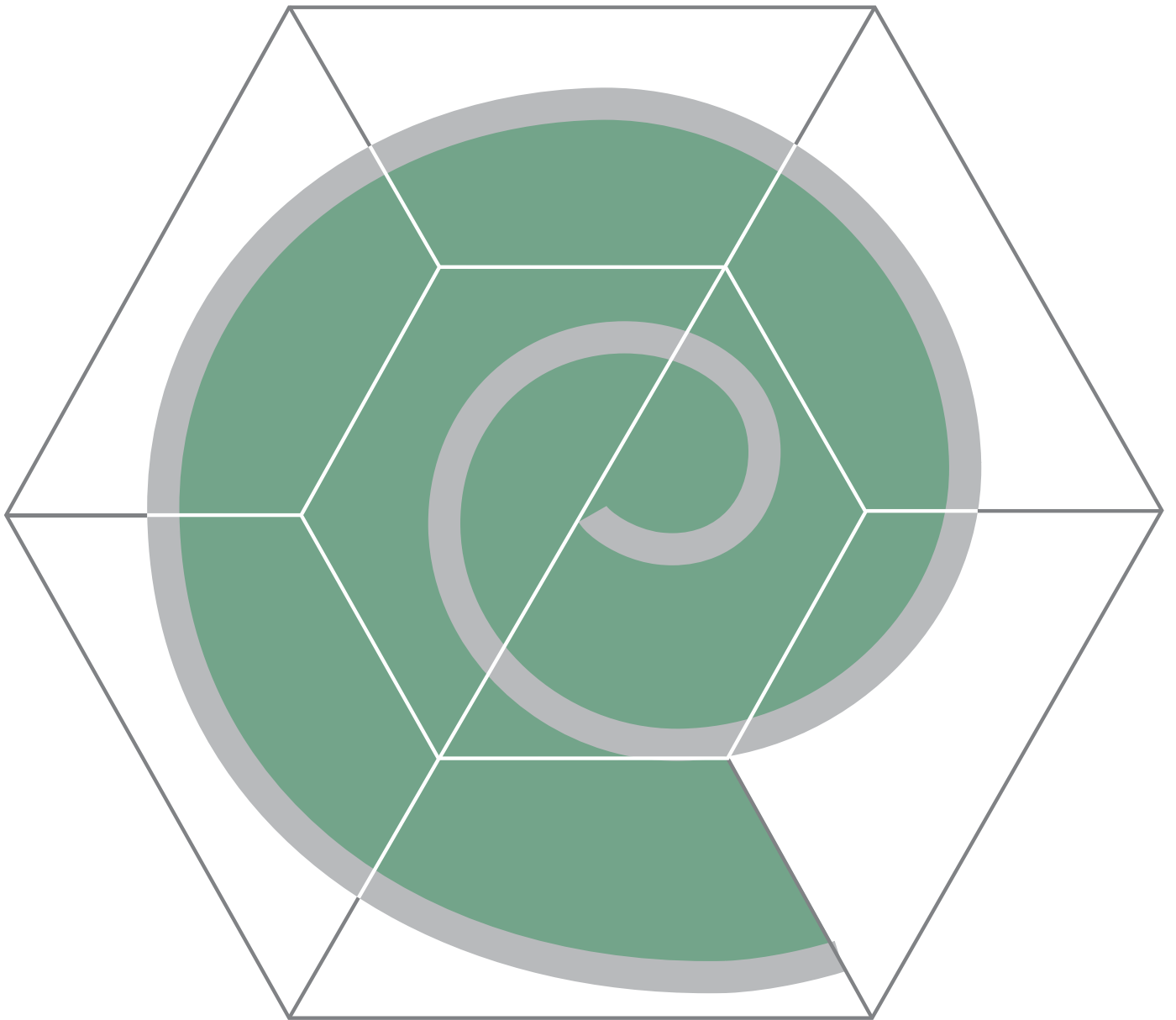


The Character Core

As part of the Primary Principals of Acting

A visual portal that evokes an immediate and purely organic connection to the character

Created, written and taught by Paula J Riley



FOREWARD

By Ronald Rand

In this fast paced world, we are confronted all too often with many challenges and at times unsure which way to turn—which direction may lead us on the path we wish to go. Learning the craft of acting is a daily commitment. A process of trial and error, starting over, understanding from mistakes, remaining open and honest, renewing one’s self, while sharing with others. Especially in our culture today it is no easy task. Yet, we know in our souls, once we have chosen this journey, there is no turning back.

How then can we glean a way of building on the things we’ve learned?

Paula J Riley, in this insightful and forthright guide, shares with you certain principles she has learned from her life and her teaching experiences that will guide you working on a role as you continue to ask more questions: How we deal with the circumstances and relationships in a playwright’s creation? What does it mean to me personally? What will it mean to the audience? Do I have what it takes to bring this to life?

Paula has skillfully illuminated the route, with common sense and innate wisdom, laying out principles to guide you on your path.

I have been an actor all my life, and I’m constantly at every moment in a state of exploration and discovery. I know if I wish to grow as a person and an artist, I must be willing to suspend disbelief, to give myself completely over to each new experience, much like a child in a playground bursting with imagination.

During my years of studying with Stella Adler, we would probe inside a playwright’s creation, and I would learn how to crack open the world of a play and out would spill a universe. That remains your ultimate task—to dive in and seek out the strongest possibilities you can bring to life on the stage, in film, and television.

Paula’s guide will challenge you, and ultimately lead you further on your path of creativity. Give yourself permission to listen, to open your heart, your mind and soul. Be spontaneous—and above all, be compassionate.

Ronald Rand—Stage and film actor, educator, director, playwright, producer, Founder and Publisher of the newspaper, The Soul of the American Actor, he is also the author of Acting Teachers of America.

INTRODUCTION

Acting in the 20th Century: a point of view by Paula J Riley

The necessity for realism in acting at the beginning of the 20th century became the forward thinking and undertaking of teachers, directors and actors that came out of the Moscow Art Theatre and their move away from 18th and 19th century declarative theatre.

Their influence upon the American theatre community, however, found its way at first through the *Group Theatre* during the post-depression era, with the proliferation of playwrights and artists stimulated by the WPA.

The divide thereafter between the founding members of the *Group Theatre*, Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg, among others, further colored the new attitude of realism as applied by their different approaches. This divide spread throughout theatre communities in the form of many new attempts to counter “realism” and developed into a variance of styles and techniques

All these systems and methods accounted for many aspects of the learning process to enhance the believability within a given performance. Each had its own focus and definitive exercises for the actor to undertake to reach a natural performance. These attempts worked for some, and became the accepted rule for teaching acting for most of the 20th century and even today.

I have formulated a process that I believe gives the actor a starting point to obtain a clear picture of the character at his or her core using visualization and metaphor.

I call this process *The Character Core*.



ORIGINS



Paula J Riley, 2016



Iza Itkin, 1969

I was twenty-three but just a child in heart and mind. My home life had been dysfunctional. It was a broken home with misunderstood relationships, which often led me to precarious situations and bad company. But I recognised a spirit within me ... an angel perhaps that helped carry me through many upheavals and disappointments and which eventually led me to Iza Itkin's door.

Iza was the daughter of David Itkin, a dean at The Goodman School of Drama for 27 years. But Iza wasn't interested in institutional life and in 1940 she came to New York at the age of 17 to find her path in theatre. She directed at such prestigious venues as the Arena Theatre in Washington, D.C and for several television programs such as the *Hallmark Hall of Fame*. When I met her in 1966, she had been coaching actors and was planning to begin a repertory theatre company. Her dream was to construct a stage that served both the playwright and actor and functioned as a character within the play.

Iza had architect Martin Bloom design and build the stage. It was a six-sided construct made from eight geometric movable modules. As Iza instructed, the module configurations could function as an active or quiet presence on the stage floor. They could be arranged in a symmetrical fashion to represent order—or asymmetrical to represent disorder. The forms could represent abstract concepts or states of mind. The stage could reinforce the underlying psychological aspects of the character's intention. In that regard the modules could help define emotional states from isolation and fear to discovery and joy.

Module configuration could represent rooms, houses, islands or stations in life. The modules could be stationary or move throughout the performance. The stage did not use scenery or flats—only actors, lights, costumes and props in an intimate setting thus minimizing the traditional sets, scenery, and scene changes.

We students found this discipline better serving the depth of the writer's intentions and the essentials of performance—the heart, mind and spirit of the piece. The outcome was an honest organic production as the actors took the audience on a journey, at once personal, revealing and entertaining. This focus allowed the actors no place to hide (so to speak) and offered the audience the opportunity to employ their imaginations and become an active participant in the production.

Iza housed this stage in her large apartment on 57th street in 1968. I became a charter member of her first group of actors, under the name—*The Chamber Theatre*.

And what a space it was. The living room alone was 33' x 25'. The rest of the house rounded out to a total of 1,500 square feet.

Her classes provided long hours in the art of improvisation, which led me to a deeper understanding of the intricacies of acting. Working with a closely-knit group of actors for an extended period of time gave me greater insight into the group dynamic. This had a profound influence upon how I would later teach.

Classes were conducted daily along with the required individual private sessions. Iza deemed it important for us to discover our true selves and deal with any personal issues that may get in the way of our craft.

Iza worked us long and hard on the often dreaded “improvisation”. Dreaded because we worked without a parachute, only armed with our curiosity and daring. It took a while but strength and trust began to grow, fear subsided and the actions we chose as actors became more conscious and profound.

We worked on many classical pieces by the greats; Strindberg, Ibsen, Pirandello, among others, and produced our first showcase of Eugene O’Neil’s “*Morning Becomes Electra*”.

In those years I learned much—life lessons as well as creative ones. Iza had found in me the perfect student. I was mesmerized and devoted. By osmosis I gathered information through every pore in my body. Because there was so much to inhale I became needy for approval. My devotion became an obsession.

Obsession can be a bad thing. I realized years later that I was serving Iza as my master, rather than serving the art of acting.

However, long after my initial exploits, both in theatre and in life, I was able to put it all together. When I reflect on those early years and after I began working as an acting coach, I realized why I’d depended upon Iza so much. She offered few signposts to mark a trail that the actor could readily follow without needing assistance or further guidance. Yes, daily practice with our learned tools made for a deeper performance. But not sufficient enough to inform and sustain an actor’s confidence. Ultimately her students needed a more definitive structure.

However, after all this work and effort, the reality was that we were a not-for-profit with a performance space that could only seat a small audience of 25 people. And we were housed, however beautifully, within an apartment building. The problem became exposure and a means of continued support. Grants at that time were not as available and the money Iza depended upon (mostly from her students) was surely not enough. Things began to crumble around 1971 soon after Iza’s father passed away and some of her charter students began to leave.

Iza was forced to vacate the apartment. I was asked to stay on to help with finances and human support. This was a time of great distress. I remember when the landlord's minions came to examine Iza's possessions in exchange for rent. They were like vultures picking through her goods and offering her little in exchange. One could say this came about because of a rather extravagant life style. Iza needed much to comfort the pain in her life. As a sympathetic observer I wouldn't judge the circumstances which led to her plight.

After the move from 57th street, Iza went through a series of medical difficulties and ended up in St. Vincent's Hospital with bleeding ulcers. I saw her through recovery and helped her settle into a small carriage house on West 23rd Street. Her stage was stacked up in a small corner of her living room and totally unusable.

She eventually moved into a larger space in Chelsea which could contain the entire stage. Ever the determined person she began again teaching new students on the stage until she died in 1993. The stage was eventually destroyed.

I wrote this poem for her memorial.

DEDICATION TO A STAGE

*The Inception, once there in the heart of the dreamer
Transported by words, to the mind of the listener
Soon bloomed into life, by the hands of the builder
Then sprang into use, by the breath of the player
The Conception, a stage made of simple material
Which traveled through life, on the faith of the dreamer
Yet remains in the minds and the hearts of the chosen
Well might again rise, as so oft spoke the dreamer
Like a phoenix, from ashes, to continue the spiral
As was first its intention, for the dreamers and players
This Spiral of wood and of flesh, that's eternal.*

During the period that followed my time with Iza, I married and divorced, acted in a few plays and sang in several nightclub acts . I returned to college for interior design, looking for the part of me I was destined to become.

Another part of me embraced writing and led to classes at the New School. I wrote a play, and then another—as well as many short stories and poems.

I became active in a neighborhood theatre company and directed a couple of productions. But life was hard financially and I had to take in roomers. A friend of mine who worked for a popular modeling agency recommended me to house young out- of-town models and their mothers. “Models and Moms” I called it. I also worked as a bartender which supplemented my income but also made it too tempting to have “just another drink” before I went home. I had a monkey on my back but didn't address it.

Many years later I was able to return to acting, directing and teaching full time. Income from classes allowed me to concentrate on my plan to rebuild Iza's stage. It was my goal to use the stage as part of my teaching process and to find a permanent home.

I wanted to build the stage in a sustainable way and become one of the first "Green" theatrical performance spaces in New York City.

I would achieve this with the ability to stage all our productions on a new environmentally-friendly modular stage made of recycled materials. By not having the waste associated with set load-ins and load-outs, we could function in a controlled environment. We could dictate what comes into our space, which would be green-optimized from the ground floor up. We intended the theatre to serve as a model as and a source of information on sustainable practices to aide other theatrical organizations that may build and operate in this manner.

The stage would accommodate readings, musical performances, cabaret, oratory, dance and movement productions, as well as to serve as a teaching platform for seminars and symposiums.

Another important elements was to introduce "essential theatre" both to the general public at an affordable price and to have a specific department which conducts educational outreach for public and high school students.

I was prepared to carry on the tradition of this sustainable poetic construct which I now called "The Spiral."

Since the stage is a synthesis of the free organic and the structured geometric working on this stage helped me create an organic teaching process that insures the actor/student the most nuanced, and unself-conscious performance as possible. I call this process the *Primary Principles of Acting*.

I believe the Spiral stage will fit the necessity of the theatrical form to fit the needs of the modern audience. Interaction and active participation are the key ingredients in a kind of theatre that will entertain, educate and exult the human spirit.



TEACHINGS

PPA

From Scratch To Script Workshop

After many years of acting and directing I began to coach. I discovered that many of the actors I worked with, both professional and novice, failed to depend upon a craft and therefore a “path” which they could use constructively. I turned my attentions to reassessing what I’d learned from Iza as well as my professional experiences, and soon had enough students to start a small weekly improvisation class.

The Primary Principles of Acting (PPA) combines Iza’s teachings and the father of organic acting, Constantine Stanislavski while incorporating Michael Chekhov’s physical vitality and my own theatrical experience to date. It stretches the actor’s memory, senses, imagination, physical and mental make-up and further deepens his awareness of life and spirit in a way that enables each individual to master his craft.

I believe in the investment of time and a commitment from the student to develop a process they can adopt and make their own, as well as the confidence in themselves and in the craft. To put forth the PPA process I developed a series of classes and workshops I called *From Scratch To Script*.

All the *From Scratch To Script* workshops begin with a review of the PPA process. Improvisations are practiced before applying them to script so when the playwright’s words enter the picture, an actor transcends the written page using his craft—therefore bringing the words “to life.”

During the course of a workshop I was approached by two of my students who felt the process should reach a wider audience. When I told them of my idea to resurrect the Spiral stage they enthusiastically jumped on board:

“Having experienced several techniques and philosophies through various acting schools, it was blatantly obvious to me that what Paula offered through her Primary Principles of Acting was a very unique approach to the standard methodologies of teaching acting. She offers a freedom of individual expression that is guided by her very skilled and caring hands that inspires students and helps us to evolve as actors, and more profoundly positively effects us in our daily lives and in our relationships. In addition, she inspires and creates a safe and caring environment where students feel available to share themselves so profound breakthroughs can occur. This is why Michael and I want to support Paula in her dream to create a home for her work so that it will continue to be shared and experienced by as many people and generations of actors as possible—Ed Smith

Thus the wheels were set in motion to re-create the physical stage that *The Chamber Theatre Repertory* used to stage their productions





I hope the PPA process and the Spiral stage concept will survive after me. I believe the actor will benefit from learning how to act organically on this floating stage.

I now know it was my intuition that gave me a sense of others, a perception that has grown and helped me “know” through feelings as well as intellect. This was a great factor in my choosing a career in which I could gratefully apply this gift. And so it seemed clear and natural for me to coach, teach and direct as well as act.



Today I have riches no amount of money can replace. I teach with passion and believe in the truth that acting is a privilege and a responsibility the actor has toward himself, his craft and his community.

Part of that privilege is being able to share the whys and wherefores of my life and my profession, the essentials of which offer confirmation of purpose for the student as well as clarity I offer through this technique.



I'm hoping all who read this guide will use it to discover themselves and their chosen profession as an actor.



The Chamber Theatre Stage, 1969

PPA OVERVIEW

An actor deals with his entire instrument; his senses, memory, imagination, physical and mental make-up and spirit. If the actor does not invest in self-awareness and undertake a disciplined craft, he can only create a thin rendering of any character he interprets and also risks emotional blockage.

Thus, however insignificant a character may appear, it should always be addressed as a “whole” being. Playing a character necessitates an understanding of, and an empathy for, said character. If you can’t get “under the skin of” a character, you are merely drawing a sketch rather than a finished portrait. There are many signals that help lead the actor toward creating an inner and outer structure.

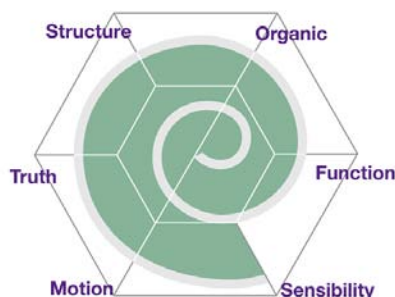
Not unlike a sculptor who begins with a slab of indefinable clay, so the actor begins his description by using materials designed to create a character.

PPA is a clarification and application of these materials. PPA teaches an actor to deal with his entire instrument and encourages the actor to develop the use of stimuli by acquainting him with his internal and external instrument. This enables the actor to choose and apply such stimuli by rote—beat by beat. The result guarantees the actor an organic performance and enhances the actor’s sense of truth on stage.

The *From Scratch to Script Workshop* was created to apply the PPA process to scene work which is then presented to an audience including industry. There is a Q&A that follows each performance and the opportunity to network with these generous auditors, who offer their time and energy by attending by attending the final workshop presentation.



The Spiral concept is a synthesis of the free organic and the structured geometric. Just as the stage is based on the six-sided hexagon, the PPA process can be summarized in six tenets.



PPA OVERVIEW continued



CONNECTING

There is an art in studying human behavior and should become a daily activity for any serious actor. When you watch a movie or go to theatre to see a play, it's the connection between you and the character that makes your experience conceivable. It is the actor's job than to convince the audience of the character's truth—that which motivates him and gives him intentions to achieve throughout the play.



All of the exercises below provide a means for the actor to find and make the truth of his/her character real for himself. You cannot expect an audience to accept your truth if you do not. Remember this is an exercise the actor chooses—he does not become the character but rather induces the desires and actions a character chooses through craft.



The PPA process is a twice a week, three-hour workshop and incorporates the following, exercises and improvisation:

BEHIND THE DOOR

Visualization, imagination and story telling

SPEAK THE INTENTION

Action with only a phrase.



WHENCE THEY CAME

A living bio.

PHYSICAL Demeanor OF CHARACTER

Where does the character live in the body?



SILENCE PLEASE

Improvising without words.

CHILDREN AT PLAY

Baby walk and Sandbox.

SEEING IN THE DARK

Reading lines with eyes closed.

MAKING IT REAL—ONE SENSE AT A TIME

Using only one sense-at-a-time in a scene.

ARGUE YOUR CASE

Defending your side of the story.

PPA EXERCISES

BEHIND THE DOOR



This exercise is devoted to heightening both the imagination and the senses.

The procedure is to lay face up on the floor with eyes closed allowing your body to sink into the floor in a very relaxed position. Students are instructed to breath in through the nose deeply and exhale through the mouth, blowing out every drop of air in the lungs. This should be done ten times, during which one begins the actual visualization exercise.



The instructor asks the class to imagine they are like Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*, and having just landed upon the ground in an unknown place, they approach a door which leads out to a scenario which they are asked to experience through what they *see, hear, touch, smell* and *taste*.



They have 2 minutes to explore this territory. Specific themes may be given to the class as to where they are, such as:

Heaven

Hell

Purgatory

Where you see yourself in 5 years

A time of joy in your childhood

A time remembered that changed your life forever

An embarrassing moment

An exhilarating moment



When working on a specific character, the exercise would apply to the following:

Your first meeting with the other character in the scene (if not written in the play)

Your character's early years

What happens to your character once the play end?

A time in your character's life that made them "who they've become".

The student *must* experience this scenario through his senses. After the visualization, the instructor asks each actor to describe their experience. The actor should describe what he/she saw, heard, smelled, tasted and touched. The result should trigger a feeling which the actor then recognizes and can use as a the well known and practiced "sense memory" at any time throughout the play, as needed.

PPA EXERCISES continued



SPEAK THE INTENTION

In life a person doesn't depend upon a "script" to express his moment-to-moment desires. But as an actor, we are required to use words that we must speak truthfully and as if we are uttering them for the first time. How is this accomplished?

To find the path toward what necessitates a specific dialogue that is spoken by an actor, we follow the "underbelly" or context of those words.



In this exercise, we do not use *any* words throughout the improvisation except for the phrase that depicts the "intention" the actor has in a given scene.

For instance, if one's intention is, "to seduce a competitor's secretary", one must create a phrase that sums up that intention such as: "I shall make you ache with desire for me".



Then *only* using that phrase, the actors improvise their scene and use the phrase *only* when it is necessary to express through words.

The result of this exercise is that the actor discovers the importance of the "context" and how to both respect the words a writer writes and make every one meaningful.



WHENCE THEY CAME

Most well written plays imply that a character has a "before" life which leads up to the moment they appear on stage.

That's why a written biography of the character's life becomes such a useful tool in your interpretation of a character. Here is where an actor uncovers and applies pertinent information about the motives and behavior of the character, which appear as "nuance".

Nuance is the shading given to a character, just like an artist's charcoal sketch. Each degree of shading brings out certain features and creating depth in a face. The actor applies his "sketch" of an active, moving, talking person while adding dimension and mystery to that interpretation. The sketch serves as a unique interpretation, and each actor will discover and apply their own personal interpretations, even though many actors may perform the very same part.

Once an actor reads the play several times and become acquainted with the circumstances of the "written" life of the character, he is instructed to prepare a "before" life. This guarantees depth and meaning to each performance, with varying colors coming through and new discoveries every time the actor renders his part.

PPA EXERCISES continued

PHYSICAL Demeanor of Character

(where does the character live in the body?)

Just as we have given a past to the character in the “before” life bio, so too must we give the character an acquired “quality” or “characteristic”. This quality lives within the character and is exhibited through a particular physical expression, a particular distinction that makes them “them”. Discovering what “them” might become is a fun and challenging choice for the actor.

For example: a person who is beaten down or experiences abuse might have a slight curve or rounding of the shoulders.

A person who is in constant need of attention, might interrupt conversations and not actually listen to what people say.



Someone who is suspicious or paranoid may find tension in their mouth, chin or posture because they always anticipate the worst.

Someone who is shy or even sociopathic might not be able to look people in the eyes.

If a character suffers from low back problems the actor may search for a particular way the character walks or sits.



Another character may be an overly anxious worrier, so the actor could feel the tension in a certain part of his body, which “acts up” in response to fear or stress. These could manifest itself in neck-straining, eye blinking or stuttering, etc. He might constantly rub his “sweaty” palms on his pants.



The student is instructed to find, experience and practice these traits within an improvisation.

SILENCE PLEASE (improvising without words)

In the time of silent movies, the audience was treated to a symbiosis of music and vision and the actors were forced to exaggerate their actions instead of using audible words.

The advancements in both acting skills and technology have demanded a greater sense of truth from the actor. *Silence Please* once again removes the words from an improvisation, asking the actor to speak through action as opposed to verbal expression.

This helps produce a greater dependency (but not an exaggerated one) upon how the character carries out their motive or intention throughout the scene. The challenge here is to subtly convey their story, through facial expression, movement, responses, and senses.



PPA EXERCISES continued



CHILDREN AT PLAY (baby walk and sandbox)

Ideally, actors are children at play. To get them involved on the level of babies taking their first steps or six-year-olds playing with their peers, accomplishes several things:

- Reduces self-consciousness and tension
- Let's imagination flourish
- Encourages a sense of self
- Helps create a group dynamic



I ask the actors to line up on one side of the room. And one by one they must get to the other side taking their first baby steps. The results are a wonderful reminder to student and teacher how much joy there used to be in our lives over the simplest of chores.



Then the students all sit in an imagined sand box with only one shovel between them and they must all get their pails filled with sand within a minute...Enough said.



PPA reveals the way people perceive themselves (and therefore how the world sees them). These exercises tend to strip away a natural negative tendency that invariably blocks the actor at work.

SEEING IN THE DARK (reading lines with eyes closed)

Place two chairs back to back with the seated actors reciting their lines with closed eyes. This way of speaking the dialogue forces the actors to use their ears to listen more intensely and their imagination to see the action.



This results in a greater need for the actor to convey what his character wants and his response in getting it.

MAKING IT REAL—ONE SENSE AT A TIME

The actor is instructed to review the scene by using only one sense at a time. Start by using only your sense of sight, then only using your sense of hearing, then only using your sense of touch and finally only using your sense of smell or taste.

Again this heightens the actors awareness of “how” he responds and he can re-use these triggers to attain a particular reaction on stage.

PPA EXERCISES continued

ARGUE YOUR CASE (defending your side of the story)



This is an exercise in which two characters stand opposite each other, while keeping their feet planted and with constant eye contact. One tries to convince the other to give them what the character needs or wants only through persuasive dialogue.



The actors can use the actual dialogue from the play. Or they can pick a topic, one actor takes a pro-gun control stance while another actor takes an anti-gun stance for instance. Or the actors can use the *Speak The Intention* to use as the persuading words.

This creates focus, reaction and sharpens the actors' tools of seeing and listening.



NOTE: As the guide was very much "in progress" there was to be explanations to the 10 additional exercises listed below.
Steve Hill 6-28-2018



- INVOKING: VOLUNTARY (Internal and therefore *chosen* by the actor)
- PROVOKING: INVOLUNTARY (External stimuli which solicits a *reaction* from the actor, or other actor's, scenery, etc.) The results of which is the *how we react*, and which is always *involuntary*.



- IMAGINATION: The Magic IF
- SUBSTITUTION: Replacing known people as reference
- MEMORY: RECALL + IMAGINATION
- Turning your senses into TENTACLES
- Using VISION as THOUGHT
- SCULPTING your character from the INSIDE OUT
- LETTING GO OF EXPECTATIONS—so you can just REACT
- EMBRACING (Trust, exploration and comprehension — so passion will inevitably follow)

IMPROVISATION

NOTE: A main component of Paula's teaching was her improvisation exercise. This comprised 50% of class time. I took Paula's classes many times and would partake in this exercise. At the risk of not getting it 100% accurate, I will try and explain the process here. *Steve J. Hill 6-28-2018*

Two members of the class are chosen. In secret to each other and to the rest of the class the student/actors are given a character to play. The teacher and or the student offer a scenario and an intention to their character.

Then the two student actors confront each other and start an interaction through improvisation. The goal of each student is to get their characters goals met (the intention) by having it addressed or acknowledged by the other member. Thus a ready made conflict of interest.



An example of an intention might be:

- The student's character was just released from prison and must convince the other student's character that he is worthy of being hired at their business.
- The student's character is about to get married but is having second thoughts because he/she is in love with the other student's character.
- The student's character has seen the other actor's character's spouse cheat with another person and is at odds as to whether to spill the beans.
- The student's character is extremely happy after a good health report, but wants to keep it secret from the other student.
- The student's character is extremely sad because of a bad health report, but wants to keep it secret from the other student.



The trick is for the student/actor to be fully aware of the other student's actions and must *hear* and *react* to their words as any actor must do...but at the same time be persistent and find a way to get their intention met and recognized by the other student/actor.



The student/actor's intention must never be spelled out in an obvious way. If the goal of one student/actor is to make the other student/actor fall in love with them he or she can't say "I want you to fall in love with me." The actor uses actions, body language, props as well as words to get their intention met.



Since their goals are at odds with each other it's quite possible to go down rabbit holes or for dialogue to get off-track and actors to get "stuck". But the goal is to accept the reality offered by your partner— but to make your reality more important and your needs met.

I'm sure I'm not explaining this correctly, and I'm not sure that I ever "got it"—but it did make for some interesting and dramatic confrontations and stretched your imagination and your ability to think and act on your feet. *SJH*

THE CHARACTER CORE—CHART 1

I remember a game that I played with Iza Itkin's Repertory Company every summer on Fire Island. It was a word game that described a person using only inanimate objects. We called it *If I Were*. This is how you play it:

Several people (preferably who know each other well) sit around a table and one person leaves the room. It is then decided by everyone who they will "describe". It could be anyone or even the person now out of the room.

The person returns and asks questions (like 21) but can only refer to inanimate objects to reach their conclusion: (e.g. If he/she were a waterway, what kind would they be?, Or if he/she were a piece of furniture what would they be?)

This parlor game led me to devise the *Character Core*, which I think is a necessary and insightful tool used at the beginning investigation of a character. This can be used in a classroom, waiting your turn at an audition, at readings, scene study and any involvement with characterization.

While working with actors on how to best understand the *Character Core*, I found visualization a natural tool to expedite getting to the core of the character —like the visual map in *Beyond the Door*.

I believe it is necessary to create a precise metaphor, which allows the actor to connect—through his imagination, his senses and his innate comprehension—that which produces an instant and profound organic result, using less words.

I chose a common device—the wheel—with an outer circle and spokes.

One arrives at the center to place the ultimate "essence", or the core of the character's existence.

Then one needs to establish an "outside" and an "inside" of the character, in order to create a "whole" vision.

One begins with the "outer personality" which the spokes reflects. One uses adjectives to best describe how a person (character) might appear to the outside world. (e.g. shy, humorless, eager, charming, sexual, etc.) Then one has to create a means of describing an inner nature, the place inside us all where the "we" exists. Try describing this without the usual and often tiresome analytical protocol.

I listed several possible kinds of comparatives but anybody wanting to add their own category can do so.

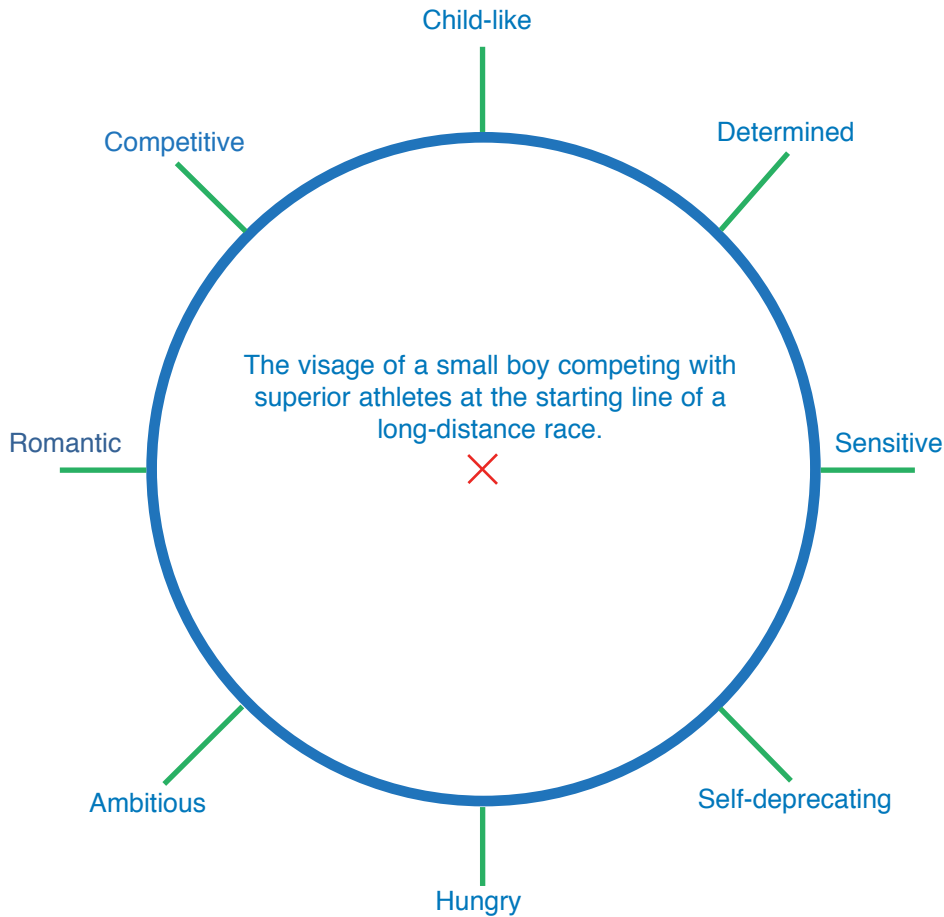
Once you've answered all the questions you close your eyes and meditate for an instant, reviewing just the answers in your head of all the descriptions. It's almost impossible not to come up with some image or metaphor.

On the following page is the chart that I use with an example of an actor's conclusion after completing this exercise for Joe Bonaparte from *Golden Boy* by Clifford Odets. >>

Character Core Chart Sample

This sample chart is from one student's study of Joe Bonaparte from *Golden Boy* by Clifford Odets.

Step 1-The Outer Personality: This step describes the **outer personality** of a given character. Each spoke represents a personality trait which is signified by an adjective. For example: shy, eager, intellectual, passive, caring, quirky, etc. It reflects how the outside world, (other people) see this character.



Step 2-The Inner Nature: Fill in the words which best describe the characters **inner nature**. Think "Out of the Box". For example: question 1's inner nature might be described as a Tsunami—if they are suddenly violent or all-consuming. Another may be described as a drip in the sink—suggesting their inner nature to be boring or uninteresting. Yet another might be a gentle summer shower—if their inner nature was sweet and warm.

1. What form of water would best represent my inner nature.

A dam with a crack, ready to burst.

2. What kind of furniture would best represent my inner nature.

A fragile, Porcelain vase.

3. What kind of fruit would best represent my inner nature.

A young grapevine—reaching toward the sky.

4. What kind of music would best represent my inner nature.

A Mozart Concerto.

5. What kind of animal would best represent my inner nature.

A joey kangaroo—wearing boxing gloves.

6. What room in a house would best represent my inner nature.

A quiet part of an attic.

7. What kind of season would best represent my inner nature.

The first day of May—with the promise of Summer.

8. What era would best represent my inner nature.

The Renaissance.

Step 3-The Core: By combining the **Outer Personality** and the **Inner Nature** of the character you will arrive at the **The Character's Core**. Review all of the answers and arrive at a visual metaphor, image or phrase that best depicts the character's truest self. (This works best if you can close your eyes and have someone read the answers back to you.) Examples of metaphors: a feather in the wind, a grazing cow, a destructive hurricane, a child holding up the world, etc. You should now have the "Spine" of the character, the place from which you begin your character development. Place your answer above the center red X.

CHARACTER SUBSTANCE—CHART 2

In order to better know the character you're playing, it is helpful to research and answer what the character says, does, and what others say about the character. This measure of comparisons gives the actor a clear idea of the simplicity or complexity of said character. And it reveals the contradictions that often make a character interesting.

THE 5 W's—WHO WHAT, WHY, WHERE, WHEN

This method you can use for cold reading, auditions, side readings, scene work or anything that depends on character analysis.

- You must first ask the obvious: *Who* is the character I'm portraying?
- Then *What* does the character *Want*?
- Then you must understand *Why* the character wants it?
- Next comes *Where* and *When* which might have literal answers (e.g. a church, at home, in a cab, in present time, in the near future, the past, 5 minutes from now etc.)

What we are looking for is not so much the “literal” truth but the “emotional” truth.

So in the above an emotional truth might be: *Where?*— In a church in which I can finally confess my sins; at home for the first time after being imprisoned for many years; riding in a cap towards the love of my life who just said they would marry me.

Everything that happens on stage has a reason and therefore is influenced by an emotional trigger. The more you investigate the “whys” and “wherefores” of any characters journey, the greater the nuances will come to the fore.

The chart makes it easy to indicate these comparatives or contradictions as you are reading a play, scene or monologue and helps you to explore the many colors most well written characters possess.

On the following page is the chart that I use with an example of an actor's conclusion after completing this exercise for Joe Bonaparte from *Golden Boy* by Clifford Odets. >>

Character Substance Sample

This sample chart is from one student's study of Joe Bonaparte from *Golden Boy* by Clifford Odets.

This chart helps you further create the substance of the character by peeling away the proverbial onion. It offers you another view and confirmation of, the many layers of the character. Usually the more complex the character, the greater the contradictions. In question 1 and 3 you can use actual quotes from the play to support what the character says of him/herself or what others say about him. In question 2, you will list some of the character's important actions.

| 1. What I say? | 2. What I do? | 3. What others say about me? |
|---|---|---|
| <p>"When I play music nothing is closed to me. I'm not afraid of people and what they say. There's no war in music. It's not like the streets."</p> <p>"I'm never alone when I play music, that's like saying—I am man, I belong here."</p> | <p>I decide to fight in the ring so I can have all the material things I never had and win the girl as well.</p> <p>I share my deepest passions with Lorna Moon.</p> <p>I try to make Lorna hear the truth and realize that she doesn't love Moody.</p> | <p>"You're a miserable creature. You want your arm in a gelp up to the elbow. You'll take fame so people won't laugh or scorn your face. You'd give your soul for those things. But every time you turn your back your little soul kicks you in the teeth. It don't give in so easy."</p> |

The 5 W's: What, Why, Who, Where & When Sample

1. What do I want?

I want to impress Lorna Moon so I can take her away from Moody, my manager.

2. Why do I want it?

Because she represents the very power that I want to attain.

3. Who do I want it from?

Lorna Moon, whom I am in love with.

4. Where am I?

At a crossroads in my life.

5. When is it?

My chance to show the world what I can do.

The 5 W's underscores the intention of a character in a given scene. It not only answers the obvious, such as time, place atmosphere, etc. but raises the stakes, making it urgent and immediate. Notice there is no "how" that needs answering because the how is always the result of the 5 W's and therefore, ALWAYS spontaneous. This is another way to produce the sense of "Being In The Moment", which is often asked of an actor.