

**EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY PACK**

**WOOF**

**BY ELGAN RHYS**



**DIRECTED BY GETHIN EVANS**

***WOOF WAS STAGED IN SHERMAN'S STUDIO DURING THE SPRING SEASON OF 2019.***

**The following pack provides some production background and context as well as providing you with the tools to answer an exam question on the Actor In Performance.**

**There are both practical and academic questions within this – please be safe when completing the practical exercises.**

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## PRODUCTION CREATIVES

### ELGAN RHYS - WRITER

- Elgan is one of the founders and co-Artistic Director for *Cwmni Pluen*; creating original, bold and relevant theatre that offers a vital platform to voices within our society.
- He has devised, co-written and performed in *Mags*, *Ti.Me*, *Llais/Voice* (Cwmni Pluen) and *Follow Me/Dilyn Fi* (Frân Wen).
- For S4C/It's My shout he wrote *Fi a Miss World*.
- As well as writing he has also worked as a director including work for Sherman Theatre (*The Magic Porridge Pot/Hud y Crochan Uwd*), Canoe Theatre (*Blue/Orange*), University of South Wales (*Woyzeck* and *Dan Y Wenallt/Under Milk Wood*)
- His Assistant Director credits include *BIRD* (Sherman Theatre & Manchester Royal Exchange), *Yuri* (August 012), and *After The End* (Dirty Protest).
- Elgan is an Associate Artist for Frân Wen, and lectures on the BA (Hons) Drama a Theatr at University of South Wales.



### GETHIN EVANS – DIRECTOR



- Gethin is the other half of the founding and co-Artistic Directorship of *Cwmni Pluen*.
- For Cwmni Pluen he has directed *Mags*, *Ti.Me*, *Llais/Voice*.
- Other directing credits include *The Last Ambulance* (Sherman Theatre & RWCMD), *Mr & Mrs Laughton*, *Happy Hour* (Sherman Theatre & Òran Mór). *Us Proclaimed/Clywch Ni* (Mess Up The Mess).
- For Sherman Theatre he worked as Assistant Director on both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Arabian Nights*.
- He worked as Associate Director on *We're Here Because We're Here* for NTW.
- Gethin worked as an Assistant Director on *Pericles* for the National Theatre as well as *Mametz* for NTW and Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru's production of *Dyled Eileen*.

### ELIN STEELE – DESIGNER

- Elin is a set and costume designer, working across dance, theatre, opera, and film.
- She was brought up on the Isle of Anglesey in North Wales, and attended the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama where she studied design for performance.
- She has specialisms in design for dance and period costume.
- Elin's costume work includes *La bohème* for Thurrock's Royal Opera House, *Wolf Hall* for BBC Productions and *Tundra* for National Dance Company Wales.
- She took on the role as production assistant for Theatr Bara Caws, Caernarfon's production of *Ga'i Fod...?*
- Her work as set and costume designer includes *Intimate Apparel* (Caird Theatre) and *Alternative Routes* (National Dance Company Wales).
- She worked as a costume assistant and dresser for Royal Welsh College on productions of *Street Scene* (at Sherman Theatre), *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (at the Richard Burton Theatre) and *Larger Than Life* (at the Shirley Bassey Studio)

**PLOT**Characters**DAF, 28** = Berwyn Pearce**JESSE, 29** = Aled Pedrick

*The play's action opens just before dawn. Daf is alone in Roath Park, Cardiff. He is reflecting upon a major event in his life that has just happened. The action then continues in flashback whilst periodically returning to Daf, still in contemplation in Roath Park.*

*Daf and Jesse meet in a club. This leads to Jesse experiencing sex in a Welsh language dominant environment for the first time.*

*We are taken through the first year of Jesse and Daf's relationship. We see Daf being persuaded by Jesse (through explanations of potential scenarios) to be in an open relationship, snippets of a dinner-date, a continual search for men on Grindr, Jesse meeting Dafs' best friend Carys, a pedalo date on Roath Park lake, meeting Dafs' parents, and celebrating Christmas and the New Year together. Things become uncomfortable at CARYS' engagement party. She keeps referring to a 'trywydd' – path – this makes Jesse feel uneasy, however DAF quietly enjoys the couple's display of 'traditional' romance.*

*The next crisis point comes at Carys' wedding. She angers Daf by insinuating that it is the non-monogamous nature of his relationship with Jesse which has led to their problems.*

*The gloss has gone from the relationship. We begin to look back at the relationship without the rose tinted vision; Daf becomes less engaged in the physical side of their relationship, Jesse scrolls through Grindr alone, they receive an invitation to Carys' baby shower. At Carys' baby shower Daf gets drunk. He loses control of his anger as questions about his and Jesse's relationship become overwhelming. Jesse is mortified. Jesse tells Daf he's fallen in love with someone else. He accuses DAF of being in his own head, and avoiding facing that he wants what Carys has. They decide to go out, attempting to drink and dance their way past their troubles, but the night ends in a blur of drugs and sex at Jesse's flat.*

*Finally, we return to the present. Daf alone in Roath Park. He knows he must face what he has done. At this moment Jesse wakes up alone, undressed, bleeding and in pain all over, unable to remember what happened. Daf arrives and confesses he forced himself on Jesse while he was unconscious. They agree that Daf has to pack his things and leave.*

*As the play draws to a close Jesse hears from his father estranged father, he starts seeing someone new, Jay. After several months, Jesse and Daf agree to meet up in Roath Park. They are happy, almost relieved, to see each other again despite their history. They decide to reject all 'paths' put in front of them and tread their own, without outside pressures.*

## CREATIVES INFLUENCES

We asked Gethin Evans (GE), Elin Steele (ES) and Elgan Rhys (ER) to tell us about their influences in creating this production. We hope that you find these insights and the exercises that follow useful when you are studying of *Woof*. We begin with Gethin's influences as director.

## DIRECTORS PRACTITIONERS

**G.E:** “As a director and storyteller I am interested in bodies in space, without depending on scenography, to tell the story and the actor's journey. *Woof* is ideal for this approach being full of multiple locations and vignettes. There is also a gentle relationship between the audience and performer in *Woof* with some direct address. This play text is an ideal landscape for the use Grotowski's approaches and techniques.”

**Jerzy Marian Grotowski** was born in Rzeszów, Poland in 1933. After the death of his father during World War II, his mother became the major influence in his life and his work, educating him in Hindu and Indian culture. He studied at the *Ludwik Solski Academy of Dramatic Arts* in Kraków and *Russian Academy of Theatre Arts* in Moscow. He taught and directed productions across Europe and America. Ultimately settling in Italy where he established the *Grotowski Workcenter*.



**'Poor Theatre'** was Grotowski's main style, which aimed for clarity of performance through the simple use of staging, lighting, costumes and effects; it was never decorative, it was always functional and placed the focus entirely on the actors. This meant actors were required to place greater emphasis on symbolism and archetypes. His book *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) declared that theatre should not, because it could not, compete against the overwhelming spectacle of film but instead should focus on actors co-creating with spectators. As part of this drive for simplicity and clarity he worked with Jerzy Gurawski who was an architect, rather than a stage designer. They considered the performance space as architectural rather than a place for viewing as you would in traditional theatres.

Grotowski's acting **style and techniques** believe in a search for self-awareness and knowledge. Ultimately he sought performances that invited the spectator to interpret what they see. As such visually physical archetypes were important to him as they were something an audience could recognise and empathise with without the need for shared language; making his theatre successful internationally. Although Grotowski's approach created physical performances he believed that genuine performances come from people learning to look at and listen to each other. This approach is actually quite a Stanislavskian psychophysical technique (both used the phrase 'I don't believe you' with their actors). Like Brecht, Grotowski also used Stanislavski's emotional memory exercises to recreate the feelings associated with a particular memory.

To Grotowski the **voice** was an instrument, which he encouraged the full use of; utilising techniques such as singing, chanting and reciting poetry. Actors also created atmospheric sounds of their world such as mechanics, animals and storms. Grotowski was particularly fascinated by song and its close association with emotions, as well as personal and national identity. Once again he focused on simple techniques that could exert an impact on both the performer and audience regardless of their culture of origin.

**Plastiques** are a Grotowski's technique that begins with the isolation of a body part. For example take the wrist. This should be rotated and flexed; exploring its possible movements. Then the performer should see where and how it leads them through the space – they are following the wrist. This develops into a dialogue with other body parts and eventually a partner; this could be the wall, the floor or an object. It is unplanned, impulsive and responsive – it does not yet have any meaning to the performer. Additionally **Corporeals** take the same principles but with more gymnastic-like movement; impulse becomes action. So a forward roll is completed to escape someone or avoid certain death. The action is performed because there is motivation to do it. Both these techniques develop associations and wake up the imagination.

*“Some words are dead, even though we are still using them. Among such words are show, theatre, audience, etc. But what is alive? Adventure and meeting.”* Grotowski

**G.E:** “In a similar vein to Grotowski, Ruth Zaporah encourages spontaneity and awareness of the body in space through her techniques. These are elements I will use a lot within the rehearsal process. As this is a cast of just two actors we will use physical improvisation to explore their relationship to each other in the space.”

**Ruth Zaporah** is an American practitioner who has developed a methodology called *Action Theatre*. This is an improvisational performance technique, which is defined by its focus on embodied awareness (much like Grotowski's work). Zaporah encourages the use of structures of modern dance and mime in order to develop physical awareness. In *Action Theatre* the mind becomes present through the body. It is the the body's experiencing that informs the content, actions and interactions of the moment being played. For example the experience of the hand, reaching for the glass is as important as reaching for the glass in order to drink from it. This approach allows for the creation of intention simultaneously with action within the moment of performance. This awareness of the link between action and interaction encourages the possibilities of new experiences and connections that are intrinsic to a continually explorative and open performance between performers.





## THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER DIRECTORS

**G.E:** “I am inspired by Stephen Daldry’s playfulness in his productions. It is rooted in character and script. He generates a truly responsive nature in his actors and a clarity of their character’s objectives; allowing for playfulness and the creation of a visceral, live experience.”



**Stephen Daldry** was born in Dorset, the son of a singer and a bank manager, he joined a youth drama group in Taunton, before attending Sheffield University to study English. After university, Daldry spent a year travelling through Italy becoming a clown's apprentice. He has worked at the Crucible Theatre, National Theatre as well as in the West End and on Broadway. He was the artistic director at both London's Gate Theatre and the Royal Court. Daldry’s theatre credits include *Far Away* (also New York Theatre Workshop), *The Kitchen*, *An Inspector Calls* (Royal National Theatre also Broadway and Worldwide), *The Audience*, *Billy Elliot: The Musical* (both also Broadway), and more recently *The Inheritance*. His filmography includes *Billy Elliot*, *The Hours*, *The Reader* and *The Crown Season 1 and 2*. Amongst Daldry’s awards and nominations he is the owner of two Tony Awards, a BAFTA, Golden Globe and an Emmy.

His direction is described as both meticulous and playful. He wants his actors to try to find actions that will release the emotion of a scene. He rehearses a scene in a number of different ways and experiments with how it can be explored, oftentimes using mundane, everyday actions to achieve this. This approach stems from his desire to achieve genuine human connections on stage.

Daldry tries to avoid being boxed into any context. Particularly relevant to *Woof* is that he finds it “...incredibly difficult to box in people's sexuality. If you take a room of people, it seems to me that the sexuality of each individual will always be unique and different with its own particular fantasies and extraordinary depths and apparent strangeness to everyone else.” Despite living with his wife Lucy Sexton (an American performance artist) Daldry was in a 13 year relationship with the set designer Ian MacNeil. He defines himself as gay though, as he says it's easier and people “...don't like the confusion”.

**G.E:** “Amit Lahav is Artistic Director of Gecko and tells stories through a mixture of physical theatre and dance. His work is created through structured, physical improvisations, rooted in exploration of emotion as opposed to narrative, which is something we will explore in *Woof*.”

**Amit Lahav** was born in Israel and grew up in London where he trained at London’s Rose Bruford College in theatre and dance creators such as Lindsay Kemp, David Glass and Stephen Berkoff. His work as a facilitator with street children in South East Asia where the shared language was physical, visual and expressive, rather than spoken nor based in a shared culture that Amit’s style began to develop. Ultimately this is where Gecko’s emphasis on emotion, physicality, metaphor, breath and musicality finds its roots.



Lahav’s unique blend of narrative dance, physical and conventional theatre has made Gecko one of the UK’s most successful international performance exports. The reason they are so successful is that their shows tend not to hammer out a narrative, instead favouring the use of a multitude of snippets of languages, and images to provide enough for the audience to the meaning interpret themselves. As a result Lahav’s shows are always evolving; if a scene begins to become too fixed, then work is be done to allow for interpretation again. This approach translates across multiple cultures and languages, because the meaning is never entirely clear. The form allows for freedom and uncertainty, particularly considered alongside more traditional theatrical forms, which are bound by text and a clearly defined narrative.

**Having read about the influences that Gethin has consider the following:**

In what ways are Stephen Daldry and Amit Lahav similar to Grotowski and Zaporah?

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Describe three stylistic elements that you think would intrigue you in about the performance of *Woof*, based on Gethin’s influences.

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## DESIGNER INFLUENCES

We asked Elin to talk about her process for design as well as the influences she had for this production.

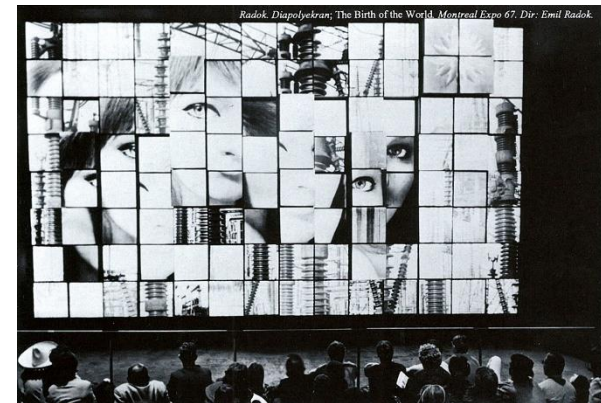
**ES:** “Directors and designers work very closely from an early stage in the process; a designer will be brought on board to help create a world that mirrors and expands upon the director’s vision for the piece. Designs work best when the collaborators really understand and can communicate their ideas. In this case Gethin wanted an **abstract space** that would allow for a lot of interpretation and changes of location. This design was developed alongside an evolving script so it was important that the space would facilitate the action, and have the potential to grow with the production.

We wanted the space to feel sleek and solid, so I looked at a lot of **contemporary urban architecture** and **minimalist interior design**. As such lighting design became very important (as is found in these interiors), particularly utilising lighting hidden within and under elements of the set to create layers, which could be combined or broken to articulate the pace of the play. We chose to use the studio space **in the round** as well as increasing the height of the stage floor, we wanted to the audience to feel that they were separate from the action; defining the boundaries of the playing space was very important. I looked at the architecture of traditional surgical lecture theatres, as well as other venues where crowds are in the round, such as a boxing ring.

As the design developed it became clear we would be relying on very **minimal props and furniture** as the lighting would be intrinsic to defining space. For this reason, it was important to consider how the light would be absorbed or reflected by the space. This led me to a light, textured inner floor for the playing area meant that it would be a versatile surface for lighting different locations and moods. The form and shape of the space was helped by the existing structure of the studio theatre; mirroring the octagonal room gave us clear lines to follow when configuring the relationship between the audience and actors.”

Elin’s design took inspiration from the work of work of scenic designer and theatrical practitioner Josef Svoboda as well as architectural photographer Brad Feinknopf.

**Josef Svoboda** (10 May 1920 – 8 April 2002) was born in Čáslav, Czechoslovakia. He began training as an architect at the *Central School of Housing*, Prague. However World War II put an end to his studies. Following the conflict he became interested in both theatre and design returning to study scenography at the *Prague Conservatory* in addition to architecture at the *Academy of Applied Arts*. Svoboda was the principal designer at the Czech National Theatre for more than 40 years. It was due to his mixed training that Svoboda considered himself a scenographer rather than just a designer; he chose a more architectural and non-naturalistic approach.



Svoboda garnered a reputation as a restless revolutionary and is seen to be responsible for the wider and more creative uses of plastics, hydraulics and lasers into the theatrical world. It was in 1958 that Svoboda created his career defining multimedia installations *Laterna Magika* and *Polyekran* with director Alfred Radok. The shows featured a montage of performers and projections woven into live action and shown against scenic elements. However, this was not decorative. The projections added depth and texture to the scenic elements; sculpting them. *Laterna Magika* featured a three-dimensional pillar of light, but by comparison *Polyekran* featured moving cubes containing projectors that threw images onto their surface. These were living, breathing pieces of art and performance.

In his lifetime Svoboda worked with companies and directors the world over creating over 700 designs. His legacy as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's most influential scenographers is well deserved.

*“When I sit alone in a theatre and gaze into the dark space of its empty stage, I’m frequently seized by fear that this time I won’t manage to penetrate it, and I always hope that this fear will never desert me. Without an unending search for the key to the secret of creativity, there is no creation. It’s necessary always to begin again. And that is beautiful.”* – Josef Svoboda.

**Brad Feinknopf** travels extensively throughout the United States providing architectural photography which has garnered national and international recognition as well as numerous awards. His grandfather and father were both architects and it seemed certain that he would follow the family tradition. However, whilst studying his undergraduate degree in Design & Environmental Analysis from Cornell University, he also took a photography course. He fell in love with the 4"x5" large format photography, which coincidentally was the standard choice for architecture. Due to his upbringing and understanding of architecture he is able to photograph buildings in a way that clearly demonstrate his appreciation for both construction and photography.

Brad enjoys getting into the mind of the architects behind the buildings, and it is imperative for him to understand their design beliefs and their conceptualisation of the building. Despite this collaborative approach to his work he does have his own vision and unique style, which places focus on design aesthetics, as well as the light and the composition of his photography.



**Having read about her process and the influences that Elin has consider the following:**

What connections are there between Elin’s design and Gethin’ s influences?

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Describe three design elements that you expect to see within *Woof*, and what kind of effect they might have on an audience?

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**EXAMINING PRACTICE - 1**

**A quick introduction to becoming awareness of physicality**

*\*Answers to questions in this section should be exclusively about the actor not a character.\**

Start with your feet shoulder width apart.

Simply lift your arms into the air.

*N.B It is essential you do not give yourself a reason to do this.*

Consider how active your body is in this – describe it using the keywords below.

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Now lift your arms like you are reaching for an apple.

Note the difference in your body when you have a “reality” to play.

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Ask someone to watch you and make a list of things that you could be reaching for – ensure that they include positive and negative things that could be involved.

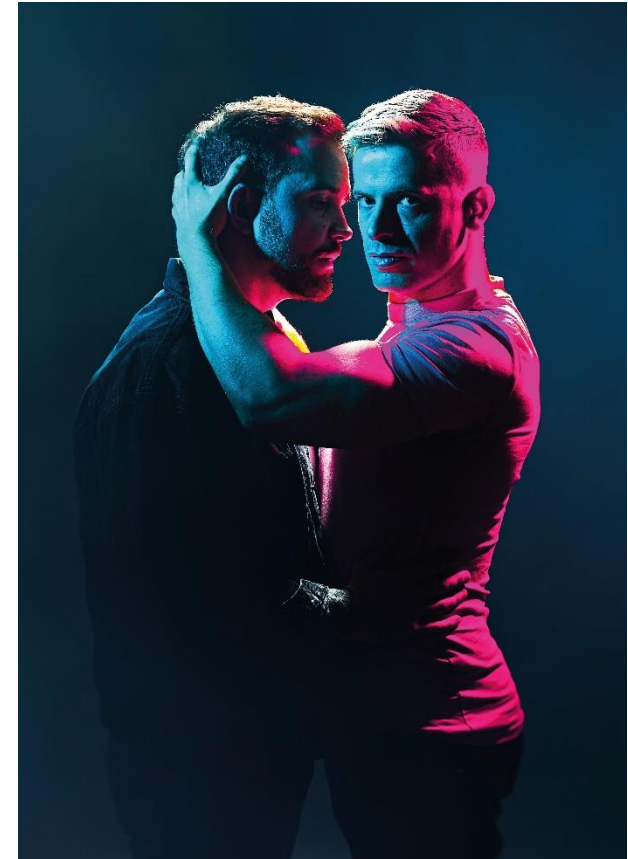
Now repeat the exercise considering these reasons for performing the action.

Consider the following:

What did you notice about your hands when you had a reason? Where did it lead you? Was there anything you felt uncomfortable with?

What did it tell you about yourself? Where did you hold tension in your body? How does it affect the rest of you?

**Stance** – Wide / Narrow **Hips** – Back / Forward / Centred / Left / Right / Sat **Feet** – Planted / Sideways / Spread **Hands** – Open / Fist / Splayed **Arms** – Bent / Straight / Rigid / Relaxed **Chest** – Pushed Out / Collapsed in **Neck / Back** – Arched / Straight **Eye Contact** – Held / Broken **Facial Expression** – Eyebrows / Lips / Forehead **Proxemics** – Audience / Set / Characters



## **EXAMINING PRACTICE – 2**

**Take a look at this exchange from the opening of Gary Owen’s *The Cherry Orchard*.**

In this section we will take a traditional naturalistic text and look at how Grotowski’s approaches might be applied to it.

“ ONE

*The sea. The Atlantic. A moonlit night. Wave after wave after wave crashes against the shore.*

*And then we move. East, inland.*

*A river running to the sea splashes over pebbles.*

*Wind whips between sand dunes, shakes sea grasses.*

*We follow the river off the coast into woodland.*

*The gurgle of water, the creak of branches, the rustle of leaves.*

*Badgers bundle through undergrowth. An owl calls.*

*Out of the forest, onto farmland. Pasture. Sleeping cows snuffle. In the distance, a diesel train flashes past.*

*Across the fields, into a long kitchen garden. Into the kitchen.*

*A broom on a cool tile floor. A half-hummed tune. Crackle of a fire. The tick of a clock.*

*The room tone grows, grows - there's a hazy medium wave radio, the beeps of the Radio 4 time signal and - a living room.*

*ALUN LEWIS fast asleep stretched out on a sofa. Dressed for outdoors. Work boots, up on the arm.*

*DOTTIE comes on, bringing glasses and wine. Walks to a table, busies herself putting out the glasses, opening the wine, putting a tea towel around it.*

DOTTIE: (As she works) Lew, they're coming.

Lewis doesn't respond. ”

### **Thinking about a ‘Style’ for performance.**

Describe how this opening might be realised in performance using the style of Poor Theatre. You may also want to sketch a set design.

What decisions might Grotowski make in regard to staging this?

*Consider both acting and design choices such as symbolism and the use of the actor’s voice.*

How might the actress playing Dottie consider the use of Grotowski’s techniques useful to unlocking her character?

*Consider the elements of her performance that might be relevant to some of the techniques and approaches we have discussed.*



**ANALYSIS OF AN ACTOR IN PERFORMANCE:**

“**JESSE:** Carys is a little bit intense isn't she? ”

Imagine you are playing Jesse how might this be delivered?  
*Refer to your vocal skills vocabulary.*

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What would you be trying to convey to the audience?

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Describe the physical characteristics of one of the characters:

Stance – Wide / Narrow \_\_\_\_\_

Hips – Back / Forward / Centred / Left / Right / Sat \_\_\_\_\_

Feet – Planted / Sideways / Spread \_\_\_\_\_

Hands – Open / Fist / Splayed \_\_\_\_\_

Arms – \_\_\_\_\_

Neck / Back – Arched / Straight \_\_\_\_\_

Eye Contact – Held / Broken \_\_\_\_\_

Facial Expression – Eyebrows / Lips / Forehead \_\_\_\_\_

Proxemics – Audience / Set / Characters \_\_\_\_\_

Consider these questions:

**What feelings or events might provoke this physicality? // Why not try the *Visualisation Physicalisation* exercise on this character?**



Chest – Pushed Out / Collapsed in \_\_\_\_\_



**ANALYSIS OF AN ACTOR IN PERFORMANCE:**

“ **DAF:** Oer. ”

Consider these elements of the performance:

Stance, Hips, Feet, Hands, Arms, Chest, Neck, Eye Contact, Facial Expression

We will now try out Michael Chekhov’s *Visualisation Physicalisation Exercise*. This encourages an actor to inhabit a character’s physicality by first imagining it then stepping into it, and taking it on.

1. Look at the image opposite. Take in as much as possible.
2. Now stand relaxed with your feet shoulder width apart and arms by your side.
3. Look through these instructions and then close your eyes and follow them or ask someone to read these instructions. The important thing here is to take your time.
4. Imagine the character is right in front of you, standing with their back to you.
5. Look down at their feet and slowly track up to the top of their head noting each detail of their physicality as you do.
6. Once you reach the top of the head imagine that they are turning to face you.
7. Observe them in profile from feet to head.
8. Observe them as they face you from feet to head. Take in as much as possible. Now you can see their face note what it looks like.
9. Watch them return to their starting place. Back to you.
10. Now you are going to step into them.
11. Imagine where they are standing has become a giant jigsaw piece into which you will fit your body.
12. Step forward into their body.
13. Push your body physically into them. Taking on their physicality. Stretch and flex your body and face into the space.
14. Now step back out of them and back to your relaxed stance.
15. Open your eyes and feel where the tension in your body is.
16. Why do they hold their tension in that part of their body? // How does it affect the rest of them?



**ANALYSIS OF AN ACTOR IN PERFORMANCE:**



“ **JESSE:** Fi'n hato swans! ”

OR

“ **DAF:** Ond 'dyw swans ddim yn cnoi! ”

Now answer the following question using the skills you have been practicing:

*Choosing either character you can see in this moment. How might the actor playing your chosen character deliver this line? What are they trying to tell the audience? Give reasons for your answer by referring to the actor's physical and vocal skills.*

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(Continue on more pages as required)

**ANALYSIS OF A SCENE IN PERFORMANCE:**

“ Mae sŵn ‘notification’ Grindr.

DAF: ...“sut ma’ pethe efo ti a Jesse?”. Jesse. ”



Imagine you are an actor in this scene how might this line be delivered?

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What might these vocal choices convey to the audience?

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Describe these elements of the performance:

Eye Contact

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Facial Expressions

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Proxemics

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What might these decisions tell the audience about the relationship between the two characters?

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