they have no option. Feelings and words live in different dimensions, like polar bears and whales. Speech, like any other reaction, always ends in failure. Words can start to do wonderful things only when we realise that they can hardly do anything at all. Of course Shakespeare’s language cannot express the immensity of what Juliet feels. That is precisely why Shakespeare is a genius. Like Chekhov, he clearly sees the distance between what we want to say and the meagre words we have to say it. More specifically they see the impossibility of ever being truly heard.

Although Irina may be intimidated by the sheer scale of the text, she must remember that Juliet’s problem is the precise opposite. Where Irina fears her emotion is too small to support the text, Juliet will feel her emotion is too huge to be constrained within the tiny confines of words. This remains a central and vital distance between actor and character. This is a liberating distance. And we have seen that if Irina tries to get ‘near’ to Juliet by eliminating the differences between them, she may reassure herself in the short term, but will block herself later.

And here is a vital distinction between Irina and Juliet: Irina’s challenge is that her text is too good. Juliet’s problem is that her text is not good enough. The more things matter to us, the more banal all available words seem. We know how hard it is to express our condolence to someone whose partner has died: ‘*I can’t find the words*.’

Words not only give expression. Words also deny expression. And the more that the stakes rise, the more the word tends to strangle the feeling.

‘No! It’s not *that*; it’s *this*’

Irina can work on this practically with another message exercise. In this instance Irina has to explain to Romeo over and over again: *‘No! It’s not that; it’s this! It’s not that; it’s this!*’ etc. Irina needs to remember that the ‘*that*’ always refers to something general, while the ‘*this*’ always refers to something specific. Irina can make the ‘*that*’ clear by a splayed gesture and the ‘*this*’ by a focused one.

It is notoriously hard to describe gesture in words and I will spare you a diagram. However, Irina’s arms could spread helplessly and wide to show Romeo the idiocy of his romantic ramblings on a ‘*that*’, while ‘*this*’ could be a tiny constraining gesture bringing her thumb and forefinger together to indicate that Romeo must think practically. This is just an example, but always the ‘*that*’ and the ‘*this*’ are polar

opposites. The '*that*' is 'bad' to Juliet, the '*this*' is invariably 'better'; the '*that*' is hopelessly general to Juliet, and the '*this*' is always specific and helpful.

The gestures and moves distil the message of *'No! It's not that; it's this!'* into something like: *'It's not your generalised idea, but my highly specific idea that matters.'*

Irina needs to repeat this exercise over and over again and in many different ways, finding as many new '*thats*' and '*thises*' as possible. Again, when the time is ripe the observer shouts: '*Text!*'

More on the message exercise

As we have seen, on the command of '*Text!*', Irina should, without the slightest gap, launch herself into '*my bounty . . .* ' As we have seen, the first few times any message exercise is done, the actor often leaves a 'gap of control' which puts a kind of fire-wall between the energy of the message and the energy of the text. One of the objects of all message exercises is to let the physical energy of the message flow directly into the text. So that the muscles, both anatomical and imaginative, remember the way they moved in the exercise. Irina's body and imagination remember how she shrank by the wall on a '*that*' and how she flew up to his face on a '*this*'. When it comes to the text, the muscles behave in the same register as they did in the exercise and move in similar ways to support the text.

This is only one aspect of this scene, but it is a foundation for many scenes, and also a useful device to clear a saturated head.

The empty head

Block makes the head feel so stuffed that the moment of release often seems like an emptying. Indeed the newly free actor often asks, *'Is that all?'*

After some time playing the message exercise, Irina will lose herself in reaction. This is when Irina forgets herself, empties her head, and stops Irina from thwarting what Irina is trying to do. The actor must forget to obstruct.

For example, the two different elements in '*No! It's not that; it's this*' may initially seem the same to Irina. If Irina smudges each '*that*' and each '*this*', the observer will notice that Irina makes no distinction between these elements. But it is Irina's job to make her Romeo grasp that the '*that*' and the '*this*' are polar opposites. After a while, Irina will start to make a clearer distinction between these two. She will become more and more desperate that Romeo will not or cannot see this essential difference. So that she will feel forced to exaggerate the difference between '*that*' and '*this*'. She will show, illustrate, indicate, explain or prove the huge distance between '*that*' and '*this*' to her partner in the scene.

Getting Romeo to appreciate the difference between '*that*' and '*this*' will matter more and more to Irina as the exercise progresses. For Irina, the scene becomes less about how she sounds, and more about what Romeo hears. Irina's preoccupation with how Irina is coming across will diminish. Irina's energy will increasingly engage in Romeo. Her impulses will originate more in her partner: '*Why can't he understand?!*' The scene becomes less about how Irina expresses Juliet and more about what Romeo can or cannot see or hear or believe.

Irina starts to play as Juliet only when she is free enough to make this transfer. As always, the reaction is only born in the target that Juliet sees. Irina can never transform herself into Juliet, but Irina can react to the world as if she sees it through Juliet's eyes.

As always, the actor needs to see what is at stake for the character and not what is at stake for the actor.

The quality of interruption

The message exercises help only when they have the quality of interruption. Thought is a series of targets. When I think something, I see it as a target. All thoughts are targets. And all thoughts must obey all the

rules of the target.

Thought has a very particular quality for the actor, and that is the quality of interruption. We never have a thought from nowhere. And we always have a thought. A human can never be both conscious and thoughtless. Each thought supersedes an old thought. Every new thought forces us to discard an old thought, a thought which will, in turn, be forced from our attention by an even 'better' thought, jostling itself into position. Thoughts are ambitious and continually elbow each other out of the way – and no two thoughts are ever the same.

Thought and text

Development is unavoidable. We cannot say the same word twice. We cannot have the same thought twice.

'The orchard walls are high and hard to climb.'

Irina cannot give equal weight to *'high'* and *'hard'*. They are different words. So the stimulus for '*high*' must be different from the stimulus for '*hard*'; there must be a development from one to the other.

In the moment of saying '*high*', Juliet may imagine that the word '*hard*', which kicks its way into her view, is 'better' to get what she needs – for example, to get an answer out of Romeo. Similarly:

'*Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny*
What I have spoke. But farewell, compliment.
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say "Ay",
And I will take thy word.'

Here, each time Irina says '*fain*', it must be different. For we can never say the same word twice. Furthermore each thought is not equal to its predecessor. Each thought thinks it is 'better' than its predecessor. Each thought pushes in until it is itself thrown out unceremoniously when it outstays its brief welcome. The targets Juliet sees in Romeo change, and the rest of her thoughts change too.

'Dwell on form' is no longer as useful as the thrillingly simple *'deny what I have spoke'*. Just as Juliet interrupts herself by telling herself to shut up on *'farewell, compliment',* she interrupts herself again with the uncontrolled simplicity of *'Dost thou love me?'* and then interrupts Romeo with *'I know thou wilt say "Ay",'* and again interrupts herself, and any possible remonstrations he may make, with *'And I will take thy word.'*

Interruption does not have to be literal, in the sense that Irina's new words should actually obliterate the previous. But the old thought never resolves itself into a void, and the new thought never emerges after a convenient gap. Before the old thought has time to expire, the new thought is clambering over its body. Irina will be more free if her thought acquires the quality of interruption. This quality comes from letting the thoughts run free, as a target that may come and go whenever the target pleases; the target does not come and go whenever the actor pleases.

The more the text is born in external stimuli, the better. The more the text can be broken down into reactions to different targets, the more Irina will feel free. The more she permits herself to depend on a multitude of tiny, or huge, emphatic or elusive targets, the freer her imagination will run. The more different pulses, the better.

Only the target and the target alone dictates the rhythm, speed and energy of everything that we do.

Rhythm, target and interruption

Rhythm is dependent on the target. Interrupting should never block the target. The actor needs to pay

constant attention to the target. When we interrupt we do not withdraw our attention from everything. When we appear to interrupt, it is in fact a new target that has interrupted us. As a result we shift our attention away from the old target. The new target gets our attention till a 'better' one comes along. When it comes to the target we are incurably faithless. The interruption is because of the new target. When we start to play with seeing and interrupting, it can seem as if we can only do one at a time. But the actor needs to practise both seeing and interrupting. Of course, seeing comes fractionally earlier; we see then we do.

'Interrupt' does not mean 'go fast'

This is the simple and relentless caveat to the above; it can prove oddly difficult to interrupt without going generally faster. Interrupting is about the transition from one thought to the next, and going too fast will cut the actor off from the target. Interrupting has nothing to do with speed. When we start to practise interrupting, it often has this side effect of making us go quicker. If the actor just speeds up in general, the target will be smudged. We do not control our speed. Only the target controls our speed. What we see dictates our rhythm. On the whole our thoughts run quicker than we like, and break records as the stakes climb. Similarly when we are flustered and say we cannot think, this is not strictly true. Our frustration is not that we cannot think at all, but that our imaginations are crammed with every thought other than the thought we need.

'Interrupt' does not mean 'don't listen'

Interrupting does not mean that the actor has to stop listening.

ROMEO
O wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?
JULIET
What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?
ROMEO
Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.
JULIET
I gave thee mine before thou didst request it . . .

But in this rapid exchange how can Irina listen to Romeo, and manage to interrupt him at the same time? How can she possibly start to see the thought and say '*What satisfaction*' before she has actually heard Romeo say the word '*unsatisfied*' first? When her key word is his last word, when she modifies this word into '*satisfaction*', then surely she must hear every syllable of it before she can copy it?

Irina can remember two things: first, we tend to listen more when the stakes rise. Secondly, as the stakes rise, we also begin to sense the other's underlying thought impulses. As the situation becomes more important, we struggle to predict what will happen. As the stakes increase we anticipate more exhaustively what the other will say. Our production of predictions and possibilities goes into overdrive. As the stakes rise, we have more dreams and nightmares about the other's next words.

Imagine a friend has phoned you and gravely asked you to come round . . . immediately. He opens the door, is white as a sheet, and mutters: '*I am very sorry, please come in, close the door behind you and sit down. I have some very bad news.*' And then he pauses to light a cigarette . . .

What happens during that . . . pause? How long does that . . . feel? What can you imagine during that . . . ? How many different scenarios can you predict? How many potential words of his do you dread? You have invented enough to write a novel. This is why we can have the strange sensation of knowing what is about to be said just before we hear it. The words seem to fill a space already prepared for them in our

ears. Does extremity make us clairvoyant? It is more likely that the soaring stakes stimulate the imagination, and the scenarios that we invent multiply. The greater number of possible outcomes we envisage, the more probable it is that at least one of them will be proved correct.

In other words, just before Romeo says *'unsatisfied',* Juliet might be dreading/hoping that the word he is about to come out with will be: elated/lonely/happy/frightened/frustrated/angry/sad/satisfied or unsatisfied, etc. She does not have to hear first the whole word and afterwards take a second to consider her response. Her response can be semi-ready and waiting. Irina has to interrupt as well as listen. It isn't easy, but it's what we do naturally as the stakes rise.

Interruption is inescapable

Even if Irina chooses to leave a long, astonished gap before she enquires: *'What satisfaction . . . '* – she will still end up interrupting anyway. For however long the silence, it can never be thought-free. Any silence will fill with thoughts. Whatever Juliet first says will be the thought that interrupted the thought that interrupted the thought, etc. . . . Every thought is an interruption. Perhaps Juliet decides to take time to compose herself, make a plan and then calmly question Romeo to shame him. Even that calm question will turn out to be different from the one that Juliet had planned.

A corollary is that there is no such thing as a true delay. We may put off doing something, but when we eventually do it, it is different. In other words, everything that Irina can do is born in the moment anyway. It is just better if the unavoidable improvisation of thoughts consists of Juliet seeing a young man who might be mad or bad or dangerous rather than Irina worrying about an audience who might be the same!

Thinking and seeing

When we think, we see our thoughts. A thought is a target. This thing that is seen is then discarded for something different that is seen and is then itself discarded, and so on. When I think, I reject one thought for another; I drop one thing I see for another thing I see. Thought is a process of discarding photographs. I see something and then what do I do? I ditch it for something else.

17

THE IMAGINARY TEXT EXERCISES

1. The pre-text exercise
Like everything else we do, all that we say happens because of something else. All text is a reaction. All text must be a reaction to some originating action that the target is doing already. So for every fragment of text, there will be some preceding, perhaps imaginary words to which the text is a reaction. An example should make this clearer:

'*O be some other name.*
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.'

Irina needs to imagine what Romeo must have been saying that would force her to contradict him. Irina imagines the words that she would need to reverse. She gives him an imaginary script. For example, what could make her say: '*O be some other name . . .*'?

Maybe if he had said something like:

'*I am helpless, I have a famous name, Juliet, I am stuck with this name . . .* '

Then she would have to change him with: '*O be some other name . . .* ' Her words then would be a reaction to this piece of imaginary text. So Irina has to work backwards. She invents what he has been saying. The imaginary pre-text happens before the line she says, and not after. As for example:

ROMEO
But names matter, Juliet . . .
JULIET
What's in a name . . .
ROMEO

A name is everything, Juliet . . .

JULIET

That which we call a rose . . .

ROMEO

But . . .

JULIET

By any other name would smell as sweet; . . .

ROMEO

I don't agree . . . !

JULIET

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd . . .

ROMEO

No Juliet! In time . . .

JULIET

Retain that dear perfection which he owes . . .

ROMEO

But Juliet, I need . . .

JULIET

Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name . . .

ROMEO

Without my name, what would I have left?

JULIET

And for thy name, which is no part of thee, . . .

ROMEO

Juliet, I would have nothing at all . . .

JULIET

Take all myself.

The dots at the end of the line refer to the quality of interruption that is an essential characteristic of thought. All of these pieces of imaginary pre-text give Juliet something that she must change. Of course they are provisional. But they are a helpful way into the scene, for it would be dreadful for Irina if Juliet had nothing to change. Were Juliet perfectly happy with how things were rolling along, then poor Irina! And that is another vital difference between the two women.

In this exercise, all Juliet's text is a reaction to Romeo's text.

All text says 'No!'

But what happens when it seems there is perfect agreement between Juliet and Romeo?

ROMEO

I would I were thy bird.

JULIET

Sweet, so would I.

Juliet seems to be agreeing with Romeo. There seems to be no conflict whatsoever. However, there must be conflict, otherwise there can be no life. Perhaps '*Sweet, so would I*' means:

'No, Romeo! You think you are alone in your feelings, but you are not: I feel the same.'

Or:

'No, Romeo! You think you are the only one who feels metamorphosed by love, you are not.'

Or:

'*No, Romeo! You may love me, but you do not understand that I love you too.*'

In other words, everything that Juliet says to Romeo must have a form similar to the following: '*No! Do not believe that, believe this!'*

2. The after-text exercise

This exercise has very different rules and should not be confused with the pre-text exercise.

Whenever block strikes, the actor remembers the target and the stakes. When block strikes and its particular root seems to spring from the text, a quick way of accessing the stakes is the after-text exercise. Irina can use it as a tool to free her words from the clot of confusing thoughts. The after-text exercise takes the form of a double question demanding a double answer. The actor simply asks '*What would be a good thing for my partner to reply?*' and '*What would be a bad thing?*'

Imagine that Irina has got herself into a tangle over:

'*O be some other name.*'

She has tried long stresses on the '*O*', in fact she has tried every possible intonation on every word but Irina still feels fake and dead. So Irina simply asks: '*What would be a good thing for Romeo to reply?*' and '*What would be a bad thing*?' Well, one good thing for Romeo to reply would be: *'Yes. I'll change my name straight away',* and a bad one: *'I'll never change my name.'*

And Irina replays her text to Romeo, emptying her head of every thought other than that she wants to hear the good thing, and that she doesn't want to hear the bad thing. This process may seem mind-numbingly obvious. This double question may seem like simplified baby-talk but in fact it is a sharp little exercise that cures much invisible confusion. The after-text questions speedily take Irina through Juliet's eyes into the dynamising stakes.

A warning

Irina must never reply with a single answer. The single answer is destructive, however much it may appear to answer both questions. An example of the single reply could be: *'Well, Juliet is now in a situation where she feels that Romeo must renounce his identity . . . '*

The content of the single reply may seem to be the same as the double version but the form is different. Fatally different.

For the single reply offers a global view of the character, which in the short term may reassure Irina that she has taken control of Juliet. But instead the single reply will block her, as it is a fatal answer in 'one'. The answer in 'one' lifts Irina away from seeing through Juliet's eyes and to an apparently safe distance where she can view the character with detachment.

And whenever Irina acts from this position, she will feel her own disengagement. And to compensate, she will push and squeeze and emote, and for all her efforts at resuscitation, her performance will be stone cold dead.

Let's take: '*What's in a name?*'

What is a good thing that Romeo could say after this and what is a bad thing?

Perhaps a good thing he could say is *'You're right, names are nothing! It's all a complete con to keep*

us in check!' and a bad thing he could say is: *'That's a terrible thing to say! My name is my whole culture! How can I renounce my world?'*

Irina can develop Romeo's imagined replies as much as possible as the rehearsal progresses. She can let her imagination soar – for the good thing and bad thing need not even be probable. And there will be many of them. But Irina must never develop the banal questions. In fact she needs to work extra hard to stop the childish questions from becoming sophisticated. It is actually quite difficult to stop the formula developing, for the baby-talk simplicity is irksome. Perhaps it is precisely because the double question of '*What is a good thing that my partner may reply? And what is a bad thing?*' is so exposing, that we find it hard to stick to.

Even to develop the double question into *'What is the best thing that Romeo could say, and what is the worst thing that Romeo could say?'* is slightly dangerous. 'Best' and 'worst' are too extreme. Because neither Irina nor Juliet can never be totally sure of the perfect 'best' and the perfect 'worst'. An example will make this clearer:

'*Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say "Ay",*
And I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swear'st,
Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries,
They say Jove laughs.'

What are the best and worst things that Romeo might say after: '*Dost thou love me?*' Presumably the very best is '*Yes, I do love you.*' And then the very worst is '*No, I don't.*' But it isn't so simple. I imagine many of us have been party to a quarrel in which an element is *'Do you love me? Don't even bother saying yes, because I won't believe you anyway! But do you love me?!*' This is not quite what Juliet is saying here, but it has a taste of it. Because Juliet goes on to say that although '*Ay*' may be what she wants to hear, she still won't fully believe him anyway. So she wants him to swear his love, but at the same time Juliet also does not want Romeo to swear his love. She wants two conflicting things. She doesn't know which she wants to hear.

Indeed, it is as if Juliet has performed her very own after-text exercise and cannot find the one very best thing that Romeo might say. However, she can find a merely good thing that he might say, because she can find other conflicting good things. For example, good things Romeo might reply are:

'Yes, I swear I love you!'

and another good thing might be:

'I won't swear I love you because you probably wouldn't believe me anyway'

and these two 'goods' contradict each other. And this contradiction confuses Juliet, but helps Irina.

On the other hand, bad Romeo replies might be:

'No, I don't love you. I'm just using you as poetry practice for Rosaline.'
'Yes, I do love you! I swear and promise I'm not conning you. I mean, do I look like someone weak who changes his mind a lot? I mean, do I?'

It doesn't matter if these outcomes are either boring or wild. When the stakes soar, many remote possibilities flash through our minds. Irina can always discard them. But 'worst' and 'best' smack of perfectionism. 'Goods' and 'bads' can be disposable and not necessarily serious. Of course as the rehearsal develops, Irina will find more specific questions that give more vital answers. But as long as

Irina keeps to the simple double question formula, she can experiment with out-landish ‘goods’:

‘You need never be frightened or lonely again. Actually, I have just had a meeting with your parents and Tybalt and they think it would be a good political move if we were to meet and get married. In fact they let me in to the orchard themselves.’

and ‘bads’:

‘*It was all a dare! Mercutio bet me I wouldn’t have the guts to make up to Capulet’s daughter. I won my bet, I had you fooled, didn’t I? But I feel pretty bad about it, so I thought I’d drop by to apologise. Paris is a great guy and I’ll always think of you as a sister. Try not to take it personally. Bye now.’*

18

MAKE-BELIEVE

The rhythm of three
Everything that we do fails. Every reaction an actor might play fails. In the exercise, *'No! It's not that; it's this',* Irina is not convincing her partner that *'that'* is very different from *'this'*. She is trying to convince him. She fails to do this, and so she tries again. Even more specifically, Irina tries to change what her partner believes, she fails and then she tries again.

To try to alter the other.
To see it hasn't worked.
To try something else.

These three steps underpin all that an actor says and does.

The impossibility of contentment
Pure contentment cannot exist, because we will always want something, even if it is only our next meal or our next breath. There is always something to be lost or won; there is always something at stake.

However, the state of being either lost or won does not exist. The moment something is either lost or won, there is always a new something, something different, to be either lost or won. This is tiring news for real life, but good news in acting. There are no plateaus. We cannot inhabit a fixed state; in fact, there is no achievable state of anything for us. There is neither a state of successful achievement nor of perfect disaster. The hoped-for result is never a state of immaculate achieved contentment. Nor does the dreaded outcome ever resolve itself into pure despair.

Even when what we do appears totally successful, we still fail.

Playing for despair
We despair when there is no hope left. We despair when there is nothing more at stake. There can be nothing at stake when we try to depict a state. So if Irina decides that her job in the balcony scene is to depict Juliet's joy at her love for Romeo, then however much she may smile or breathe ecstatically, she will be playing for despair. For there can be no outcome in the depiction of a state.

'Playing for despair' is a major and frequent source of block. 'Playing for despair' happens whenever the actor forgets that there is a double outcome to every moment of stage life. You play for despair whenever you try to portray an emotional state.

The indication of any emotion is always rooted in despair. That is why it does not work.

The impossibility of despair

It is useful for the actor to remember that pure despair does not, has never, and will never, exist. Even the suicide hopes for death. 'Hope' and 'despair' sound like words that reflect each other, concepts that must always come together, like night and day. But only one of them exists, and the one that exists, hope, is permanently present, in every situation. Hope exists as much as we do, and independently of our wills. We can try to lock out the visits of hope, but it seeps round the thickest doors. Hope is often cruel.

Pure despair is not possible. That is why, theologically, it is the only sin without forgiveness. All sins are forgivable; pure despair is the only unforgivable sin, because it cannot exist. Despair is only a technical possibility, like zero or infinity.

The paradox of loss and rebirth

So the actor has a strange and helpful paradox. All we do fails but there is no such thing as despair. The triple step '*We try, we fail, we try something else*' is crucial. We cannot do the same thing twice. You cannot play the same reaction twice any more than you can swim in the same river twice. The human condition is one of living with permanent loss and permanent rebirth.

It is our life's work to keep up with reality, for the target cannot stand still.

The triple step of '*I try, I fail, I try something else*' underpins the scene for Irina. Juliet sees a Romeo she wants to change. To possess someone is to try to change them, to marry someone is to try to change them, to see someone is to try to change them. When we listen to people, we are changing them all the time. We are changing them from the person who is unheard into the person who is heard.

Changing belief

Anyone who has sweated hours with a fight director knows that the golden rule is: *'Keep eye contact!'* The fight director knows that the combat is as much in the intention as in the blows. Similarly the coach knows that the gymnast needs motivation as much as muscle. The coach must boost the confidence and determination of the athlete. In fact during the training session the coach puts most energy into changing the belief of the gymnast; and later, during the competition, the gymnast puts most energy into changing his own belief. The athlete will learn that his greatest problem is not just his strength, but what he believes about his strength: *'I can go faster! Yes, I can, I really can! Steady . . . If I can just . . . '*

Make-believe

Make-believe is an interesting expression. It usually refers to the fabrication of a never-never land. But it could also refer to brainwashing. A human being is a 'make-believer', or more precisely, a 'belief-changer'. Humans are permanently altering belief, either other people's, or their own.

Indeed, Irina can work on every word of Juliet's text by using the following simple message:

'*No! Don't believe that, believe this*.'

Again '*that*' is more general and '*this*' is more specific.

How can the notion of make-believe help Irina practically? How can the exercise save her from emoting? Let's take the line:

'*Deny thy father and refuse thy name*'

The exercise can help Irina to refine what she is doing from:

1. To tell Romeo to deny his father into:
2. To get Romeo to believe that he ought to deny his father.

The first is simple; the second seems more complicated.
The first seems to make Irina's job simpler than the second.
The second makes Juliet try harder.
The second forces Juliet to be more specific.
The second may seem very complicated and difficult, but then the balcony scene is very complicated and difficult for Juliet.
The easier Irina makes the balcony scene for Juliet, the harder she makes it for Irina.
Whatever we do, we are trying to change the target, and a surprising amount of what we do is an attempt to alter belief. In particular, all text is an attempt to alter belief.

Another example
What about earlier, when Juliet says: '*a rose by any other name would smell as sweet*'? What belief could Juliet possibly be trying to change here? Amongst other things perhaps Juliet is trying to make an imaginary Romeo believe that changing his name would not change him. Or, to be long-winded but more useful, seeing a Romeo who needs to be convinced that names don't count.
Effectively, our beliefs are external to us; they behave like other targets and must obey all the rules. We are permanently attentive to our own states of belief. Do these structures work only for active moments, like a fight or a seduction? How about more reflective moments, when someone is musing? If Juliet ponders the moon, for example?

Passivity does not exist
This statement has an intriguing capacity to enrage, but it does not need to be true, merely useful. A human being cannot do nothing. A human being is never inactive. Even when we sleep, our heart, lungs and central nervous system work hard to keep us alive, and when the slumbering brain flickers, it sends us dreams. Scientifically speaking, dreams always come from inside ourselves. But our rapid eye movements betray that what we fabricate is projected out – we still have to see our dreams unfolding outside us. Even our dreams are composed of targets. Strange shifting targets with a stranger logic, but targets all the same. Furthermore, when we dream, we are scriptwriter, actor, stage-manager, lighting technician, director, editor, audience and censor . . . quite an active little bunch.
But many things we do may seem to be entirely passive, for example: to receive something, to yield to something, to take something, to suffer something, to witness something, to undergo something, to regret something, to comply with something, to obey something, to recoil from something, to ignore something. But if we examine each of these in any given specific situation we will find that there is invariably an active element. Although it may be tiny, this active element is all that the actor can actually play.
Human beings are always trying to get what they want. Even at our most altruistic moments this remains true. The problem is that sometimes we do not want to see ourselves as 'getting what we want'. Self-interest can seem ugly and so we may perform as if we are passive. For this particular performance we reserve the best seat for number one. Outing the passive can have spectacular consequences. But most of us some of the time, and some of us most of the time, and none of us none of the time, conceal our wantingness behind a blanket of passivity. If we did not have this capacity, society would be impossible, as there would be permanent manifest conflict. There remains of course permanent hidden conflict.

Playing passive
How then can the actor play someone who appears passive? Let's take Gertrude. Perhaps the actor sees

Hamlet's mother as Shakespeare's attempt to stage a great withdrawer. But the actor still needs to do a lot of invisible work on what Gertrude really wants. Quiet? Peace? The happiness of her son? A secure kingdom? A contented husband? Two men fighting over her? The actor needs to consider and then perhaps forget what Gertrude really wants. For Gertrude may well neither know, nor wish to know, what she really wants. We do not let ourselves see everything. We may want to be happy in a certain way, which we normally see; but at the same time, we may also want to be unhappy in a certain way, which we rarely want to see.

It is often hard to work out what we really want, and therefore hard to work out what our characters really want. As a general rule, however, we do exactly what we like within the constraints of the given circumstances.

When Romeo murders Tybalt, he is caught in a deep conflict between the old family vendetta, his sudden love for Capulet's daughter, his desire to be new, his desire to stay the same, and a choice between Mercutio and Juliet, between family and freedom. He may only realise this later in the wisdom of hindsight. We have had hundreds of years to reflect on what Romeo decides in a split second. But even within the constraints of the given circumstances: hot blood, hotter afternoon, panic, incomplete information, the rush of fear and all the adrenalin of rage, guilt and grief – even within all these constraints, Romeo still makes a choice.

Deeds and words

Deeds count more than words. We learn more about people from what they do than from what they say. So it is a good rule that when a character's words and deeds contradict, the deeds should be given precedence. Therefore, during the invisible work give far more importance to what the character actually does than to what the character says – particularly if these two conflict.

We have come back to character. We have come back to emotion, text, reaction and space. There are many legs but only one spider. We are trying to find the spider. The legs cannot be discussed independently. All move in unison, or else the spider falls over. However, if we leave this strange spider just one leg, it can still regenerate the other seven.

19

‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT I’M PLAYING’

The eighth and last of the spider’s legs is particularly treacherous because it sounds so professional. Irina wants to know what she is playing, and why not? It may seem a basic prerequisite for Irina to know exactly what she is playing. But does Juliet know what she is playing?

If you asked Juliet what she was playing, she would look quite blank. Juliet will not think in terms of playing anything at all. But Juliet will know she has to deal with an extraordinary set of circumstances: a whole host of thoughts, feelings, deeds and potential outcomes fight for her attention. Juliet must find out what is happening, discover what she is feeling, she must try to see who and what Romeo is, she must work out how to survive, she must work out what she needs, what she must prevent, she must determine what is to be lost and what is to be won. One thing is sure, Juliet will try to do many of these things, but she will perfectly achieve none of them.

Like the rest of the spider legs, ‘What I am playing’ must come from the target and not from ‘me’. But, when I try to know in advance what I am playing, I inadvertently reverse this and hitch the cart in front of the horse. In fact, if I can predict what I am playing it must imply that:

The target is somehow still.
I know what the target is.
I know how the target will react.
I come before the target.
I control the target, and not the other way round.
. . . quite a few assumptions.

To know what I must play in advance is a rehearsal-room luxury denied us in real life. The UXB expert does not choose between defusing the bomb and wanting to live. In fact even these choices evaporate in the concrete minutiae of: ‘*Does this wire connect here, or not? Is this off switch a bluff, or not? Can I squint enough to keep the sun out of my eyes and still avoid the fuse, or not?*’

Flux

Everything moves and changes whether we like it or not. However, we mistrust the independence of the outer world. The target has a habit of doing what it likes, and we don’t like that very much. We cannot change this law of flux, but we can deny this unpopular aspect of reality. We may fantasise that the world is still, when it is not. We can choose how we interpret what we see, so we can pretend the world doesn’t change. This mechanism may be unconscious, but it motors us whenever we ask what we are playing –

without reference to the target.

Knowing and playing

The problem with knowing what you are playing is that often it doesn't work. We can know what we are playing till we are blue in the face, and still feel dead. The difficulty is that the real world rarely lets us do or 'play' exactly what we want. Life is one long improvisation. Juliet can plan and plan what she wants to play, but plans never quite work because all plans are ultimately dependent on the outside world. And reality is full of surprises.

We must all have suffered from the collapse of the prepared speech: '*Oh yes! I'm going to tell him exactly what I think of him. I have the full list here. I'll begin by saying x, and then I'll go on to y, and finish him off with z.*' And when the time comes, you march into his office, fix him in the eye, and surprisingly but inevitably, '*It wasn't at all how I expected it would be!*'

It is not so much how you feel inside that is different. Both he and the room look completely different. It is in the specific and concrete targets that the ghastly metamorphosis seems to have taken place. The office is different. His voice is different. His face is different. Your thoughts are different. Your words all seem hideously different. The rehearsed speech vanishes, and only a few tattered phrases get blown about. '*It just wasn't like I expected it to be at all!*' But the more the stakes go up, the less things turn out as anticipated. This surprise that reality is other than expected is weirdly tenacious.

Target-free hell

'I don't know what I'm playing' has the same structure as the other seven spider legs. The expression endangers the actor by erasing the actor's only source of energy. Again one 'know' and two 'I's. Our precious attention spills once more down the double drain of identity and control.

Playing may seem like a target-free verb. It has a ring of self-absorption. That is until we actually look at a child playing. The child is absorbed not inwardly but in the bucket and sand. Even when absent, distracted or paranoid we are still rearranging events in our fantasies, we are always on a target. 'Playing' can only ever exist in a context. The idea that I could know 'what I am playing' irrespective of who or what I am trying to change is plausible rubbish. Trying to know what I am

We can never know what we are playing until we know who or what we are playing to. We can do nothing at all out of a context.

Only a fantasy is controllable.

Rules

It is sad when an actor says: *'But if she plays that, then I can't play this.'* The answer is: *'Yes, you're right, but can't you play something new that you haven't planned, something that arises from this new event?'*

Of course it is only easy to do this when the working relationship is good. Sometimes such openness can be intimidating. Freedom corrupted is anarchy.

If the actor is worried by sudden big changes on stage it will cause fear and blindness. Every performance needs rules; otherwise independence will stifle freedom. The actor needs to feel sure of certain parameters in order to be free to see. For example, Irina will of course need to know in advance where her balcony is, but she does not need to know exactly where Romeo will come from. She may need to know exactly where he will be standing at certain given moments, or she may not. However, if Irina plans precisely how she will play each and every line then she will probably block herself. Certainly if she wants to know what Romeo is going to play on each line then she will block herself – such towering

structures must collapse and suffocate her.

Irina should give herself rules, but not too many. There should be only enough rules to empower all the actors to see something new in the moment. This takes not only trust, but also a lot of practical application. Sensible rehearsal decides what can be changed and what cannot be changed. It is prudent to fix in advance what must be predictable and what must remain unpredictable.

Total freedom is a wonderful ideal but we do not live in an ideal world. Indeed if everything is unpredictable, we may become afraid, and when we are afraid, we rely on things that are familiar, however useless they may be. This may explain the irony that excessively unstructured performances seem so predictable. There must be some structure, but we have to keep a cool eye on it, because excessive structure will also make a performance seem dead. Polar opposites can look very similar – no structure and too much structure can amount to the same thing. The anarchist and the reactionary have more in common than either would care to admit.

The big question is '*How much structure do I need?*' And the answer is that there is no absolute answer. We must judge for ourselves and accept that some days we trust more than others. Trust cannot be manufactured.

We can no more force ourselves to trust than to be present, or to forgive. Forcing aggravates all block, so it is destructive to insist: '*Be open!*' or '*Be present!*' or '*Trust!*' Somewhere we have to see that trust is like grace. We cannot demand these gifts, but they are freely given. Our choice is to refuse them, which we do much of the time.

Above all, the atmosphere of the rehearsal must be safe, so that the performance may seem dangerous. If the atmosphere of the rehearsal has been dangerous, then the resulting performance will seem tediously safe. We all lose with Fear.

Structure and control

Say Irina decides that Juliet is trying to defend herself against Romeo's advances. She may have given herself a target, but this still gives Irina only one thing to play – there is no inherent development.

Let Irina think less about what she is playing, and see more how the target shifts. For example, at the beginning of the scene Irina may see a Romeo she must get to leave the orchard and by the end of the scene she may see a Romeo who must stay. Perhaps Juliet starts by seeing a potential rapist and ends up seeing a son who must be mothered. Perhaps she begins by seeing a Romeo who is bright, strong and deep, and ends the scene less sure, or vice versa.

We can have a lot of ideas in rehearsal, some better than others. But the advantage of the above ideas is that at least they take the form of paths. They give Irina a journey from the beginning of the scene till the end, and a journey takes us from seeing one thing to seeing another. Through rehearsal and performance Irina will discard these voyages for others that live more, but they are at least voyages and not states. For if the scene does not develop, it is not a scene at all. Though Godot never arrives, Vladimir and Estragon still develop. And even Godot develops – from their point of view.

Development is unavoidable and stasis cannot exist: even stagnant water teems with microactivity.

A digression: the death of structure

Structure is dead theory, but, like every institution, it envies us and wants to live. Every structure has the inherent tendency to choke the life that created it, like a delinquent robot. Structure has a bad memory and always forgets that it is provisional. Aping us that live, it also wants to be needed, but structure is as dead as a bandage, and its contract as temporary.

Structures like those for Juliet above may be used to underpin the rehearsal. But the acting will be more

liberated, if, with trust, these structures are gradually dismantled. If bit by bit these decisions are digested into the stakes that Juliet sees, then Irina will start to see in her partner and all the other externals, a shifting, ambivalent and highly specific set of targets. A set of targets that propel, impel and compel Irina into free and vital performance.

Accepting ignorance

Even Juliet cannot fully define what Juliet is 'playing'. Because whatever we think we are doing, we are always doing something else as well. Not only can we never fully know all the reasons why we do something, but also we can never be certain of the full meaning of what we do. A word is largely out of control, but we use words readily. If we paused to think of all the possible meanings of what we say, we would never say anything.

I may use a word and expect it to mean one thing, and in fact the hearer believes I mean something else. That is obvious. What is less obvious is that I may use a word and remain unaware that I mean something else by it as well.

So it is clear that much of what Juliet says is not fully understood by Romeo. But Juliet will not understand all that Juliet says either. And this apparent complication is of great use to Irina. For at times of stress we can speak better than we know. Like the road accident that summons us into presence, the soaring stakes can spontaneously release vocabulary, imagery, ideas and feelings that we never knew we had. As we have seen, the cosmic immensity of Juliet's '*boundless sea*' will astonish Romeo. But it may also surprise Juliet.

We cannot see the full significance of what we say or do. Many things about ourselves we can never know. Nor can we ever know for certain all the consequences of what we do. Nor can we ever be absolutely sure of the story we are telling, because what appears to be a single story is always many stories. To be truly responsible we have to admit of our ignorance.

Even when perfectly tied to the target, a rigid plan of '*What am I playing?*' is best thrown away. Otherwise it might delude us that we fully know what we are doing or that we know what Time holds in store.

20

TIME

Nature shifts by itself and Time is indestructible.

Time is out of our control. It is the actor's friend because it powers the third rule that the target exists before you need it. Time works for Irina.

Time plays many tricks: Time is not just a wise old man with a scythe, Time is also the Joker, who brings in his revenges with the broadest of grins.

The rule of Time

As the stakes increase, so the time available appears to decrease. In other words the more there is to be lost or won, the less time there seems to be.

The actor in the invisible work should always have enough time. The character in the visible work should never have enough time. The actor needs to keep a firm wall between these two rhythms. The patient actor takes time with the invisible work, but the galloping stakes whip the reins of Time from the character's hands. The character is always trying and failing to keep up with the situation. Even Winnie, buried in sand in *Happy Days*, can barely keep up with the thoughts that hurtle through her mind; her limbs are stuck, but her imagination tears free. The story her limbs tell pales beside the dazzling sequences of memories and discoveries that she sees. Hamlet may appear motionless on the stage. But the story he tells us hurtles on, his eyes full of desperate outcomes as the future strafes him like a warplane:

'To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub.'

But let us investigate a sequence where Juliet seems to suffer from too much time:

'*Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,*
Towards Phoebus' lodging. Such a waggoner
As Phaeton would whip you to the west
And bring in cloudy night immediately.
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
That runaways' eyes may wink, and Romeo
Leap to these arms untalk'd-of and unseen.
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties; or, if love be blind,

It best agrees with night. Come, civil night
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match
Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle, till strange love grown bold,
Think true love acted simple modesty.
Come night, come Romeo, come thou day in night,
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back.
Come gentle night, come loving black-brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo; and when I shall die
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.
O, I have bought the mansion of a love
But not possess'd it, and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd. So tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child that hath new robes
And may not wear them. O, here comes my Nurse . . .'

Is this an exception? Surely here the character has too much time? The situation seems clear: Juliet is impatient. But let's go back to basics. We now know that any adjective is utterly useless for Irina. So trying to be impatient will block Irina. What then is Irina playing? Passion? Frustration? No, emotions, like adjectives, cannot be played, for they are expressed without targets.

It will release Irina more to ask: '*What do I stand to lose and win at this specific moment?*' To see what Juliet may win or lose, Irina prises open the targets to glimpse some of their duality. So what could Juliet see first? Let Irina examine the specific detail of the text:

'*Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,*
Towards Phoebus' lodging.'

So Juliet must be addressing the '*fiery-footed steeds*'. Juliet scolds these horses of the sun. What is a bad thing they can do and a good thing they can do? Perhaps '*Will you hurry up, finish your job and end the day? Or will you, horses, go on dawdling and keep me from Romeo?*'

Juliet wants night to come, and an image tumbles conveniently into view. Any image? Phoebus is the sun god who drives his chariot across the sky from east to west where he sleeps and thus causes night. She wants the day to end and so begs the horses to hurry. Fair enough. But Juliet mentions not only Phoebus, the only 'waggoner' who had the right to drive the horses of the sun. And that other person is his son Phaeton who seized control of his father's sun-chariot one fateful dawn the earth will never forget. For against his father's wishes, Phaeton insisted on steering the sun-chariot himself. But he was inexperienced, the horses bolted, tumbled from the sky, and the fireball scorched vast tracts of the planet. Phaeton himself was killed and the ecological catastrophe burned forests into deserts, which would never again bear fruit. It is highly unlikely that Juliet remembers every nuance and resonance of her image before she utters it. It tumbles out as a slip. For not only has the chariot careered out of control, so also

has Juliet's image. By chance she conjures another disobeying child who was destroyed by rashness.

'But why say this now exactly?' is often a shrewd question. Why does Juliet mention Phaeton now? His chaotic, accidental suicide implies that somewhere Juliet suspects her night of love with Romeo is still *'too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden'*. Perhaps Juliet knows she is also careering hectically towards chaos, death and sterility. And she wants not to see these things. She is tired of knowing and seeing things that hurt her head. She wants to un-know and un-see. Juliet wants to sleep with Romeo and to hell with the consequences.

Juliet, like many characters in Shakespeare, talks too much for her own good. Dashing Phaeton was supposed to cheer her up but, as an image, he turned out to be a disaster; anything more depressing and coincidental for Juliet than Phaeton's fiery fall would be hard to find. Before her resolve can weaken, Juliet drops Phaeton fast, and turns to that cosy aunt, Night.

Night should be far safer; Night is sober-suited and thoroughly respectable. Older and wiser, Night wouldn't do anything impulsive and destructive. Night wouldn't do anything horrible, or would she? Night will keep my imagination calm and cool and safe, won't she?

To begin with, Night is pleasantly vague, or 'cloudy'. But when Night arrives she turns up in a more definite colour – black. Juliet mentions this twice. So who is Night mourning? Juliet tries to lighten the unfortunate reference and bring in shining, living Romeo:

'Come night, come Romeo, come thou day in night,
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back.'

Romeo sprawls on the wings of Night, not as warm flesh but as refrigerated snow. If Romeo is white, he is naked. If Romeo is white, he is a corpse. Sex doesn't come alone; Death turns up too, and makes a grim threesome between the sheets. Even Matron Night has metamorphosed; now she beats around as the raven, the harbinger of evil, who will croak himself hoarse for Lady Macbeth.

Juliet may appear to have time to kill, but Time takes its revenge. Time is in control and not Juliet. However much time Juliet may have to kill, high stakes always chase the imagination. Juliet may think she is digging up one image after another to fill the boring hours. But the more time she has to think, the more she understands the danger of her situation and the more her resolve weakens. And the more her resolve weakens, the more time she needs to strengthen her resolve. She runs out of time trying to find new images to plug her leaking self-confidence.

Images are targets: they live independently of us. So all images, from dazzling Phaeton, to dowdy Night in mourning black, take on a life of their own. Like it or not, Juliet has to deal with the ambivalence of the images she has released. Are they on her side or not? Juliet thought she could control the Phaeton image. However, the remembered image did not come alone. The Phaeton story, like all stories, is ambivalent. It can mean many things. The images once released are independent, like words we regret having used. Here, however much Juliet stresses her longing for sex, love and life, her images also imply chaos, destruction and death.

Description never happens

'Come gentle night, come loving black-brow'd night'

'*Gentle*', '*loving*' and '*black-brow'd*' are all descriptions. But a useful principle for the actor is that there is no such thing as a description. Pure description simply doesn't exist. What may claim to be a passive description is in fact always an active attempt to change a perception. So Juliet appears to be describing

how Night is. Night has three qualities, Juliet asserts. Night is gentle, loving and black-browed. So how can these be an attempt to change a perception? As always, Irina needs to find a target. Presumably, Night herself. So what change is Juliet trying to make in Night? Is she saying: '*I know you are black-browed, but can you also try to be gentle and loving too, please?*' For Juliet is not at all sure how Night will behave. What is at stake for Juliet, then, must be either that Night will be gentle or that Night will be ferocious . . . that Night will be loving . . . or the reverse. What could Night be about to say or do that she needs to be appeased and propitiated as being gentle and loving?

Then Juliet makes a slip in pleading:

'Give me my Romeo; and when I shall die
Take him and cut him out in little stars'

It would have made more sense to say '*When I die, take me and cut me out*', or '*When he dies take him and cut him out*', but Juliet is confused between where she ends and where Romeo begins. She says: '*When **I** die, take **him** and cut **him** out.*' He will metamorphose on her death, which breaks the rhythm of the Ovid stories she knows so well. Juliet can't quite lock death out of tonight's festivities. She wants Romeo to come not only to make love to him but also to distract her from complex, darkening thoughts. If he doesn't come soon they will engulf her. She fights her own imaginings by arguing that she only wants one simple thing: to consummate her love for Romeo. Juliet tries to simplify the situation, to blind herself to the ambivalence of what is really happening.

' . . . though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd. So tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child that hath new robes
And may not wear them.'

The bravado of her desire does not quite match the tender and nostalgic image of the child. Perhaps Juliet also sees *'the future in the instant'* and already regrets the passing of her innocence. She is fourteen and impatient for new and adult clothes. Sinister old Night creeps once more into her imagery and shows her a wide-awake child, alone in the dark, unable to sleep.

Juliet talks about the stakes

' . . . learn me how to lose a winning match
Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.'

The '*winning match*' directly refers to the stakes. Not just one maidenhood, but two, her own and Romeo's (is her assumption about Romeo a rare attack of naïveté?). So the prize, the best possible outcome, is that someone will win two 'stainless' virginities. But if there is so much to be won, what then could be lost? Juliet, we notice, only mentions what is to be won. Winning is the only possibility. So although it is a match, losing is impossible, because she implies that she wants to lose. So for Juliet to lose her virginity is also to win? She is trying to do something in a 'one'. Juliet thinks she can only play a match that wins. But there are no win/win situations. The other side that the actor knows very well, the '*or not*', is cut out. What she stands to lose is quickly slammed in the dark with Phaeton. Juliet argues with all the confidence of a doubter.

She may have begun the speech begging the horses to '*gallop apace*' as if resolved and bored with waiting, but this is not all she feels and sees and needs.

Juliet is not only passing the time, praying for Romeo to get there soon. Time is breeding dreadful pictures. Juliet must run to outstrip and rein in each of these subversive images before they escape. And Juliet does not have enough time to scoop them all up. Juliet needs more time.

Shakespeare's brilliant words make it clear that Time incites Juliet's thoughts to mutiny and escape and she has to race to catch them and lock them up. Of course Juliet does want to make love to Romeo, but it is equally true that she does not. Juliet may only speak of her desire, but her fear is also implicit.

A dreadful rewrite

But what would happen if Irina did not have the brilliant matrix of Shakespeare's imagery to lead her to the hidden side of Juliet? What if Irina were acting in a rewritten version of Shakespeare's play with all the darkness censored? Irina would still be able to guess the existence of Juliet's hidden feelings. Even if the script were rewritten and poor Irina had to say

'I want to sleep with him. I want to sleep with him.
I want to sleep with him. I want to sleep with him',

Irina could still infer the opposing side. For the more we stress something, the more we imply its co-existing opposite. Even this banal text must be a reaction. It must imply somewhere that also: '*I don't want to sleep with him. I don't want to sleep with him. I don't want to sleep with him.*'

Juliet wants opposites. As Zerlina sings to Don Giovanni: *'Vorrei e non vorrei!'* or *'I want to, and don't want to!'* Conflicting emotions tear Juliet; she does not feel only one thing at once.

A digression: Time and change

Juliet is never satisfied with Time. Sometimes she thinks she wants it to speed up . . . *'Gallop apace . . . '* sometimes she wants it to stop . . . *'Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day. It was the nightingale and not the lark . . . '* It is useful for Irina that Time never seems to be Juliet's friend. But Irina needs to see that if she does not obey Time, Irina too will become Time's victim. Irina acknowledges the mastery of Time by refusing to let Fear escort her to the past and future. Juliet's Fear, on the other hand, often drags her in both these directions.

Time is the actor's friend but the character's enemy; it is as well to accept this even in the briefest rehearsal. The present shakes us awake. When a road accident summons us into presence, time appears to slow down. But when depression tightens its grip, Time seems to stand still. Time dies. This is only a delusion; Time cannot stop. For us, time will never die.

Irina needs to make friends with Time. Time is an immense wave that can be surfed, or ignored at peril.

The more we can accept the mastery of Time and resolve to live exclusively in the present, the less we block ourselves. However, the more we declare our independence of Time and shelter in the past or the future, the more we become blocked. And we remain frozen until the moment we decide to obey the command of Time and admit that we only exist in the now.

21

THREE MORE UNCOMFORTABLE CHOICES

There remain three more uncomfortable choices for Irina.

The fifth uncomfortable choice:
creativity or curiosity
Renouncing creativity seems heresy to the artist. However, trying to be creative is disastrous. Being consciously creative is closely related to concentrating. Curiosity is more liberating; curiosity is connected to attention and the target. Trying to be creative has a nasty habit of sending us home.

Of course all human beings are creative, but our creativity is a symptom and not a cause. We do not control our own creativity, any more than we can control our feelings. We can, however, control what we do.

The sixth uncomfortable choice:
originality or uniqueness
Originality is another quality that we believe we can control. However, originality is not a cause of life; it is only one of life's many symptoms. In a way, our creativity and originality are none of our business. Irina is unique. Irina is irreplaceable. Nobody can play Juliet like Irina, because nobody can see quite like Irina. When Irina sees through Juliet's eyes it will be a unique pair of Juliet's eyes. Every actor who plays Juliet will see through a different pair of eyes, because each actor is a different and unique human being. Moreover, each time that Irina performs her role, so Juliet will also be slightly different. We can each see an infinity of different things; and these infinities are infinitely different. One look up on a clear night makes such numbers seem less preposterous.

On the other hand, if Irina tries to create an original Juliet, a Juliet who tries to break with tradition, she will block herself. Trying to create something original is doomed to failure. For whenever we try to be original, we end up looking exactly like everyone else who is trying to be original. We produce work that is born dead and decomposing things look increasingly similar.

Whenever we try to be original it is evidence that we have lost confidence in our uniqueness. We may fear our uniqueness might not be there when we need it, or, what is more sinister, we fear that what is different about us may actually be inferior. Particularly when young, uniformity can seem reassuring. But uniformity is impossible. Uniformity is only an ideal, always a dangerous one. But it shouldn't frighten us too much as it has never actually existed. Like attention or presence, uniqueness is given to us, it has to be accepted and is out of our control. Like anything else out of our control, we suspect uniqueness simply

because it just might let us down. So we invent an imaginary substitute, a synthetic dummy, which will be our personal creature. Hello originality, goodbye uniqueness.

If Irina sees her targets specifically, openly, and accepts that whatever she sees has a potential to go well or badly, then she will reveal a Juliet who is utterly unique. However, if Irina decides to create an original Juliet, she will create something that cannot breathe; and, as said before, all dead things start to look the same. True conformity starts only when we rot.

Consequently, any pressure put on Irina to create something 'new' is catastrophic. The more we strive to be original, the more we obliterate our inherent uniqueness. The more we try to be 'new', the more repetitive and reactionary we become. We are new. We cannot be otherwise. We have no business trying to be anything. We can be nothing at all by an effort of will. Creation renews us and our surroundings every second of every day whether we like it or not. Newness happens to us without our permission.

Although we are out of control, we like to give ourselves the illusion of control; and so we attempt to ape creation. We also are going to make things new. Our vanity is not born of arrogance, but of fear.

I have seen it all before

If Irina hears *'I have seen it all before!',* she should consider less the criticism, and more the critic. *'I have seen it all before!'* exposes the observer, not the observed. When the 'I' no longer sees well, everything does indeed end up seeming uniform. Sometimes everything else does start to look alike, but it is not the fault of everything else. The more we die inside, the more we see death outside; and death, the specific-hater, always homogenises.

The problem does not lie in the outside world, which could never achieve homogeneity even if it wanted to. The problem lies in our control, in what we will and will not let ourselves see. If ever we start to feel that we have 'seen it all before' we should try to sneak up and catch ourselves unawares. Then we will see that the problem is not in the outside world, but originates from inside ourselves; we are losing our curiosity. Lack of curiosity is a symptom of a secret suicide; the only forensic evidence is not an empty pill-bottle, but a persistent drive to find something new.

Everything that lives is always new. Human beings depend on that newness. We are an intrinsic and irreplaceable part of endlessly renewing creation. The new already is, we cannot create it.

If Irina feels she has to serve up something new to the director or to the audience or to her colleagues or to herself, then she will manufacture a dead performance. Ironically, this still-born performance will seem strangely familiar to everyone, including Irina. If Irina sees through Juliet's eyes what Juliet must see, then Irina's own concealable but indestructible uniqueness will illuminate every corner of her performance. Whatever Irina sees is new. Whatever Irina tries to make new is as old as death itself.

The seventh uncomfortable choice:
excitement or life

If Irina panics that her performance is dead, then she must go back to the target. The target is the source of all her energy. It is fatal if Irina tries to excite herself into life.

We have imaginations to connect us with the outside world. When we fear our dependence on unpredictable creation, we use excitement to impersonate life. Life happens, and we are part of it. Life happens to us when it wants to. However, we do not like life as much as we suppose, because it could drop us at any moment. So again we invent a more obedient substitute.

And we manufacture excitement. Excitement is something we can do to ourselves. We can provide for ourselves. We don't need to depend on anyone or anything to give it to us. Excitement is a medicine we prescribe for ourselves. Sometimes, however, life is exciting. When Irina sees something utterly alive in rehearsal or performance, she will flush with life and the effect will be thrilling. But as we know, if she

tries to revisit that state the next day, it will have vanished. Because what happened was never a state, it was a relationship, a direction. All states die; and they rot fast.

If Irina feels she has to make an exciting choice, she will invariably block herself. The search for the new and exciting severs our connection to life. The scramble seems to be about the outside world, as we rip through experience, frantic to grab that elusive high. However, this scramble tries to find in the outside world what we fear we lack within. The scramble for the new and exciting has secret links to the mafia of self-dislike.

This tear through sensation produces one strange effect. All at once we start to resemble everyone else on the same stampede; our uniqueness gets trampled beneath the sightless hooves. We are different and unique in our enthusiasms and generosities; but we all toe a strict party line when we complain that: '*I have seen it all before*.' The hunt for the exciting and the new makes reactionaries of us all. Seeing things is life enough.

A digression: spontaneity

The performance that seems unspontaneous seems dead; even the Noh master must in some way seem spontaneous. 'Spontaneous', however, is not the key word; the key word is 'seems'. Being present may be crucial for the actor, but to know total presence may well be an unachievable ideal. Presence is one of the many gifts we can neither manufacture nor earn. Pushkin's Salieri raged that Mozart had done nothing to earn his genius. We cannot earn our gifts, but we can learn not to slam the door in their faces.

'Spontaneity' seems to be connected to presence: '*If I am present, I will react in the moment, and so I will be spontaneous*' – and certainly, when blocked, Irina will feel deeply un-spontaneous. However, few commands curdle more than '*Be spontaneous!*' – although '*Don't be self-conscious!*' comes pretty close.

It may reassure Irina to remember that however present we may be, no one is ever entirely consciously spontaneous. Insofar as a reaction is conscious, it isn't spontaneous. True presence may, God knows, have occurred in a human being; total conscious spontaneity never has. The psychopath rarely springs from the dock to strangle the judge, and when he does, he makes a decision. On the whole, human beings do not lose their tempers with those who are far more powerful. It is astonishing how we can spontaneously yell at someone who is small and on the other side of a windscreen, and miraculous how spontaneously we lose that spontaneity when all seven feet of that someone swings open the car door. Whenever a bully crumbles, his 'spontaneous' wildness freezes instantly into a highly trained and vigilant circumspection. It is amazing what sophistication of control we can suddenly develop.

But what does happen when we lose our tempers? An unpopular assertion that the actor can use is that we always decide when we lose our tempers. This may seem to contradict all that has been said about the target: '*I don't decide anything, it is the target that makes me do it.*' However, the expression 'losing my temper' needs some unpicking first. 'Temper' is fairly straightforward, meaning balance of mood. We have little or no control over how angry we may suddenly become, but we always decide what we do, within the constraints of the given circumstances. 'Losing temper' implies loss, loss of control. To lose something always has an active element.

Active loss

Even when loss is used in terms of grief, there is an active element. To lose a friend, who suddenly dies, seems entirely inactive. *'I didn't want him to die.'* But we need to see this loss, or we live in denial. Seeing is active (as is denial). Grief and mourning demand recognition of loss, a letting go, and this part is active. We must do something to bid farewell.

Even the most hot-headed take a nanosecond between hearing the insult and throwing the punch. Suspects only resist arrest if they feel they have a chance of escape. When we see one man struggling in the middle of ten police, it is rarely because he is optimistic; normally he is defending himself from being

hurt.

We tend not to resist against the odds, and always choose the battles we fight. Is there an exception with someone who is self-destructive and argues and fights with everyone, the braggart who, as my father would have quipped, has his own private graveyard? But such a person somewhere, sometime, will have negotiated an internal deal with himself to be always arguing and thereby alone and, so, at least un-disappointed. He is still getting what he thinks he wants. For all his fury, he is still calculating.

Calculation

Calculation may be unattractive, but everybody calculates. The baby's calculation for food or attention delights and amazes the young parent. We invent concepts of innocence, wildness and spontaneity because plotting shames us. We just don't like it that *'conscience doth make cowards of us all'*.

It is sobering to remember that displays of uncontrolled and spontaneous temperament normally conceal ultra-control. An actor famous for cocaine binges and assorted madcap wildnesses was discovered late at night on stage, measuring the distance from ashtray to cigarette box with a ruler.

Spontaneity does not quite happen in the way it claims. What does happen when I lose my temper? I see something that enrages me, and I decide what to do. The process may happen at such speed that it is barely conscious. I might decide to lick my wounds or kick the cat; in short I decide whether or not to lose my temper. I may decide unconsciously and in a split second to lash out 'spontaneously' and sod the consequences. I may feel the adrenalin of fury pump my temples, but unconsciously and at lightning speed I will decide and control whether or not to use that 'out-of-control' energy.

It is a note that some actors have found useful, if inexplicable, that: '*You see something, and then you do something else*.' Of course, that something else has to be seen as well!

We do not do what we see. We see something and then we do something as a result of what we see. Every thought, of course, is a target. Every thought is a new thing seen.

A digression: aesthetics and anaesthetics

We use anaesthetics to take away pain. And in part they work; they take away our sensation of pain. But anaesthetics do not remove the cause of pain, and pain is important because it tells us something is wrong. If fire didn't hurt, many of us would have no fingers and would not thank whoever had painted our tiny hands with painkiller. The anaesthetic cannot remove the danger of fire, merely the most useful symptom of a burn.

Civilisation excels at manufacturing anaesthetics. However, the causes of pain have not fundamentally changed since we became a species; we fall ill, we get lonely, we feel hungry, we feel cold, we feel sad, we feel unwanted, we feel unloved, we feel abandoned, we feel ignored, we feel insignificant, and though we must die, we don't want to.

If the luxuries of modern life fail to insulate us we can still avoid unwanted sensations by tampering with the wiring. We redirect the imagination so that instead of connecting us to reality the imagination actually severs us from the real world. The imagination degrades into the fantasy and only ensures that we no longer recognise the pain that we are, in fact, feeling.

The word aesthetic comes from the Greek root meaning 'things as we see them', in other words, 'targets'. Anaesthetic can therefore be construed as: 'without targets'. We devote a lot of time and money to reassuring ourselves with anaesthetics of every sort. Indeed one of the main reasons we go to the theatre is to witness characters and situations in which the anaesthetic does not work so well. One of the similarities between Tragedy and Comedy is that both reveal the anaesthetic wearing off.

Civilisation always seeks control of our perceptions, and like the rest of us, Irina is anaesthetised to a greater or lesser degree for the rest of her life. But the characters that Irina plays may see a lot more than

we do. We desperately need Irina to see, however briefly, a more real world, where joy and pain are felt for what they are.

POSTSCRIPT

When we make theatre we tell stories. Each time we tell a story it is different; the ancient myth changes each time we hear it. Even if we stick to precisely the same words and intonations, like an Irish bard with his harp, each retelling unfolds the high deeds with slight differences. The story changes because the tellers and hearers change; Time changes. It is one thing to tell a story, another to define what the story means. When we try to control all the meanings of a story, we invariably fail. An advertisement on behalf of a politician can convince us not to vote for his weak smile. Manipulation can reverse its desired effect.

Art never quite does as it's told. St Peter's was presumably intended to bray the confidence of the counter-reformation, but the Roman basilica also does the exact opposite. The more the edifice trumpets its strength of will, the more it also whimpers insecurity and doubt. Everything we make is ambivalent. We obscure this ambivalence with sentimentality.

To treat something sentimentally is to claim it has only one meaning. Sentimentality tries to divide the good guys from the bad guys, and wipe up the messy ambivalence of life. Seeking certainty, we shun ambiguity; and that is precisely when we become sentimental. A Viennese waltz insists that life is carefree, but remembering the historical context, those hectic strings can seem sinister.

A ship

Making lists of what the character wants may give provisional structure in the early days of rehearsal, but these structures will block us if we don't ditch them in time. It helps to see these early rehearsal structures as the scaffolding used in shipyards. At the beginning there is an idea of a ship; then the scaffolding seems bigger than the idea. Soon tiny men with hammers bang away within the immense cradle. Bolts and sheets are hung on the structure until they find their own connections. Winches and pulleys swing from the cradle and carpenters clamber up and down. Slowly girders and cables and panels join together and the cradle swells with the vessel. But the time will come when the structure of scaffolding must fall away to let the ship slide into the waiting sea.

The story and freedom

At the beginning of rehearsal we may analyse the plot and its meaning. Agreeing the story we want to tell may provide a beginning, but ultimately we will not tell stories well until we are prepared to let them run free. The wise storyteller knows that the story will have many different meanings to different people at different times. Experienced storytellers intuit this mystery: not only are they telling the story, the story is also telling them. The story creates the storyteller; just as whenever we think we use a lie, the lie ends up using us.

The wise actor learns not to try to control what the audience sees. The target needs to be discovered and seen, that is all. The target generates the impulse to act. What the actor plays springs from seeing the target and not from the character's inner will. The shape of the scene is living and mobile, its form is determined by the shifting nature of the targets. The wind and sea sculpt the sand; the beach does not shape itself alone.

The target and the source

What we see goes deeper than we may think. Approaching a normal staircase, our leg and feet muscles prepare to go up. But if we see an escalator we instruct these muscles to rest as we glide up past the adverts. However, a broken escalator is interesting. We may remark to our feet: *'This is an escalator. It does not work at the moment as an escalator. So we will use it as an ordinary immobile staircase.'* But as we step on the ridged metal, our legs still give a small, but perceptible, jerk. We knew clearly not to expect a moving stairway. We were perfectly clear with our feet, and they have done something that we told them not to.

It was maintained earlier that the baby is born not only with an anticipation of parents and language, but also with an anticipation of performance. It is, however, exceptionally unlikely that a baby might be born with the expectation of an escalator.

Presumably what happens is this. Over the years the eyes have been communicating directly to an unconscious part of the brain, i.e. the part which controls learnt reflexes. This part of the brain has learnt that those ridged steps with the jagged edge move by themselves and that the feet must readjust otherwise we will fall over. Pavlov explored these conditioned reflexes, almost spontaneous reactions that are learned. It helps Irina to know that the senses can completely bypass the conscious mind. This unconscious learning is what motors the invisible work. The target can do more to us than we know.

We cannot equip the characters with a subconscious, but Irina can nourish herself with the invisible work. She can prepare herself so that in performance the images she sees are not superficial and simplistic, but rich and ambivalent. Although the actor can only act what is conscious, not all acting is conscious. The target is the only impetus for what is played both consciously and unconsciously.

Seeing specifically what is outside will send the actor deeper into the character than thinking what is inside.

The frame

A work of art is something with a frame around it. A photographer frames things, but so does the theatre. The applause is a kind of frame; so is the space where we see a performance. '*This is where we perform, over there we don't perform.*' The baby gurgling at the pillow feels safe only when it learns that the putting down of the pillow signals the end of the show. The baby needs a frame.

The world we see is also limited – by the arc of our vision. Rabbits can see more than we can in two dimensions, but less in three; nobody sees everything. We learn to see both less and more than what really happens in the world. But many forces shape what we see. For example, the identity has no intention of letting mere reality contradict its theories. When we see the world we create it; we never see what really is. Every time we open our eyes we have made a work of art. That is as near the truth as we get.

One of the reasons that babies make us feel so tender is that they pay us so much attention. A baby sees us so purely that we feel we exist that bit more. But as soon as the baby starts to wonder how it itself is seen, this omnivorous curiosity is blunted. Later in life the adult may have to retrace these steps. For the actor, nothing matters more than this reverse journey.

The backwards path

On this journey patience is vital. However, we can no more be patient by an effort of will than we can trust or be present by trying. Patience is a grace, and we are wise not to bar its visits. Of the great doors that we slam in its face, self-judgement is one of the mightiest. We can control our self-judgement, but we cannot control the free comings and goings of patience. When the answer can't be found today, we may feel discouraged and failed. It is easier to punish ourselves than to be patient with ourselves.

However, the actor's unending quest remains the retracing of this path from '*How am I seen*?' to '*What do*

I see?’

Guides
Companions on this path are the uncomfortable choices.

Concentration or attention

Independence or freedom

To show or to see

Certainty or faith

Creativity or curiosity

Originality or uniqueness

Excitement or life

However, our vitality, our capacity and urge to move and breathe, are guaranteed by the double rule of the stakes:

There is always something to be lost and something to be won.

The thing to be won must be precisely the same size as the thing to be lost.

And the rule of Time:

As the stakes increase, Time decreases.

The rules of the target hold good if we think about them when safe and hold on to them in danger. The target is there for us. We are not there for the target. The target has indestructible attributes that are stronger than our most violent doubts. Isolation is just another theory.

rst: there is always a target.

cond: the target exists outside, and at a measurable distance.

ird: the target exists before you need it.

urth: the target is always specific.

fth: the target is always transforming.

cth: the target is always active.

A NOTE ON THE VERSE

Conflicting theories can tie the verse into a Gordian knot. However, actors have found the following observations useful.

The verse follows the same rules as any other target. First, the verse is there for the actor. The actor is not there for the verse. The verse gives its energy to the actor. The actor is not obliged to accept this gift but is foolish to refuse it.

Second, if the verse and the sense are in conflict, then the actor is obliged to follow the sense. The actor, in the end, must do only what makes sense to the actor.

Let us take Juliet's speech:

'Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face,
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight.
Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny
What I have spoke. But farewell, compliment.
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say "Ay",
And I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swear'st,
Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries,
They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.
Or, if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my 'haviour light,
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,
My true-love passion; therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love
Which the dark night hath so discovered.'

First tendency of the verse:
the line yearns to be regular

The line is called the *iambic pentameter*. This impressive expression helps only if we dismantle it and examine its parts.

Iambic refers to the *iamb,* the name for the basic beat of the line, sometimes known as a 'foot'. The stresses of an iamb go *weak/strong*, as in the words:

today, goodbye, farewell, hello, goodnight, Macbeth, obey, renown, pronounce, perverse, impute, redeem, endorse, believe, confirm, protect, expect, survive and *salute.*

Each of these words is composed of an iamb, weak/ strong.

It is an excellent exercise for Irina to make up her own regular blank verse – it is a lot easier than it sounds. Starting with single words as above and building to single lines:

'I wonder what the time is? Am I late?'
'I'd like a ticket for the match tonight.'
'I think it's raining. Did I bring a coat?'
'I hate rehearsing when I've got a cold.'

As in the message exercises, this is best played in pairs or groups, alternating lines:

'I'd like to speak in verse with you today.'
'I hear they spoke like this all day at court.'
'I hardly think that's true, that's just a myth.'
'I'd like a cup of tea – I take it black.'

And finally into conversations:

'A cigarette? No thanks, I'm giving up.'
'Oh well, perhaps just one, it helps me think.'

The verse exercise is surprisingly easy; English naturally falls into this pattern.

Let us take Juliet's first line in the speech:

'*Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face*'

Irina could stress as follows:

*'**Thou** know'st the mask of night is on my **face**'*

i.e. *Only you, Romeo, know that the mask of night is on my face and nowhere else on my body*.

In which case, there are as many as eight weak beats in the line and only two strong beats; the only iamb is '*my **face***'.

The line could mean this, but Irina has many choices. She could give several different meanings to the line by stressing as follows:

*'**Thou** know'st the mask of **night** is on my **face**'*
*'Thou **know'st** the **mask** of **night** is on my **face**'*
*'Thou **know'st** the **mask** of **night** is **on** my **face**'*

But the question for Irina is this: can she make the last reading, which is regular, work for her? In other words, does this final version of the stresses make sense? Can that final *'on'* take a stress?

If Irina can sensibly stress the line:

'*Weak* ***strong*** *weak* ***strong*** *weak* ***strong*** *weak* ***strong*** *weak* ***strong***'

then that is what Irina should do. One of the excellent side effects of verse is that it forces us to consider how many choices we have. When we see a line, we have several possibilities of inflection.

If all things are equal and you can make good sense of the meaning with the regular stress pattern, then use it.

Jazz

Verse works a little like jazz. In jazz there is a sense of what is regular, say 4/4 time; then this is the beat that is 'square'. Jazz is not as independent of beat as it sometimes sounds. Jazz musicians know they depend on a highly disciplined beat that they can then disobey. And this disobedience releases energy.

Verse works in a similar way. Verse creates an expectation of a beat. *Tee-tum, tee-tum, tee-tum,* etc., and suddenly, if we meet not a *tee-tum*, but a *tee-tee* or a *tum-tee* or a *tum-tum*, we react; our anticipation has been denied. We have predicted something, however unconsciously, like the moving escalator, and when it doesn't happen as expected, we get a jolt. In verse this jolt seems to be a bolt out of the blue, a hit of external energy. As we have seen, sources of external energy are precious for the actor. Verse supplies a ready supply of outside energy. Verse is a windfall for the actor.

Anticipation denied

Verse sets up an anticipation that the actor can either satisfy or deny. If anticipation is continually denied, then all anticipation gets lost. That is one of the reasons why the line yearns to be regular. Too many irregular lines would dismantle the verse into prose.

Of course, Irina's choices will change the more Irina develops in her work. At the beginning of rehearsals she may feel a line cannot be regular and later on in the run feel that perhaps it can, after all, and give it a try; and vice versa.

It is a matter of negotiation between the actor and the verse. The line always wants to be regular. Sometimes the actor will agree with the verse. Sometimes the actor will hotly disagree and break the regular iambic rhythm. More often a line could just about manage to be said regularly, and the actor will have to decide whether to give in to the verse or not. Each line presents its own special opportunities. The law is there, but each case should be decided on the facts.

The pentameter

The second tendency derives from the second word in *iambic pentameter*. As we have seen, the iamb refers to the basic beat. Iamb is a name for a unit called a *foot*. *Pentameter* is derived from the Greek word for five. There are five feet in each line. Ideally each foot in the iambic pentameter is an iamb; ideally there are five iambs in each line.

The line wants to have five neat iambs all of its own. The line does not want four iambs, or six iambs. No. The line wants all five, and only five, iambs. The verse does not always get what it wants; but it never gives up trying.

(*Thou* ***know'st***) (*the* ***mask***) (*of* ***night***) (*is* ***on***) (*my* ***face***)

Five iambs and the verse is satisfied. It is easy to hear the familiar throb of the iamb . . . *tee-tum* . . . *tee-tum*. But how does Irina mark the fact that there are only five iambs per line? How does the audience hear that after the fifth iamb there is a new line? Should Irina leave a pause to make this clear to the audience? The actor, as we know, should never try to make anything clear to the audience.

Second tendency of the verse:
the first stressed syllable of the line yearns to be the most important syllable of that line

'*Thou **know'st** the **mask** of **night** is **on** my **face***'

Here *'know'st'* wants to be more important than the other stressed syllables: *'mask', 'night', 'on'* and *'face'*. Irina may feel that the words *'mask', 'night'* and *'face'* are far more interesting than the bald word '*know'st*' and may want to put more energy into these more exciting and glamorous words.

But the actor should first take care of the unassuming syllable near the beginning of the line, around which the sense of the entire line revolves.

Of course, only in a regular line will the first stress fall on the second syllable. If the line is irregular, the first stressed syllable might be the first, or the third or even the fourth syllable. The rule remains that wherever the first stress falls, that syllable asks to be considered as first candidate for the line's most important syllable. Of course this affects the meaning.

The first stressed syllable

*'Thou **know'st** the mask of night is on my face,*
*Else **would** a maiden blush bepaint my cheek*
*For **that** which thou hast heard me speak tonight.*
*Fain **would** I dwell on form; fain, fain deny*
*What **I** have spoke. But farewell, compliment.*
*Dost **thou** love me? I know thou wilt say "Ay",*
*And **I** will take thy word. Yet, if thou swear'st,*
*Thou **mayst** prove false. At lovers' perjuries,*
*They **say**, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,*
*If **thou** dost love, pronounce it faithfully.*
*Or, **if** thou think'st I am too quickly won,*
*I'll **frown** and be perverse and say thee nay,*
*So **thou** wilt woo; but else, not for the world.*
*In **truth**, fair Montague, I am too fond,*
*And **there**fore thou mayst think my 'haviour light,*
*But **trust** me, gentleman, I'll prove more true*
*Than **those** that have more cunning to be strange.*
*I **should** have been more strange, I must confess,*
*But **that** thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,*
*My **true**-love passion; therefore pardon me,*
*And **not** impute this yielding to light love*
*Which the **dark** night hath so discovered.'*

All line readings are personal. The above is a provisional choice of where the first stressed syllable may fall. '***There**-fore*' reminds us that we do not mean the first stressed word. This is an important distinction. We are talking about the first stressed syllable.

The last line of the speech reminds us that the first stressed syllable does not necessarily fall on the second syllable. Here it is marked the third syllable. However, there are good arguments for the first stressed syllable to be the third syllable in some of the above lines.

Reading each of the lines it will be seen that the meaning subtly changes if the first stressed syllable

becomes more important than any of the words at the end of the line. It can involve quite an act of renunciation.

For example, let's take the second line:

'*Else **would** a maiden blush bepaint my cheek*'

Here the first stressed syllable is '*would*'. But does '*would*' really matter more than '*bepaint*'? '*Bepaint*' seems so much more interesting than '*would*'. Surely '*bepaint*' deserves more energy than '*would*'? The imagination runs to the wonderful words towards the end of other lines, as, for example, '*cunning*' and '*strange*'. Surely Irina should spend more time on these intriguing words and less on the boring adjective, '*those*', at the beginning of their line?

The challenge is this: if Irina dwells on the thrilling images at the end of the line, she will tend to emote on those words. She will push her feeling into a frame for ever too large for its contents. Spreading feeling into and onto the big words fixes the actor in the same problems we have met before. The frame must always be smaller; the feeling is always bigger than the word.

On the whole, the big words need to be controlled; it is the first stressed syllable that needs to be made work. If we run the first stressed syllables together we get a good impression of what the character sees and what the character thinks that she needs to do. In this speech we find:

Know'st
Would
That
Would
I
Thou
I
Mayst
Say
Thou
If
Frown
Thou
Truth
There
Trust
Those
Should
That
True
Not
Dark

We can even make almost-sentences:

'Know'st, would! That would I!
Thou, I mayst say thou, if frown thou.
Truth, there!

Trust those!
Should that true?
Not dark.'

What can Irina hear in these words?

ues to what Juliet sees?
world that makes her need to control it?
Romeo that makes her need to believe him?
trust him?
Romeo whom Juliet needs to believe?
darkness to be used?
darkness to be feared?
darkness to be overcome?
truth that must be uncovered?
truth that must be protected by the dark?
balance between him and her that must be created and maintained?
Romeo that must be loved?

This word sequence offers an insight into what Juliet thinks she wants. Even without the re-punctuation the sequence has an impressive energy.

Punctuation and breathing

*'Thou **know'st** the mask of night is on my face*
*Else **would** a maiden blush bepaint my cheek*
*For **that** which thou hast heard me speak tonight*
*Fain **would** I dwell on form fain fain deny*
*What **I** have spoke but farewell compliment*
*Dost **thou** love me I know thou wilt say Ay*
*And **I** will take thy word yet if thou swear'st*
*Thou **mayst** prove false at lovers perjuries*
*They **say** Jove laughs O gentle Romeo*
*If **thou** dost love pronounce it faithfully*
*Or **if** thou think'st I am too quickly won*
*I'll **frown** and be perverse and say thee nay*
*So **thou** wilt woo but else not for the world*
*In **truth** fair Montague I am too fond*
*And **there**fore thou mayst think my 'haviour light*
*But **trust** me gentleman I'll prove more true*
*Than **those** that have more cunning to be strange*
*I **should** have been more strange I must confess*
*But **that** thou overheard'st ere I was ware*
*My **true**-love passion therefore pardon me*
*And **not** impute this yielding to light love*
*Which the **dark** night hath so discovered'*

It is always useful to remove the punctuation from Shakespearean text; it is extremely unlikely that he

supervised the printing of any of his plays and so we cannot know for sure what he intended. Indeed, different editions have conflicting versions from different editors.

There is another reason for de-punctuating: if we read the unpunctuated text aloud we run out of breath because we are no longer told when to stop. This is an advantage. Modern punctuation follows modern conventions. It is a modern prose convention that we have many short thoughts. But, whatever the convention, we naturally breathe on the thought. The depth of the breath we take is dictated by the stakes. We do not have to think about this rule in real life; it is a reflex. When under threat, a second's delay could mean the difference between life and death.

In attempting to clarify, modern punctuation may dismantle the original thought. If the Shakespearean long thought is deconstructed, it will change or lose its meaning.

A word of caution

We often pretend that we want to do certain things we are in fact forced to do. We may deny that we have no option. So we can invent countless reasons why that long thought should be chopped into many little ones, tiny bite-sized thoughtlets. All aided and abetted by a plethora of modern commas.

It is emphatically not a problem that Shakespeare is so complex you need a degree to understand it. His thinking is not some cerebral conundrum that only academics can fathom. The major difficulty for modern actors approaching Shakespeare is practical: the length of thought demands far more breath than the actor needs for most modern texts. Actors must train physically for the long thought so that they may breathe when they want to and not when they have to.

Reading the speech unpunctuated may make Irina get out of breath. This is a useful lesson, for Irina needs to try as much of the speech as she can without breathing in, because some thoughts in Shakespeare are exceptionally long.

However, breathing exercises do demand patience and endurance. Actors often feel helpless or enraged the first time they run out of breath. These feelings are also practical. It is entirely helpful to face our limitations. If we never dare explore the rim of our capacities, we can never expand them.

Irina needs to practise slow exhaling. There are many exercises. Only the most obvious is to breathe in deeply and breathe out while counting slowly and aloud. With practice the number reached comfortably can rise. Previous generations have had much technical advice. My advice is that breathing, even if it needs particular capacity and stamina for Shakespeare, must always be natural. The actor should never feel forced to retain breath. Artificial techniques can block the actor. The body knows better how to breathe than we can consciously teach. If we need more breath, the body will provide us with the means. We only need to provide the body with enough practice.

Natural reserves of breath

When the stakes soar, our lungs never empty. Empty lungs reduce our capacity for fight or flight. This deep-breath reflex is bred in us. Both bulls and robins inflate their chests when frightened or angry. Of course we can take in small top-up breaths that happen naturally and by reflex. But in the presence of danger, we never let our lungs completely empty. When the stakes soar we could not pump out all our breath even if we wanted to; just as we cannot commit suicide by holding our breath. The reflex is stronger than the conscious will.

Shakespearean verse demands a lot of breath – the stakes are high and the thought is long. If you want a car to drive comfortably at sixty miles an hour, it ought to be able to reach a hundred miles an hour. The car that can only do sixty miles an hour will have problems with endurance and power even if its limit is never breached; the breathing apparatus is the same.

Irina will breathe when Juliet's sense demands it. Irina should not have to think about when to breathe. Irina will breathe naturally on the thought. Her intake of breath will follow the sense automatically. But

Irina needs to see that the spoken thoughts of Juliet are often longer than they appear to a modern reader. Reading and rereading the text aloud and without punctuation will help Irina to see how long some of Juliet's thoughts might be.

The last word sequence

If we list the last words, they make an extraordinary effect. Unlike the first stressed syllable we are now talking of whole words. This last word sequence opens a door onto the vastness of the unconscious mind. This exercise is invaluable for the invisible work.

Irina reads the final words aloud and slowly:

face
cheek
tonight
deny
compliment
Ay
swear'st
perjuries
Romeo
faithfully
won
nay
world
fond
light
true
strange
confess
ware
me
love
discovered

These sequences are often astonishing, and seem to give an irrational and subconscious version of the character and even the whole play. It is reductive to define

what the sequence means. The phenomenon works mysteriously by developing what the actor sees. This juxtaposition will mean something personal to Irina that is subjective, indefinable, profound, and will enrich the targets that she sees through Juliet's eyes.

Of course this artificial sequencing must be forgotten for the visible work. Like every other component of the invisible work, the impression will decide when and how it makes its influence felt.

The acceleration

Reading the text aloud, Irina may notice that something strange occurs between the last word and the following first stressed syllable:

*'Thou **know'st** the mask of night is on my face*
*Else **would** a maiden blush bepaint my cheek*

*For **that** which thou hast heard me speak tonight*
*Fain **would** I dwell on form fain fain deny*
*What **I** have spoke but farewell compliment*
*Dost **thou** love me I know thou wilt say Ay'*

There is a noticeable tendency to accelerate. This desire to race to the first stressed syllable seems to come from somewhere else. The verse has a will of its own. So there exists a seemingly independent urge to go fast between '*face*' and '*would*', between '*cheek*' and '*that*', between '*tonight*' and '*would*', between '*deny*' and '*I*' and between '*compliment*' and '*thou*', etc.

This acceleration between the last word and the following first stressed syllable is the major means by which the line ending makes itself felt. The actor may go with the acceleration, may deny it, may obey it, may disobey it, but the actor cannot simply ignore it.

Other examples

We can look at the effects of the last word and first stressed syllable exercise on the three speeches we looked at earlier.

'Hist Romeo hist O for a falconers voice
To lure this tassel-gentle back again
Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
With repetition of my Romeos name . . .

'Tis almost morning I would have thee gone
And yet no farther than a wantons bird
That lets it hop a little from his hand
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves
And with a silken thread plucks it back again
So loving-jealous of his liberty . . .

Sweet so would I
Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing
Good night good night parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good night till it be morrow'

Here is a list of the possible first stressed syllables:

Hist
lure
Bond
would
make
rep
al
yet
lets
poor
with

lov
I
night
I

(Incidentally, I can only make out four stresses in the line: '*Like a* ***poor pris****-oner in his* ***twist****-ed* ***gyve****s*'. Were the line regular it should have five stresses of course. Perhaps the first '*Like*' could take a stress. This decision has to be left to Irina; after all, it is her imagination alone that can make this line seem like the inevitable consequence of what she sees.)

This sequence of syllables is quite telling. These first stressed syllables imply an urgency or an intensity that might get overlooked if Irina gets distracted by the magnificence of the later final words. Perhaps Juliet feels she needs to take events into her control, and not leave them to fate or to Romeo. Irina can sense many conscious actions and targets in this sequence that are too subtle to be described in prose. This sequence of first stressed syllables can give Irina some constructive ideas for her invisible work.

The underpoem

Once more, Irina can use the last word sequence to stimulate her imagination:

voice
again
aloud
lies
mine
name
gone
bird
hand
gyves
again
liberty
I
cherishing
sorrow
morrow

– another astonishing underpoem: mysterious, rich, allusive, joyful, generous, frightening, epic, tender and prophetic. This underpoem is like a secret message sent from Shakespeare's unconscious direct to Irina's. All Irina need do is pay attention to the sequence, by reading it aloud and slowly and with a head as empty as possible. The matrix leaves its own mark by feeding the unconscious.

The caesura

Another technical aspect of verse is the impressively named 'caesura'.

Loosely speaking, the caesura is a break in the middle of the line, and is often used to mirror antitheses. With open attention, Irina will discover these breaks herself. Too much expert advice on the caesura can confuse, and there is no hard and fast rule on the caesura in each Shakespearean line. Some lines have no caesura at all. Some lines split naturally into more than two and the best way for Irina to develop a sense of these breaks is through practice.

The mid-line turn

There is, however, an exception and that is when there is an unavoidable caesura because Shakespeare has put a 'turn' not only at the end of a line, but also in the middle.

A 'turn' here includes not only a full stop; it indicates wherever the thought has a major change of direction; such a place might be marked in modern punctuation also with an exclamation mark, a question mark, a dash or a semi-colon. Typically these turns would be reserved till the end of the line.

'Turn' is a more helpful word than stop. 'Stop' implies that the energy stops and starts again. In a play the energy never stops. The energy may be transmuted into a seeming stillness and silence, but beneath the tranquil surface, the play storms on. As in a relay race, the baton of energy is deftly passed from performer to performer; the energy changes but the baton of energy is never dropped. Dropping the baton only loses a relay race, but if the insecure pilot decides to check the engines mid-flight – and switches them off to test them, then the result will be more serious.

Here is a speech with some provisional mid-line turns marked:

'Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight
Fain would I dwell on form fain fain deny
What I have spoke ***TURN*** *but farewell compliment*
Dost thou love me ***TURN*** *I know thou wilt say Ay*
And I will take thy word ***TURN*** *yet if thou swear'st*
Thou mayst prove false ***TURN*** *at lovers perjuries*
They say Jove laughs ***TURN*** *o' gentle Romeo*
. If thou dost love pronounce it faithfully
. Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won
. I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay
. So thou wilt woo ***TURN*** *but else not for the world*
. In truth fair Montague I am too fond
. And therefore thou mayst think my 'haviour light
. But trust me gentleman I'll prove more true
. Than those that have the cunning to be strange
. I should have been more strange I must confess
. But that thou overheard'st ere I was ware
. My true-love passion ***TURN*** *therefore pardon me*
. And not impute this yielding to light love
. Which the dark night hath so discovered'

What does Irina need to do at these mid-line turns? Irina will notice that the mid-line turn denotes an unusually important change; it is a red light, an emergency warning: '*Watch out – this turn is sharper than you think!*'

The turn and the target

The turn is entirely dependent on the target. We cannot force ourselves to turn around internally. We can only change direction because the target has changed. It is the target that changes before we can change. We are for ever trying to keep up with the changing target.

For the actor, the mid-line turn signifies a major change of target. It asks the actor to see something altogether new. A big change of target at each mid-line turn will encourage the actor to make an interesting

choice. Something unexpected jumps in front of the character's gaze. This new target could be many different things, but it should be substantially different from what the character saw before. How is Irina supposed to show this mid-line turn?

Well, it is not for Irina to show anything. All Irina can do is examine what Juliet might see that is startlingly new. For example:

1. Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face
2. Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
3. For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight
4. Fain would I dwell on form fain fain deny
*5. What I have spoke **TURN** but farewell compliment*
*6. Dost thou love me **TURN** I know thou wilt say Ay*

Conceivably we could have put another turn in line 4, between '*form*' and '*fain*'; and also we could have omitted the turn in line 5 between '*spoke*' and '*but*'.

The target is permanently changing, but some of these changes are bigger than others. Juliet improvises her text. Rising stakes make it harder to stick to a pre-written text. Whatever plan she makes, vanishes and emerges transformed at each word she utters.

However, there is arguably only one thought in lines 1–3. This thought does not exactly finish on the last word: '*tonight*'. It is helpful for the actor to remember that a thought can never be complete. (This is also useful to remember in all verse forms, particularly those, like the Alexandrine, which appear to package 'perfect' thoughts.) It helps more that a new thought is born before the old thought has had time to die – all thought is an interruption.

In Juliet's case the new thought starts on line 4 with: *'Fain would . . . '* For her first stressed syllable, Irina has a choice: either '*fain*' or '*would*'. It will be that syllable which gets that extra pressure, that heavier lean where the new thought kicks in to kill the previous thought. The previous thought never trails away in its death throes. The new thought always interrupts before the previous thought has had time to die. The preceding thought is always cut off in its vigour. It is in fact the very friction between competing thoughts that sparks the motor. Of course these thoughts are all born in the target.

The next 'turn' for Irina, however, possibly does not occur with relative comfort at the end of a line, but in the middle.

What happens before *'But farewell compliment'*? Does Juliet steel herself for the coming declaration of love? Possibly. The rule for Irina is that she has to interrupt '*spoke*' by seeing a radically new idea. The same is true for the next line: *'Dost thou love me **TURN** I know thou wilt say "Ay" '* where it is likely Juliet will want to interrupt any claims made by Romeo. Practical advice for Irina is to make sure she has enough breath at these crisis points not to have to gulp in more. The actor should not be forced to breathe at this point; a gulp needs a pause and a pause won't help here.

The Chinese pictogram for the word 'crisis' collides the pictograms for 'danger' and 'opportunity'. This helps us understand the mid-line turn. The danger is that the actor will blunt this change by marking it with a pause. The opportunity is for the actor to see something extraordinary and make a remarkable new choice. The mid-line turn offers the actor an opportunity to see something startling and new in the spontaneous moment. The mid-line turn invites Irina to surprise herself. The mid-line turn offers the actor a safe framework in which to lose control.

See something new; the invisible work and the tension in the verse will protect you.

A digression: a cable car

The verse in general and the mid-line turn in particular work rather like a cable car. We may feel doubt as we sway over the jagged rocks. We may try not to breathe and not to move and not to look down. But it is a shame to miss the hurtling valleys and soaring peaks. We will enjoy ourselves more if we remember that the engineers have done the invisible work. We can relax and rely on the tension in the cable. Along its length there are no sags, no droops and, above all, no gaps.

Of course the actor can pause, as long as the thought continues to change and the targets are never dropped; a pause is merely expensive. But if a pause denotes the completion of a thought or the dropping of the target, then the cost is as high as if there were a gap in the cable.

A digression: infectious diseases of the line

The line that continually trails off is exhausting to say – and hear. But line droop is not a disease; it is only a symptom. The cause is that the actor fails to see the targets at the end of the line. The opposite problem to this is the line that never quite starts, with muttered syllables, like a car that revs without moving; the effect is similar to the actor dropping his cue. This is caused when the actor has not fully committed to the target at the beginning of the line.

Blind spots can become habits. The actor can get into the rhythm of blocking the target at certain repeated moments. Why? Because of an unconscious desire to have a regular rest at home. And it's not much of a journey if we keep going home for a rest. It's not much of a match if you keep kicking the ball into touch. Incidentally, any sprayed-on tricks to bamboozle the audience, as for example, imposing an automatic upward inflection on the end of every line, destroy both the actor's belief and self-respect. Besides, like any structure, safety devices can be dangerous. Once nets were strung across an Australian bay to stop the sharks eating the swimmers. But sharks aren't stupid, and dozens nosed their way in through holes. They found themselves trapped inside the bay, and soon became irritated and rather hungry . . .

A verse exercise

Irina memorises the speech and walks the length of a small room, or runs across a larger hall.

As Irina moves she keeps the words flowing out loud and touches the wall on the last word, and only on the last word, of each line. Her touch on the wall must last for the entirety of each last word and only during each last word. Then Irina turns and points with her arm and finger outstretched towards the opposite wall on the first stressed syllable of the following line. The intention of her point must be to pierce and change that approaching wall. Irina then walks to that opposite wall pointing all the time and makes her walk last as long and no longer than the line, so that she is able to touch the opposite wall only on the following last word. She repeats this till the end of the speech, each line lasting for one crossing of the room. Irina performs the exercise several times, each time judging her pace more accurately, each time touching the wall, turning and pointing more specifically; it is not easy.

The exercise helps the actor to see the time a line may take and to feel that verse springs as much from the body as from the head. Above all, it helps the actor to sense that particular and powerful interval from last word through any unstressed syllable to the first stressed syllable. To describe this short interval as a 'gap' or a 'lapse' or a 'suspension' is misleading, for it is a time charged with energy. This interval normally gives a sense of acceleration, and always a change of direction, a sense of sharp reorientation, wherever it occurs. The sensual feel of this specific moment will vary from actor to actor.

A digression: the International Date Line

In any event this sensation changes from line to line. The sensation is generated in Irina when she pays attention to both the last word and the first stressed syllable. The distance from first stressed syllable to the last word in the same line is rational. It is the line itself. However, from the last word to the first

stressed syllable of the following line is strange, a little like the International Date Line. What might happen to a traveller without the International Date Line is curious. In terms of time-reckoning, travellers would get younger if they continued to journey west. And so the Date Line was invented. A flaw in logic, a fault line, an artificial crisis imposed on the clock so that we can recover a sense of narrative control of Time itself.

Dionysus and Apollo

Ultimately, the very best way to learn about blank verse is to read as much verse as possible aloud. Developing verse speaking is rather like researching how the Greeks saw their gods. When rehearsing an Ancient Greek play we may go off and read what the experts have said. Actually, it may help more and intimidate less to read the Greek texts themselves. We learn in these texts, from the plays, the epic poems and the histories, to meet these gods ourselves. We each have been given a different way of seeing the world. This individual way of seeing can be led out of us, educated, with the help of others. But it remains our way of seeing and not that of someone else. This does not mean that we can make up whatever we like about these ancient beliefs. We have to get used to them through attention. But we cannot get near what Dionysus or Apollo meant to the Ancient Greeks without allowing ourselves to experience these gods as directly as we can. We experience them through contact as immediate as possible. Our contact needs to be simple and sensual. We need direct contact with the original sources, rather than via what someone else has seen in these sources. Although it helps to read an introduction and listen to experts, we must always remember that this research can only ever be an introduction to our own work.

Personal verse

There comes a moment when we grasp something for ourselves. We cannot give, get or take wisdom, but we can be helped to discover our own and help others to do the same. This means that Irina cannot be taught how to speak verse. She can be given a hundred rules and be forced or coaxed to give a passable rendition of someone else's way of speaking it. Only Irina can teach Irina, first by listening to others more experienced. But the moment will come when she needs to teach herself her own way. One of the best ways that Irina can teach Irina about verse is not only to read aloud as much verse as possible from all periods, but also to try to write some of her own. Trying to write (or act) teaches us fast how hard they are to do well. Irina can learn quickly at first hand what words cannot do and, consequently, what they can do. Irina will learn how alarmingly independent words are, even for the greatest poets.

Irina can become as much an expert on blank verse as anyone else. Knowing about verse or indeed any other aspect of Shakespeare's plays is not the privilege of a Gnostic priesthood. The more we get to know his work the more we each recognise an individual relationship with him. Nobody owns Shakespeare. (Although once a Hollywood producer solemnly assured me that he had acquired the rights!)

Just as Irina will find her own way of performing Juliet with this particular Romeo, so Irina must synthesise her own way of speaking verse. Irina can be given help and guidelines. But in the end Irina has to find her own individual way. With some discipline and a lot of practice, Irina will discover how she must speak verse.

Seeing

It is the same for the verse as it is for any other aspect of acting. Irina must remember that she has no business getting anything right. Right doesn't exist, for the actor at least, and wrong is equally frivolous. We are not here to get things either right or wrong. We are here to do our best. What constitutes this best we decide as individuals, having seen the ambivalence of the world as clearly and unsentimentally as possible.

The actor sees for us: things we want to see and also things that we don't want to see. The infant

Millennium is roaring: the actor's capacity to see the target in all its messy ambivalence has never been more precious.

Don't go home.

APPENDIX

ROMEO AND JULIET, Act 2 Scene 2
(The Balcony Scene)

Enter ROMEO

ROMEO
He jests at scars that never felt a wound.

JULIET appears above

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!
She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!
JULIET

Ay me!

ROMEO

She speaks:

O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art

As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air.

JULIET

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

ROMEO

[Aside] *Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?*

JULIET

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

ROMEO

I take thee at thy word:

Call me but love, and I'll be new baptised;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

JULIET

What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night
So stumblest on my counsel?

ROMEO

By a name

I know not how to tell thee who I am:
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee;
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

JULIET

My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound:
Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?

ROMEO

Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike.

JULIET

How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?

The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

ROMEO

With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do that dares love attempt;
Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

JULIET

If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

ROMEO

Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords: look thou but sweet,
And I am proof against their enmity.

JULIET

I would not for the world they saw thee here.

ROMEO

I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes;
And but thou love me, let them find me here:
My life were better ended by their hate,
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love.

JULIET

By whose direction found'st thou out this place?

ROMEO

By love, that first did prompt me to enquire;
He lent me counsel and I lent him eyes.
I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise.

JULIET

Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face,
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight.
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny
What I have spoke: but farewell compliment!
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay',
And I will take thy word: yet if thou swear'st,
Thou mayst prove false; at lovers' perjuries
Then say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully:
Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my 'haviour light:
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.

I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,
My true love's passion: therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

ROMEO

Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

JULIET

O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

ROMEO

What shall I swear by?

JULIET

Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee.

ROMEO

If my heart's dear love—

JULIET

Well, do not swear: although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract tonight:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say 'It lightens.' Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!

ROMEO

O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

JULIET

What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?

ROMEO

The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.

JULIET

I gave thee mine before thou didst request it:
And yet I would it were to give again.

ROMEO

Wouldst thou withdraw it? For what purpose, love?

JULIET

But to be frank, and give it thee again.
And yet I wish but for the thing I have:
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,

The more I have, for both are infinite.

NURSE calls within

I hear some noise within; dear love, adieu!
Anon, good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true.
Stay but a little, I will come again.

Exit, above

ROMEO
O blessed, blessed night! I am afeard.
Being in night, all this is but a dream,
Too flattering-sweet to be substantial.

Re-enter JULIET, above

JULIET
Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.
If that thy bent of love be honourable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow,
By one that I'll procure to come to thee,
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite;
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.
NURSE
[Within] *Madam!*
JULIET
I come, anon.—But if thou mean'st not well,
I do beseech thee—
NURSE
[Within] *Madam!*
JULIET

By and by, I come:—

To cease thy suit, and leave me to my grief:
Tomorrow will I send.
ROMEO

So thrive my soul—

JULIET
A thousand times good night!

Exit, above

ROMEO
A thousand times the worse, to want thy light.
Love goes toward love, as schoolboys from their books,
But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.

He draws back

Re-enter JULIET, above

JULIET
Hist! Romeo, hist! O, for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud;
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine,
With repetition of my Romeo's name.
ROMEO
It is my soul that calls upon my name:
How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears!
JULIET
Romeo!
ROMEO
My dear?
JULIET
At what o'clock tomorrow
Shall I send to thee?
ROMEO
By the hour of nine.
JULIET
I will not fail: 'tis twenty years till then.
I have forgot why I did call thee back.
ROMEO
Let me stand here till thou remember it.
JULIET
I shall forget, to have thee still stand there,
Remembering how I love thy company.
ROMEO
And I'll still stay, to have thee still forget,
Forgetting any other home but this.
JULIET
'Tis almost morning, I would have thee gone,
And yet no further than a wanton's bird,
That lets it hop a little from his hand
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silken thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.
ROMEO
I would I were thy bird.
JULIET
Sweet, so would I:
t I should kill thee with much cherishing.
ood night, good night. Parting is such sweet sorrow,
at I shall say good night till it be morrow.

Exit above

ROMEO
Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!
Hence will I to my ghostly father's cell,
His help to crave, and my dear hap to tell.

Exit

Declan Donnellan

Declan Donnellan is joint founder of Cheek by Jowl with Nick Ormerod. He is joint Artistic Director of the company.

Declan Donnellan was born in England of Irish parents in 1953. He grew up in London and read English and Law at Queens' College, Cambridge. He was called to the Bar at Middle Temple in 1978.

He and his partner, Nick Ormerod, formed Cheek by Jowl in 1981 and he has directed thirty productions for the company.

In 1989 he was made Associate Director of the Royal National Theatre in London where his productions have included *Fuenteovenjuna*, *Sweeney Todd*, *The Mandate* and both parts of *Angels in America*.

For the Royal Shakespeare Company he has directed *The School for Scandal*, *King Lear* (Academy 2002) and *Great Expectations*.

He has also directed *Le Cid* for the Avignon Festival, *Falstaff* for the Salzburg Festival and the ballet of *Romeo and Juliet* for the Bolshoi in Moscow. Other work in Russia includes *The Winter's Tale* for the Maly Drama Theatre of St Petersburg.

In 2000 he formed a company of actors in Moscow, under the auspices of The Chekhov International Theatre Festival, whose productions include *Boris Godunov*, *Twelfth Night*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Tempest*. These productions have already been seen in forty-eight cities of twenty-five countries.

He has written a play, *Lady Betty*, about Ireland's notorious hangwoman, which was performed by Cheek by Jowl in 1989. He has also adapted *Don't Fool with Love* by de Musset, *Antigone* by Sophocles, *The Mandate* by Erdman and *Masquerade* by Lermontov.

He has received awards in Moscow, Paris, New York and London, including three Laurence Olivier Awards – Director of the Year (1987), Best Director of a Play (1995) and the Olivier for Outstanding Achievement (1990). Last year he was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres for his work in France.

His first feature film, *Bel Ami*, co-directed with Nick Ormerod, was released in 2012.

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