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Making Theatre for Environmental Communication

**A practical Guide
for Beginners**



Community Creativity **from School to Society**



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union 



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

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Prologue: an introduction

This e-book illustrates some guidelines for theatre-making, with the specific target of school theatre. Starting from a general introduction to theatre, the first chapter describes the different jobs in the field; the second chapter introduces some exercises aimed at building a group, while the third chapter starts investigating creation, from the decision of a topic to the writing of a play. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the work on stage, from directing to playing, and the last chapter is about the final steps that lead to the show.

Chapters are divided into prologue, acts and epilogue in relation to the structure of the traditional theatre play, and there will be references to video clips that can help you understand the execution of some exercises.

1. What is theatre?

What is *theatre*? This is a question nobody is capable of answering with precision. There are several definitions of theatre and several *visions* of theatre. Something we can easily agree upon is that the history of theatre is the history of *theatres*, different forms that settled down on the structure of the society they were born into, playing the role of a mirror.

In the western part of the world, the first forms of theatre, date back about 2500 years ago.

At that time, theatre was made by a group of people dancing, singing and playing.

It used to be a ritual to Dionysus, the god of inebriation, and music – and who became after, god of theatre.

From this nucleus of people moving and singing together – that we can call a *chorus* nowadays – one person came off and started talking to this group of people. Some years later, another character, the *deuteragonist* – the second actor – came out from this group and started talking with the *protagonist*, giving birth to the *dialogue*. A few years later, another

person, the *tritagonist* – the third actor – came to the *skené*¹ to play with the other actors. It was still a ritual – a goat used to be sacrificed before the shows started – but it was also a three-day competition: three poets joined this competition and only one got the award for the best show. The names of the winners are today the Greek poets that we know the most: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides for tragedy, and Aristophanes and Meander for comedy. There was no written text at that time, text was conveyed through spoken word, using the rhythm of poetry. The fact that we know their texts is due to one tyrant of Athens, Lycurgus, who decided to turn the theatre building into a permanent building made with stones and not wooden-built anymore, and at the same time asked to write down the best tragedies and comedies of the most important poets.

All citizens were invited to take part in this event: people who couldn't afford the ticket had the right to the *theorikon*, a public fund that the *polis* used to let the poorest go to festivals and particularly to theatre performances.

This theatre tradition continued and developed in Roman tradition, and got lost right before the Middle Ages when we've lost all traces of theatre-making for ages.

But the need for theatre never got lost.

Theatre started coming back in churches and on the streets. In the first case, to teach poorer classes the episodes of the Bible; in the second case, to laugh at the powerful in a blasphemous carnival.

The *Commedia dell'arte* was born from this form kind of performance. A form of street theatre made with masks and based on improvisation. The actors created characters and performed following a *canovaccio*, a plot "map" that was the base for their improvisations.

The *commedia dell'arte* actors are the ones who started making theatre a *profession*. They got money from their performances, and they went where they could get paid.

That's how theatre people got into kings' palaces.

King's and Queens, nobles and aristocrats loved theatre, and even though street theatre, "popular theatre" continued to live and animate the squares, in the king's and duke's yards the "kings companies" worked and produced the texts that inhabit our historical theatre books - Shakespeare in England, and Molière in France for example.

Year after year, with the rising of the bourgeoisie, the theatre became the building that we know today: a place divided in two, where there is a stage inside a frame, and where the audience sat not only in the front but on several balconies all around. In the so-called

1 Place where the greek actors used to play, different from the orchestra, which was the place of the chorus.

teatro all'italiana, the theatre became a *divertissement* for the aristocracy and upper class and also a fancy occasion for social affairs. It was not only the place where to see but also the place to *be seen*. A sort of old vintage Instagram. That is why it was a common opinion that theatre was a frivolous activity, just like today we may consider watching tv series or going to a club.

During the 19th century, with the industrial revolution, the population growth, the new discoveries, the structure of society deeply changed, and theatre started becoming more complex: a new mode of production emerged, and the new figure of the “director” started making his way, playwrights started becoming more reflective. Society started to split and become more and more individualistic and started losing the sense of community.

Modern psychology was born, scientific discoveries questioned the existence of God, men felt lost and the classical drama started failing.

We can observe this kind of transformation in all artistic fields: the time of reproducing reality was over, and artists wanted to tell their point of view on reality because all certainties were falling apart.

In the 20th century, as in all other artistic fields, artists started wondering what was theatre.

Big artists and directors came out with their own points of view and philosophies on the essence of their artistic field.

This is the time, also, when all the crafts started mixing.

In 1959, Allan Kaprow invented something called happening, where contemporary art suddenly became strictly near to theatre: mixing music, visual art, presence of the bodies and actions.

Theatre was no more the place where the upper class met to have fun, but the place where to question life, existence, politics, and art itself. The audience shouldn't feel consoled by theatre plays, but shocked, involved, and ready to act in the world. Actors were not asked to be “nice players”, but upsetting activists, ready to go to jail for their thoughts and actions.

Theatre came out of that building, not only symbolically, but also physically.

During *Paradise Now*, made by Living Theatre – one of the most important and influential groups of the 20th century, a group that changed theatre radically – after a performance more similar to a ritual, where the barriers between audience and actors went off, where the audience was invited to really join the performance, sometimes led to commit some act of violence, or end up making love on stage with the actors; audience and actors abandoned

the theatre building and went on the street, half-naked, yelling “Theatre is in the street!”.

Theatre research was no more only research about contents, but research about forms.

Theatre has always reflected the social and theological structure of contemporary society; that’s why, in the 20th century, the theatre became something that exploded, with no shape and no certainty.

From that time on, the idea of theatre has become fluid, so we cannot actually refer to one idea of theatre, but several of them. Different companies and different directors had different points of view, and all of them were theatre. A lot of groups were born and with them the idea that theatre was something meant to be done as a community, together.

The 20th century has been the century of experimentations and theoretical research about this topic: what is theatre, and what are the constitutional elements that make theatre what it is.

Did they succeed in this heroic effort? No. They just offered us different ways of thinking and doing theatre.

All along with this sense of community, theatre began getting into schools and school theatre started being a thing. Theatre companies understood the pedagogical potential of theatre-making with students, and from that moment school theatre became a very important field of theatre.

Theatre was the place where to experiment with different ways of being together, of building a group, the place where the people who had more social difficulties could find a way to flourish and make connections, the place where students could question the world and come up with creative propositions to re-invent it.

A pedagogical approach was born also in some directors’ way of working: “pedagogical directors” were those who refused a dictatorial way of directing, where the directors gave orders and actors had a passive role. They believed in the *process* of theatre-making, finding ways how to take out from the actors: characters, interpretation and playwrights. This ap-

2. The pedagogical mission of theatre

proach did get education and theatre closer than ever, and theatre-makers understood how important could be theatre in a *social environment*. Significant theatre experiences grew up in these contexts; teenagers became an artistic resource for theatre work, and school theatre became not only a social activity but an artistic *genre* with its own features.

Teenagers, going through such a meaningful and delicate moment of growth, gave powerful and interesting material to meaningful international projects: the Teatro delle Albe, for example, an Italian theatre company from Ravenna, gave birth to the *non-scuola* – word for word: non-school – a theatre project in schools with teenagers, where it's the artists themselves who are working and playing *thanks* to the presence of teenagers: the principle of their work is based on the concept of *Asininity*:

“Asininity. This is the first item in the Noboalfabeto in which Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari offered glimpses from “A to Z” for an understanding of the non-school, a theatre-teaching experience with adolescents which has nothing to do with academic orthodoxies and is not something that can be theorized without poetic inspiration. Rather it is a jumble of denials and unrepeatable moments; a heretical humility suggested by Giordano Bruno; an art-life grafting action which it is not the case here to say how better or worse than anything else because its features are unique.

The non-school, with its horde of kids “photographed” Mayakovsky style as a “platoon”, is nutriment and contagion for the Teatro delle Albe [...].”²

It is all about *losing* knowledge to acquire another one, to start playing together, a *non-school*, a “heretical” place where there is nothing to teach because you can't *teach* theatre. A place where to invent new words and give another meaning to the ones we know, where to find the happiness of the body, of playing, making mistakes, and being together.

A place where teenagers are the protagonists and essential heart of the artistic creation:

“The non-school puts this secret into relation with adolescents, precisely them, them and no others, those faces, that dialect growled through the teeth, those sighs, that language of gestures, those dreams, those cartoons.”³

The aim is not to make a *nice* show, but to create a fertile ground for life and creativity, for relationship and dialogue, where everyone has the right to be and interact.

Cristina Ventrucci, *La comunità irreparabile. Coro centrifugo e altre amenità asinine*, in Teatro delle Albe, *Suburbia. Molti Ubu in giro per il pianeta. 1998-2008*, Ubulibri, Milano, 2008.

3 <http://www.teatrodellealbe.com/eng/contenuto.php?id=4> (22/06/22)

That's what school theatre should aim to be: a place where students, teenagers, can be *whatever* and where they can discover themselves along others, refusing the usual hierarchy, inventing their own world, the place where they can fail and nobody will judge them in the end, and where that failure will be the essential step in an unknown path.

Theatre always had this *political* vocation, and had always been the place where society could face its problems, where to convey its values, to process transformations. In a famous essay, Victor Turner, a Scottish anthropologist (1923 – 1983) said that theatre was the place where to deal with crises, where society could reflect and understand herself⁴. Just like a mirror, theatre reflected the feelings and the problems of the community using creativity.

Theatre has always had a strong relationship with power; but was it in order to flatter it or in order to criticize it? With the expedient of comedy, theatre people were able to put social problems in a stand, and because of that, they often got censored.

In the 20th century, as we already saw, the theatre was the elected place where to re-discuss society and political problems, and a lot of theatre players went to jail because of their political points of view that they brought in stage⁵.

Some directors from the 20th century also theorized this political use of theatre, giving some directions for theatre to be the place where to convey political messages, like Erwin Piscator – *The Political Theatre* (1929). In a way, this was a more “didactical” point of view: theatre is the stage where to observe life in order to understand some mechanisms and also learn some lessons.

Today, we are asked to work on a political subject such as sustainable tourism and sustainability in general. We are going to analyze better this theme inside the e-book, but the

⁴ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, Paj Publication, New York, 1982.

⁵ The same Living Theatre's shows has been interrupted several times by the police, and their members went to jail for some periods.

3. Political theatre: when you use theatre to say something

first question we need to ask ourselves is: why make a theatre performance and not a conference, a political meeting, or an essay? What does theatre have that these other forms of communication don't?

First of all, theatre is made by people: bodies and feelings I can identify with. This allows me to understand something on a deeper level than the rational one. That means that I have to find a way not to explain my message but to lead the public through a path where there is place for contradiction, conflict, debate and dialogue. Where the world is not divided into bad and good, black and white, but where it is welcomed in all its complexity. Think about the stage not as a place where to judge but where to understand.

actl The company

When we get into a theatre, we are usually welcomed by a person who is supposed to sell us tickets. With our tickets in our hands, we lead to a room full of – usually – red seats, and another person will probably ask us for our seat number and then guide us to find it.

Behind a desk, hidden in the dark, someone will let the lights go down, and someone else backstage, will raise the curtain, and a scene will be discovered. A scene that was designed by a set designer, agreed with a director, built by a carpenter and installed by a group of technicians. Some performers will get on stage. An actor could stand in front of the public, and say some words – written by a playwright – while a dancer dances in the background above the notes of a musician playing. They will probably wear costumes, designed by a costume designer and tailored by a dressmaker. Lights will change – lights designed by a light designer and handled by some technician. When the show ends, we will make a big standing ovation for all the work made by the actors, for sure, but also for all this incredible crew.

When we get out, we suddenly start paying attention to the posters and flyers, with a picture from the show – that a stage photographer did, a curator chose and a social media manager put on Instagram so that we were able to know that there was a show that night! – and above the picture, all the written names of the people who have worked on the performance.

Theatre is made by people, people who do all different kinds of things. Theatre needs all kind of talents and crafts.

The director is usually the one who leads the project, who keeps the company together and has to know what the show needs in order to assign tasks. Many people picture the director as a bad guy, yelling at anybody and demanding his cappuccino

1.1 Director

in rude ways. That's the picture of a *bad* director. Let's start thinking about the director not in terms of *power* but in terms of *responsibility*.

Some theatre shows don't even have a director, a company can also make decisions collectively. That's a very interesting way of working, even though it requires to have a lot of time. A figure like the director was born in order to give unity and coherence to the performance because it can be helpful to rely on a single point of view. The director's job is to be the *first spectator*. Watching from the outside is the only way, sometimes, to have an "objective" feeling about what you're making on stage.

1.2 Playwriter

Playwriters are the people in charge of conceiving the plot, designing the characters and writing the parts.

They can have the text written before starting rehearsals or decide to write it during rehearsals, maybe together with the director. They can decide to write the parts starting from the actors of the company, by drawing the characters based on the actors who will play the role, or write some characters and *then* searching for the perfect actors for the role.

Question: does every theatre show have to have a text?

Of course not.

Are we going to need a playwriter even if we don't want any text in our performance?

It's up to you.

Many theatre shows have no words at all, some of them have just a few.

Theatre is made by *actions*, which need to be organized coherently; theatre is not made *by* text but *with* text.

This is the difference between literature and theatre. In theatre, words are written to be performed, and, on the other hand, not every action is performed by words.

Text in theatre is meant to mean something, to help the audience understand what's going on. Words don't need to *explain*, but to let a character, a moment, an action, *live*. That's why, even in a wordless play, the playwriter can always be useful, to *write* the performance on stage, to hold the structure.

The performer is the most current term to identify those people who *perform* on a stage. They can be actors, dancers, singers, or all those things together. They're asked to be on stage, and be creative and generous. To listen and be open to their partners and colleagues, to think about the needs of the performance and of the company. They have technical skills that they built through years of study, in order to manage their voice, body, emotions and relationships; and thanks to this technical knowledge, they can feel free, explore, make mistakes, be ugly, have fun and play. For all these reasons they need to have good conditions around: the stage must be a safe place, a non-judgmental environment where they can feel welcomed and secure. They need to work harmoniously with the company and be deeply respectful to all the other professionals working around them.

1.3 Performers

Deciding the set of the performance is the job of the set designers. They can choose to design a *realistic* set or a *symbolic* set. It is a matter of aesthetics, of course, but also a matter of budget, most of the time. Theatre is a poor art, and very often theatre-making is a matter of finding creative ways to tell something with a low budget. Hopefully, theatre is made by symbols, we don't need to have a *real* set like in movies, but we may need some *objects*, for example, something that helps the public to understand *where* we are, or *what* we are talking about. The set designer is an artist supposed to figure out what can supply a real set on stage, suggesting time, space or mood. For example: our purpose is to set our performance at the seaside. Of course, we can't have a real seaside on stage. What can substitute the lack of sands and water? Are there any objects that can suggest, possibly in a poetical way, this place? Where can we find it? A set designer's job is to think about the stage and the performance in a *visual* way. Think about the set designer more as a visual artist.

1.4 The set designer

The work of the set designer usually goes along with that of the costume designer. They need to work together to create coherence between the visual parts they're taking care of. Costumes, as sets, can be hyper-realistic or symbolic. More often, depending on time and money, costumes can also be made by some elements. They need to help the public to understand

1.5 The costume designer

something about: the time, space, mood or features of a character. For example, if the characters are going outside and it's winter, they maybe would were a coat or a hat. It may seem easy or intuitive, but costume designers think about all those details that make the play more understandable and convincing.

1.6 Light and Sound designers

Space and time can also be created by lights and sound. Some artists work in empty stages working only with light and sound to create space and time. Lights and sounds can tell stories and help a lot of the public to understand better what's going on, what's the mood of a scene. For example, if we want to set our scene on the seaside, in a melancholic mood, maybe we can put on the sound of waves and some blue lights all around. Immediately, the public will understand all that matters. Theatre

is usually a matter of *synthesis* and *poetry*. Light and sound are two of the most interesting tools in this process.

1.7 Various assistants

Some people can be very interested in making theatre but are not interested in the creative part of the work. Theatre cannot be made without the various assistants who help the director, set, costumes, light and sound designers do their job. Assistant directors, for example, are the ones who handle everything that

the stage needs: organize rehearsals, give the call sheet, take notes, be the intermediary between actors and directors, producers and all the other figures around. Most of the time we think about an assistant as a “secondary role”, but it's not. It's a proper job that requires specific qualities and knowledge as well as organization and accuracy that most people – especially creative ones! – don't have.

1.8 Technicians

Respecting and saying “thank you” to the technicians is one of the golden rules of theatre-making. They're the ones that, in the dark, manage all the technical aspects of our performance. They can be electricians, sound technicians, or prop masters.

They're the ones who set the scene every single time, are supposed to manage lights and sounds during the performance, set lights and manage microphones and music. They make a very precious line of work.

Our show could not even start without a curator and the whole group of people that take care of the organization of a company. They mediate between the company and the theatre; they take care of the whole organization and promotion. They are required to have management skills, social skills, and they need to be good at planning. They can be joined with a social media manager to take care of all the promotional aspects on social media. The success of a play depends largely on the good job of these figures, who need to be creative and find interesting ways to attract new audiences.

1.9 Curators

The Producer is the one who is supposed to give you money to do things. Theatre is also a matter of how much money you have, and not having much can be a boost to finding creative paths to reach content. It's not a given that a rich production can make better plays than a poor one.

1.10 Producer

Peter Brook says that the only thing that you need to make a show is an actor and an empty space. And an audience, of course.

The word "theatre" comes from the Greek verb "to watch". *Theatron* is "the place where to watch". A theatre play cannot exist without an audience, someone who is watching, who is participating in this common ritual. Theatre making is an act of communication, and all acts of communication need an addressee.

1.11 The audience

actII “To play”: how to start

Can you remember when you were a kid and decided to play the heroes who wanted to fight the bad guy, maybe to win the love of a princess, or to erase evil from the world? Do you remember when you played pirates or spies from a movie? You pretended to be someone else, and suddenly your bedroom became a jungle, a spy’s Intelligence headquarter or a castle. And your body, your voice, was no more yours. For the duration of the game, your name changed and so did the world around you.

This is more or less what theatre is. Playing.

First of all, theatre-making is a matter of playing. Just like kids we put ourselves in a fictional situation. What’s the difference between kids playing and actors? The aim. Theatre makers’ aim is to tell something important to somebody. We have already seen that all different kinds of professions are important in theatre-making, and everyone will be able to work in his favourite field at the end, but I suggest that everyone will take part in the practical workshop that will precede the show, for two main reasons: the first is that it is my opinion every different craft involved in theatre works better when they know what does it feel to be on stage; the second one is that it can be a great opportunity for the students to live a new experience.

2.1 What do we need for theatre-making: the body

At the very core of theatre-making, there’s an actor performing in order to communicate something. Performing is a job that requires improvement, body and voice work, but most of all: developing confidence and listening. It’s a job that has to be done *together*, as a group. Even when a performer is alone on stage, he’s never alone. The performer plays with the audience, with the space, with the past. This is a job, and it takes years and years of training, a training that never ends.

Training is preparatory to being on stage: since we're young our body and voice get used to what society expects us to be. Our back may bend under the weight of bags or lean on books every day; our shoulders may close to protect our chest from unwelcome sights, and our voice may become – especially for girls – higher and thinner than it would naturally be; training will help you to find again a neutral position of the body, to make you feel conscious and in control of his possibilities. The body is the performer's instrument when the performer is also the player: just like a guitar player will study for years to know how to play the guitar, performers will have to learn how to play their bodies.

Let's make a game: walk around the room for some minutes, and then stop in a place, standing up. Close your eyes and start observing yourselves. Is one of your feet more forward than another? Is one of our shoulders tallest than the other? Is our back respecting the natural curves of the spine, or there are some curves more prominent than the others?

Make this exercise in couples, now. Walk around the room, normally, and then stop. Try not to change your position. Observe one another. People observing will have to the people observed the asymmetries of their bodies. Was your own perception right or your partner noticed some asymmetries of your body? For the person who is observing: try to communicate those things in a thoughtful and respectful way; for the person who is observed, you have to remember that these adjustments are the way our body tried to face the world around us. There is nothing *wrong* with it.

Now switch sides and repeat the exercise.

Just observe, and practice the very one rule of theatre-making: no judgment.

2.2 How to build a group: some exercise

Theatre is a *group* experience, something we're doing *together*. We can think about a theatre company as a re-making of a small society: it can help us understand how to live together, but with new and utopic rules.

Theatre can be also a different way to know each other, and also to know the students from a different point of view; that's a big opportunity to know each other differently.

The first step to building a group is to create a safe space where there's respect, confidence and no judgment. The students need to know and feel that, unlike during classes, they will not be judged, there is no rating at the end, and that theatre is a place where mistakes are not only welcome but also necessary.

Some exercises that can help you in this process:

1) **Make a circle:** ask everyone to present themselves, even though you may already know each other, saying their name and mentioning something they like and something they don't; you can also ask them to tell what are their expectations from this experience, their dreams and desires.

2) **Make a circle but in a standing position.** One person says his/her name and, in the meanwhile, makes a movement. The following person will have to repeat the name and movement of the previous person and then add his name together with a movement. The next person will have to repeat the two previous names and movements and then add his/hers. The exercise goes on so that the last one will have to reproduce all the movements and names of the others, adding his own. The exercise can go along for different rounds. It stimulates memory and concentration and makes the students move in a funny way. They may feel weird or ridiculous, but that's the point: everybody will have to do that and start playing.

3) A nice exercise to warm up and develop listening, rhythm and observation is called **"the carousel"**. While everybody is in a circle, put on some music; one person comes to the centre of the circle and starts a movement. Everybody has to imitate him/her perfectly, and he/she has to check if everyone got the movement. When everybody has taken the movement, it's time to pass the lead to someone else. Keeping eye contact, the chosen one comes to the centre with the common movement and, always taking care about the others imitating, he/she will have to develop it in an organic way until it turns into something different. When this person has found and settled his/her movement, it's time to pass the lead. Be careful not to make fast changes: you need to make the other people able to follow. It's not about making a complicated or original gesture but making a whole group of people move together.

Clip reference: "The carousel"

Unlike what we may think, acting is not a matter of shining, or talking louder, or outshining the others. Acting is all a matter of listening, being present and co-existing with others. Developing a sense of space and listening are the most important tools for theatre-making.

2.3 Playing: developing confidence and listening

1) **Walking around the space at different speeds.** This is one of the most basic exercises we use to do in theatre. It helps us develop self-awarenesses of our bodies, perception of space and listening to the group. Set 10 degrees of speed where 0 is stillness, 5 is normal walking and 10 is fast running. They will start walking at a medium speed, like 5, and you will have to tell them the numbers in order to change the speed. They need to settle in a common sense of speed of a certain number. Be sure that everyone walks without crossing arms or with their eyes down. That's a form of protection that they can, nicely, start to let go. It is supposed to be a "neutral" walk. So, eyes up, arms down, and walk without dragging the feet. They will have to take care that their presence in the space is balanced: they will have to know where the others are and where the group needs them to balance the space. Think about the space as a *raft*: our job is to prevent the raft to sink.

At a certain point of the exercise, they can start looking each other in the eyes. Be aware of the space and the people occupying it. Suggest them to choose directions so that they're not just walking around randomly, but with a purpose.

2) **Meeting.** During this exercise, they can also start making some meetings. First, they will have to meet a partner – always walking around at changing speeds – and look in the eyes for three seconds. This can seem easy but it's a very intimate and difficult exercise. After this step, we can start giving them more dynamic tasks.

It is interesting when the students get hyperstimulated during this exercise. They finally stop thinking and start really living in their bodies and with the others. A lot of interesting things can come from the tiredness of the body, a body that is not asked to be performative, but that has to find freedom. Then give your students some tasks. For example, they have to cross other people's eyes and give them five while jumping. They can do the same thing by pronouncing out loud at the same time the name of the person they're giving five to. They can crawl together on the floor while keeping eye contact. Give them some steps.

3) **While they're walking, throw them a little ball.** They will have to throw it at one another. Every time the ball falls, everybody has to lie down completely, and cannot get up until everybody is down. Then they need to get up all together, assuming back the speed they were walking on. The rule of balancing space and changing speeds stays. Give them quick changes of speed. They will reach a good mood of playing and will start to have fun and get concentrated.

4) **After they've practised it a couple of times, they can be ready to decide the speed as a group.** You can start asking them to stop and then start *together*. The aim is that it would have to be impossible to say who's the one who takes the lead. Watching from out-

side, I would have to see a whole group slowing down and then stop *at the same time*. Same for starting. At one point, they will have to be able to change speed together independently, as a group.

5) **Confidence.** Developing confidence and trust toward others is not easy, especially for teenagers. While they walk around, ask them to make some *balance* exercises. They can take the other person's arm and, giving the other their own weight, balance themselves back. They can also find different positions, like back-to-back. The interesting part of this exercise is that the other won't fall only if you will give him your weight.

Clip reference: "Walks + Balance".

These are basic exercises that actors still do even after years of career, but it's also a matter of discovering theatre by having fun, discovering our bodies in a unique manner, experiencing something new, some quality of ourselves that is not necessarily improved in everyday life or in a standard school approach.

In theatre-making, especially during this experience, it's important to recognize the interests and talents of everyone. It may be important that the whole class takes part in these exercises, but when it comes to making the performance it's important that everyone will be able to choose what's his interest or talent.

Theatre, as we saw, is a place full of different types of jobs, it's not only about actors. Some students who are passionate about fashion can decide to take care of costumes, some who are talented in organizing can become the curators or assistants, some who are interested in architecture or visual art can think about the scenes and some who want to become electricians can think about all the technical aspects.

Instead, this is also a place where they can experience something else. This can be the chance to encourage them to explore one field or another or to get out of their comfort zone. Theatre can be a safe space to escape everyday life, of course, but also it can be an opportunity to discover talents, interests and future jobs.

2.4 Discovering and supporting the talents and interests of everyone

2.5 Exercise of the week

Let's imagine that your experience will be set into different weeks (you can translate in days, or whatever). I will give you one exercise per week (=step) that you may do as a group.

For the first week, the task is to go to the theatre together.

Find something funny. Not too long, preferably. Choose maybe a musical or something which has rhythm, that students can enjoy; maybe not something that they "should" see, like a classical piece or something linked to the school program. Of course, this can be very interesting, but it happens sometimes that going to the theatre, when in high school, means sometimes boring, maybe made by old actors, and that the students don't even understand. They must start thinking about theatre as something joyful, and beautiful, as something where you can have fun, express your ideas, and get together with other people.

This is an exercise you can repeat every week!

act||| Theatre making

Theatre is an act of communication, so we'd better start with a simple question:

what do we want to talk about?

3.1 The theme: *what*

Answering that question is one of the most difficult and fundamental things to do.

The answer needs to satisfy these questions:

- What's my interest? What is *urgent* for me to talk about?
- How does this have to do with me?
- What does it have to do with the community I am talking to?
- Why now?

The first question can seem quite easy to answer. Find something that is important for you.

But: why do *you* care about it, why does it concern *you*? Picking a hot topic of the month, for example, is not enough. Or if it's the case, try to figure out what is your personal connection with this topic.

Next step: is the topic you care about interesting for the community you are addressing too? Why? Having a *personal* connection with the topic will make your job specific and not generic, but why this thing which is so important to you, should be important to someone else too? It is important not to mix up *private* and *personal*, not to use the stage as my secret diary. Is this how it's supposed to be or should my topic be relevant to someone else too?

Third step: why now? The relationship with the present is crucial for a good theatre show.

For example, my theme is *gender equality*. But *what* inside this huge theme is meaningful to me? Maybe my urgency can come from an article that I read that made me angry and made me think about myself and my peers. Or maybe it can come from a feeling, or fear, that I realize I share with my generation.

Or maybe I am attracted to a really hot topic of the moment, something that is at the centre of public debate. But what specific aspect do you want to talk about? What is your connection, your personal point of view or addition to this topic?

In this case, the topic is given.

Sustainable tourism. But what is interesting for *you* about this topic. There are a lot of nuances inside it: the relationship between humans and nature, the relationship with borders, time, and space. Accessibility and equality, noise, colonialism. It might seem a too specific or technical topic but it contains universal themes that can be brought up: cooperation, environment, the relationship between past and future, and quality of life. In the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS)⁶, there are 27 indicators and 40 optional indicators to monitor and measure the sustainability of the tourism activity, and they are divided into 4 categories: destination management, social and cultural impact, economic value and environmental impact⁷. Sustainable tourism is linked with themes like solidarity, respect for nature, capitalism, greenwashing, and pollution. You have a big field of research and different appeals to your creativity and interest.

You can think about the artistic process as a telescoping movement: from specific to general, from detail to grand view, from personal to universal.

A single, specific story can bring up, and has to be linked to, universal themes as love, poverty, diversity, fear, loneliness, friendship, memory, justice, time, future.

The Brundtland report was the first theoretical text, of 1987, called *Our common future*, that defined sustainable development as a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”⁸.

6 European Tourism Indicators System for sustainable destination management: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators_en (22/06/16).

7 ETIS toolkit in English, French and Italian: <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/21749> (22/06/16).

8 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf> (22/06/16).

Our common future. That could be a good start.

1) **Research;**

Researching and studying are two important steps you can use to clear up your mind. Theatre makers study a lot before starting a new creation. Have a look to everything that has been said, written, or filmed about your topic. It can be helpful and inspirational. If you're a teacher, let your students be the main *actors* of this part.

This is not research linked to acquiring knowledge, they're not asked to be tested for an exam. Of course, if you want to talk about something you'll have to know what is it about, but the aim of this research is to find something interesting for them. Something that can be a fruitful ground for their imagination and creativity. Something they *want* to know more about. This implies that they may not remember by heart some historical data, but, for example, they may learn a lot about what is happening in Tanzania between poaching and sustainable tourism.

Use your intuition to guide you in this research. It would be impossible to know everything about such a big topic, so let's trust our interests and intuition.

2) **Brainstorming;**

Time for free associations. Consider everything that, instantly comes to your mind, and is linked to the main topic. All the students are kindly invited to contribute. There is not a single uninteresting or wrong idea; this is not the time for censoring.

Write it all down. You can use these things as a path towards the studying part.

Sometimes, research around the topic can imply some images, or ideas for the show; stories, moods, pictures.

3) **Collecting material;**

Following the intuitions coming out from the brainstorming, you can start collecting reference material. Films, books, poems, images, videos, speeches, all the material that can be useful for your work.

You can split into groups: each group in a different field will have the task to make research and return, the day after, with some ideas and material to bring to the collective work.

Let's not stop on a theoretical level. Start thinking about the stage.

If, for example, my track is the relationship between human beings and nature, apart from essays and theoretical discourses and contributions I can find, is there some artist out there that worked on this topic before? Whose work is inspirational for me? A photographer, a poet, a musician, a painter.

You can ask your students to come up, not only with the material they found but also with an idea for the scenic project.

4) **Talking and listening:**

Everyone will have the time to reveal the result of their research. Give yourself the time for this exposition, like 10 minutes max for each group. Ask the group to try, if they didn't do it already, to translate the materials and topics into a scenic proposition. It will help them to select and change their point of view: not in a manner of examination but of creative work.

After every group or student has presented their idea, everybody can add or discuss the projects in open and respectful ways. In an open discussion there can be space also for confrontation, but please remember the two fundamental rules of theatre: respect and listening. There is no better idea over another or ideas less valuable than others. There are, just like in life, different points of view and different interests.

5) **Selecting:**

Theatre's dimension is *synthesis*. So now, it's time to decide what is the most interesting thing brought to the table. What is it that interests mostly the students? Sometimes, selecting implies also to ruling out something you may deeply care about, and that's ok. Theatre is a process; nothing is really lost. Sometimes, even after the first brainstorming, the several materials are not that different from each other. The different propositions may end up already in a possible structure of the work: every little contribution may compose your final show.

3.2 Creativity: how

Art makes you free. You may end up telling us a story of long-distance travel in a chariot; you may find some tourist guides with love letters inside. You might invent something utopic or dystopic, something realistic or something fantastic, a comedy or a drama. You can write something new or you can take a story somewhere else; it can be a real story or a fairytale.

You can express your point of view on an aspect of this topic, and invent a funny way to get people to know what sustainable tourism is. Do you think the politics are adequate to the needs? If you have new ideas and propositions, you can use this space to develop and express them.

You can run an investigation, making your performance with interviews, asking people around you what they know about the topic, what's their opinion about it, and what are their experiences.

You can choose a point of view: you can decide to take the point of view of a traveller, of a hotel, of a tour operator, of a government. You can choose to start from the point of view of someone who doesn't agree at all with sustainable tourism.

From one single theme, we can have thousands of different works of art, performances, and micro themes brought up. Starting with the materials and topics you've chosen, what kind of performance can you create?

What does it mean to write for theatre? First of all, as we already said in the first chapter, writing for theatre is not only a matter of text. Also, the text is not the essence of theatre; sometimes, in school programs, theatre is a part of literature, and for a long time, theatre plays and text, in general, have been considered the essence of theatre craft. Today, we assumed that the scene is the real heart of theatre, and text is only a part of it.

3.3 Writing

Dramatic writing implies actions, bodies and *conflict*.

Theatre is based on conflict, and on the presence of different points of view. That's how the dialogue was born.

What's the difference between a conversation and a dialogue? During a conversation, you can also agree with the other, or just discuss and make the thoughts grow. In a dialogue, something has to happen. Two different parts wanting two different things are fighting to obtain something. I'm not necessarily talking about fights, but there must be some obstacles between the desire/aim of the characters and their possibility to reach it.

The same principle must be used in the entire structure of a theatre play.

An example.

Improvisation exercise. Person-1 is on stage, Person-2 is going to come. There is a killer behind the door. Person-2 wants to go to the place behind the door, and Person-1 has to prevent it because otherwise, the killer will kill them. Person-1, also, is forbidden to tell Person-2 that behind the door there is a killer.

An **aim** (Person-2 to go over the door, Person-1 to survive), an **obstacle** (the killer behind the door) that made a **conflict** (Person-2 and Person-1 wanting two different things).

Dramaturgy will be the different strategies Person-1 will find in order to persuade Person-2 not to cross the door.

Lots of playwrights are written following these principles in a fictional context; this is called a *dramatic situation*. There is a plot, there are fictional characters and a fictional space and time. The contemporary theatre has given us the opportunity to create *epic situations*.

What are the differences?

In epic theatre, I don't need a fictional situation. I don't need to pretend to be someone else and talk directly with the audience, telling them stories or doing things that are connected by a principle of coherence but not by a plot. This is a more narrative style, where you can assemble different materials without creating a story made by characters and so on.

The theorist of *epic theatre* is Bertolt Brecht. He defined the differences between dramatic theatre and epic theatre⁹:

⁹ John Willett (ed), *Brecht on theatre: the development of an aesthetic*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1964.

DRAMATIC THEATRE

plot

implicates the spectator in a stage situation

wears down his capacity for action

provides him with sensations

experience

the spectator is involved in something suggestion

instinctive feelings are preserved

the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience

the human being is taken for granted

he is unalterable

eyes on the finish

one scene makes another

growth

linear development

evolutionary determinism

man as a fixed point

thought determines being

feeling

EPIC THEATRE

narrative

turns the spectator into an observer, but

arouses his capacity for action

forces him to take decisions

picture of the world

he is made to face something argument

brought to the point of recognition

the spectator stands outside, studies

the human being is the object of the inquiry

he is alterable and able to alter

eyes on the course

each scene for itself

montage

in curves

jumps

man as a process

social being determines thought

reason

Brecht modifies the traditional drama, in order to stimulate the engagement of the spectator on social topics. He made the spectator an *observer*, he cut out all the plot tricks to make the audience fall into a story, turning the plot into a narration, where the audience knew already where the story was going to end up and could focus on the social dynamics that lead to that end. He believed in a human being capable of changing and using theatre as a tool to provoke transformation and even revolution.

Brecht used also “titles” for the scenes so that the public wouldn’t get too involved in the plot and could think intellectually about the themes he brought up with his plays. He introduced also some songs for the same reason.

That implies also that in epic theatre actors can be conscious of the audience. The *fourth wall*¹⁰ – that for decades characterized dramatic theatre, closing actors and characters into a closed place where they pretended not to be watched – has fallen, and actors can come out from their fictional situation whenever they want, talking to the audiences, explaining parts of the play, singing a song, telling stories, making games or jokes, and developing their thoughts with them.

10 The imaginary wall that separates actors from the audience, so that they can act pretending that nobody is watching.

That's where, also, a specific type of theatre, the *metatheatre* came from. Theatre was no more the place where to hide all the tricks that created delusions, but the place where to think and observe. Watching the mechanisms of theatre-making – making them visible to the audience – became a way to observe the mechanisms that ruled the world and the human relationships.

3.3.1 Music and theatre

Musical theatre is a form of theatre where music, songs and dance are used to convey meaning, emotions and text.

What's the difference between the use of music in *musical theatre* or in *opera* and in *epic theatre*?

In musicals and operas, characters are not conscious of the fact they're singing: they sing as they talk. In epic theatre, songs are tools for the writer to add meanings or for the director, to enrich the play. In this case, actors and characters on stage are conscious of the fact they're singing.

Including music in your performance can be a very interesting choice. Especially if there are musicians, dancers or singers inside the group, it can be fruitful to highlight their talents to enrich the performance with their contributions. In epic theatre, especially, you don't need to find a situation in order to insert a musical scene inside the performance. If, in a dramatic situation, it can be useful to find a "reason" for the use of music (i.e.. the main character loves to play the guitar and starts singing in a bar), in epic situations the mix of crafts is welcome.

3.3.2 Define a structure

Think about the structure of your play as a texture. All the nodes collaborate to make the whole picture: they need to be connected with a certain rhythm, with no holes, or wires that get out. The elements that you chose for your texture need to build up the pattern. A texture that works is the one where you have certain elements that come back, maybe with a variation.

It can be an easy job for a single creator who has to deal only with him/herself, but what happens when it comes to co-creation and collective work?

There are different strategies:

- 1) We discuss all the parts all together. This is a hard and long process. It is a possibility, but it will take a lot of time and it's not granted that the result will be efficient.
- 2) We work all together but give everyone different roles. A group of writers, a group of directors, a group of performers. Everybody follows the qualities associated with their role.
- 3) We split into different groups and each group works on a different part of the play.

This last one can be a fruitful way to create. We can exploit the number of people to save time and at the same time, everybody can feel involved in the process.

Once you defined the structure of your play, you can split into groups to create the different scenes that will compose the performance;

If you split into groups, and every group has a proposition, you can organize it like that:

- 1) Give yourself some time to rehearse and ask the group to come up with a scenic proposition to show to the others.
- 2) At the end of the presentation – the group will have to answer this simple question: what did we see? They will have to describe what happened during the scene and what did they understand about the message. The rule, once again: no judgments. Make an effort to give back to the group what you saw, understood, and felt, in order to help them make their *speech* clearer. Providing them with the type of feedback they can work on. Start from the good things.
- 3) After everyone presented their propositions, it's time to make considerations about the work. Is the structure you imagined going to work? Are there some changes to work on? What are the goals for each scene?

The concept of understanding in theatre is different from the concept of understanding a lecture. You *understand* not only with your brain but with your body-mind. For example, if my performance is a choreography there is nothing that has to be understood by the brain, but it's a speech made of sensations, feelings, and emotions.

Try not to underline in a didactic way the messages you want to transmit.

Here is an example of a didactic mode: I want to tell you something sad, I put a sad song under a sad speech where I explain to you why I am sad.

More often, this way can provoke the exact opposite of your will, becoming comical.

Theatre is a poetic act, it works through details, oppositions, contrasts and layers.

3.4 The cast

When it's time to give roles and define the cast, keep in mind what has been said in Chapter I about respecting and valorizing each talent and interest.

As a teacher, if I notice that some of my students would be good at, or would gain from taking a certain role, I can encourage them to do it. More often, self-confidence and responsibility can come from an act of trust. Students can be surprising when it comes to theatre.

In school theatre is very important not to subvert the social order settled in a class. For example, it would be easy to put the cute guy in the role of the protagonist. Anyway, wouldn't be interesting to ask a girl who is always sitting in the corner, instead? Or to the one who hasn't got the esthetical *physique du role* for the part?

Also, most of the time working with teenagers means utilizing advantageously their skills and talents. If, for example, one of your students plays the cello, that can fit into the show. Or, for example, you may have a class who loves to sing, and then create a musical play.

3.5 Exercise of the week

Ask your students to open a personal archive with images they like or they find beautiful or attractive. Ask them to collect them. At least 20 images. Some of them can be in a media folder, but ask them to collect some also from old publications that they may have at home or at school. They will have to scroll the pages and choose the images they like. Then, if it's possible, crop them, and put them on a wall. You can add new pictures day by day, and also share them on a media folder. This can be the starting point of the mood board of the class.

Try to see if there is something similar to the various pictures of the class, to find a "common" mood. Students can figure out that they have more in common than what they thought.

Clip reference: [Example of project.](#)

actIV Rehearsing: from the text to the stage

Theatre is based on repetition. Rehearsals are the space before the performance dedicated to the creation of the show and to the repetition of the scenes, in order to learn them well – words, highlights, lines, actions, rhythm – and to discover new details and make actions *coherent, organic* and *credible*.

Repetition allows you to go *deeper* into your work. The training we've talked about, for example, teaches you that repetition is something preparatory for actors, and that never ends.

There is not a *good* way to do the exercises, there's a goal and our improvement consists in our effort to reach it. Theatre requires fundamental elements that can always be improved and are never acquired forever. Of course, there's the technique, but things such as *listening* and *presence* are not given once forever.

Also, theatre is based on repetition because it's a one-off. You need to know well the structure inside-out in order to feel free inside. Every day, even if your text and actions are always the same, your performance will be different. The structure will be the same – your partner and technicians will play with you, so you have to stick to the script – but you will be able to discover new things every time, and try to reach a deeper connection with yourself and your partners every time.

That's why we rehearse in theatre. Not only because we have to learn words and actions by heart, but also because those words and actions can start living harmoniously.

4.1 Organizing time

Planning is a very important part of theatre-making. Normally, you don't have infinite time to create, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. Limits are helpful for creativity.

Make an agenda and a program of the activities in order to manage your time correctly.

Give yourself a hypothetical plan of rehearsals. For example, if you have only a week to prepare for your performance, make a schedule.

Monday 25/04/2022	Rehearsal of the 1 st and 2 nd scene	Time:	People needed: -----
Tuesday 26/04/2022	Rehearsal of the 3 rd and 4 th scene	Time:	People needed: -----
Wednesday 27/04/2022	Rehearsal of all the scenes + Objects and costumes	Time:	People needed: -----
Tuesday 28/04/2022	Rehearsal of all the scenes + Lights rehearsal	Time:	People needed: -----
Friday 29/04/2022	1 st Run through with cos- tumes and lights	Time:	People needed: -----
Saturday 30/04/2022	General rehearsal	Time:	People needed: -----
Sunday 01/05/2022	Showtime	Time:	People needed: -----

4.2 Playing

I suggest you to start your rehearsals with training and warm ups for everyone. This will help the sense of group and the improve performing skills of the actors.

Nowadays performers are more often the real creators of the play, especially in collective works. The notion of performer leads us to the contemporary idea of an actor: the actor is no longer the one who gets out of the dressing room to make his unforgettable interpretation, with a sort of divine aura all around. He/she's the one who *performs*, who does everything the play needs. He/she can even do very little things and has to be where it's better for the show.

What is acting?

There are different theories and different methods towards this job.

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, two different ideas of acting were born.

One, issued from Stanislavskij (1863-1938)¹¹, that follows the so-called Stanislavskij Method, is based on identification. This is the most common acting method in filmmaking and it is very famous in the US thanks to Lee Strasberg¹² who brought it into his Actors Studio. We will call it the dramatic actor, very useful for dramatic situations. In the Strasberg version especially, it is a very psychological approach, in which the actor is asked to use his/her own memories and experiences to nourish the character.

A detached idea of an actor implies a bigger consciousness of oneself. We will call it an epical actor, and Bertolt Brecht was one of the theorists of this kind of performer: there is no identification, the performer needs some distance from the character in order to have a critical view of it. This kind of actor is nearer to the most contemporary approaches to the stage. This is a way to present a character, a way of telling a story: it is the same difference between putting on a cloth, and keeping the cloth in our hand. In the first case we become that character, in the second case, we show it, or we don't even need to show. We stand in front of the audience as ourselves. A performer.

4.2.1 Performing

Good performers are the ones who can be wherever the performance needs them. There are no little roles or tasks, every performer contributes in a crucial way to the good success of the show.

¹¹ Konstantin Sergejevich Stanislavski, an important theatre actor and director of the 19th century, writer of *The actor's work on himself*.

¹² Lee Strasberg (1925–1982) actor, director and actor coach, director of the Actor Studio in New York.

Performers must be *energetic*, it is that energy that the audience's attention relies on.

It doesn't mean to play fast or in a rush: a performer can also stand still for the whole duration of the performance and still capture the audience's attention.

Picture the attention of the audience as a ball that must not fall down. The aim of the actor is to hold it and keep it alive.

Make a ball game, like volleyball, before starting rehearsing. In addition to warming up, the students will understand what kind of attention and presence they have to keep during the performance.

Look at their bodies at the exact moment the ball is about to be thrown. They've changed. They're preparing for the game: all their senses are heightened; the muscles are tense.

That's what Eugenio Barba, director of Odine Teatret in Oslo, calls *predrigra*¹³. The condition, common for all performers all around the world, of preparation for the stage.

The performative situation modifies your way of being, talking and walking. This isn't about being caricatural, but that your energy will be addressed to someone else; someone who will have to be able to *understand* what you do and say. Your speech will have to be clear and your movement energetic.

We think that "being spontaneous" is the easiest request from an actor; instead, it is very difficult to be "natural" in front of somebody else eyes – that's why acting is a profession and actors study for years. Sometimes, we can be afraid, when on stage, that the audience will not understand our thoughts, emotions, and actions; so we may start to *overact*.

What's the difference between *doing something* and *pretending to do something*?

Instead of *looking around*, we'll *show* that we're looking around, underlining the actions in a caricatural way.

We will have to find a balance between not being "daily" on stage, and at the same time try not to overact.

I suggest replacing the word "natural" with "credible". That's what you're asked to be when on stage.

This word will help you understand that there is no limit to what you can do on stage. You can do whatever your imagination leads to, but it is important to *believe* in what you're doing, even if it's something surreal or fantastic: the audience will follow you, automatically.

¹³ Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe. A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, Routledge, England/USA, 1995.

4.2.2 Improvisation

Improvisation exercises can be a very useful tool to create. You can use it to create the scenes and also to stimulate creativity and play.

Some exercises:

1) **Split people into groups.** Take some pictures, paintings or something illustrated and observe the positions of the people in it. Otherwise, you just choose 3 or 4 positions (depending on the number of students in each group). Give them some time (20 minutes max) to create a scene that ends up with those positions. Ask them to remember the principles of aim, obstacle and conflict that we saw in the previous chapter.

2) **Ask your students to choose 3 or 4 movements** from the warm-up of the day, especially some from the carousel. Ask them to connect them, like in a sort of choreography. *Movement 1, movement 2, movement 3.* Give them no more than 10 minutes to create a sequence. After that, pick three people: the person in the middle will have to perform the movements, one on the right will have to describe objectively the movements; the person on the left will have to tell a story starting from the movements. So, if the person on the right is describing the person in the centre as *lifting his left arm, shaking his/her head with the eyes closed*, the person on the left will tell that *Sara is stealing some grape when suddenly a bee comes to bite her*. The “captioner” on the right has to be objective on a verbal level, but can express opinions or emotions towards the person in the centre and what will be their relation then?

Will the person in the centre modify his/her movements according to what the other people say?

3) **They will have 5 minutes to prepare this improvisation:** they will have to decide a) the initial situation; b) the accident; and c) the ending. They will decide their characters and the relationship between them. They can start with a theme, like “Grandma’s 100th birthday”.

4.2.3 Warm-up: some examples

Before going on stage, a warm-up is always necessary. Warm-up your body, voice and articulation.

- **Breath;**

Breath is something we usually have to re-learn in theatre because in everyday life we use to breathe nervously, our breath is blocked by anxiety.

Here are some exercises to make it free and to help us use it to move and talk.

1) **Lay down, one hand on the chest, one on the pelvis.** Take 5 breaths in the chest and five in the pelvis. Try to send the breath lower and lower, don't push. Then lay on the side and breath, trying to send the air to the back and side of your body. Repeat on the other side.

2) **Jump on the feet, springing softly,** following the movement with the breath and sound. It helps release the breath and sound, according to the body;

3) **Inhale with your nose and exhale with your mouth.** Inhale in counts of 3, then one moment of apnea, then exhale in 4. Imagine sending the air somewhere. You go on with the counting: inhale in 4, exhale in 5, inhale in 5, exhale in 6, inhale in 6, exhale in 7, and so on. When you reach a limit (you can reach also 13 or 14, but get there nicely, start stopping at 10 for the first time and make sure that none of your students is struggling) you go back: inhale in 9, exhale in 10, inhale in 8, exhale in 9, inhale in 7, exhale in 8 and so on.

- **Body;**

For the body warm-up, some of the exercises mentioned in the first chapter can be always useful. Walking at different speeds, making movements with music, and also playing some games are efficient ways to get the body warmed up and the energy built.

Something really fun is to put on some music and just *dance* following rhythm and feeling.

After a general warming up, for wrists, ankles, shoulders, and neck, make some movements, in touch with the floor. We can start a *logorrheic* dance, a dance where you don't stop, exploring different levels, floor, midway and stand up. Dancing, especially for theatre, is not *muscular*. We need to follow the structure of our skeleton trying not to push and get hurt. There can be an interesting dialogue between our skeleton and the floor. The only muscle we're allowed to use is the pelvis, the centre of our body, the place where all the movement starts from. We need to find a way to move with less effort. Make a going down-going up movement, as a flow. Using the structure of our skeleton and the centre muscle, the pelvis, following the breath. You will find an organic movement made with no effort.

- Rhythm;

Rhythm is a very intuitive skill of human beings. There are people who have a better intuition for it, and people who need to work harder to improve it. Most of the time, *meanings*, *emotions* and especially *laughs* do not come from interpretation but from the rhythm of playing.

One of the most representative examples is the comic punchline. It will work only because of a special pattern and time.

Some exercise:

1) To develop listening and rhythm, **put yourselves in a circle and send an impulse to one another**. The impulse can be sent by a simple clap of the hands, but clearly directed to another person. Keep making eye contact. The faster you go the better it becomes. After some rounds, you can start eliminating the ones that make mistakes. This will stimulate the challenge and their concentration in it. It is like you have a hot ball to throw: it can't fall down and it cannot stay in your hands for too long;

2) **The row**. This exercise stimulates listening, a sense of rhythm and concentration. A group of students in a row. They have to start walking forward together, with the same foot and counting the steps: 10, for example. They have to move *as a row*, and not further apart. They have to count steps, out loud: *one, two, three, four...* all together, in chorus. When they get to 10, another way round, they turn, *all together*, same foot, and start over going back. After some time and after they find the rhythm as a whole body, you can start putting some difficulties. For example, in step 3, instead of saying the number, they have to clap their hands, in the rhythm. Then, instead of saying the number 5, snap their fingers. Instead of saying the number 8 turn their head to the left. Give them these instructions one by one. After that, they can stop saying numbers out loud, they will just have to mark the appointments: clapping their hands at step 3, snapping their fingers at number 5, and turning their head at step 8. They will have to be able to do that counting in their head, but after some time they will just *feel* the rhythm and do the right actions at the same time. This can seem quite hypnotic, but the aim of these exercises is precisely to stop the mind from overthinking too much and let instead the body act.

3) **Put on some music and give your students some extreme situations** (i.e.. Inside an hourglass full of sand). They have to move following the rhythm and also going *against* it.

Clip reference: "The row".

- **Articulation;**

Step 1. Warming up the face muscles.

Hands in the shape of claws, with strong fingers, we put them on top of the head. All body strong, we move the head around, moving the skin under the hair. It is not the hands moving, but the head under.

Release.

Put your hands above the ears and move the skin.

Remember not to put tension on your neck, but stay strong in your body. Voice is a body, first of all.

Release.

Put your fingers on the bones around your eyes and massage energetically all around.

Release.

Give some pinches to your cheeks, and lips and massage gently the place above your tongue; start making some noise in the meanwhile.

Release.

With the jaw, the tongue and all the other muscles of the face released, make some *blabla*, pulling out the voice;

All this releasement of these muscles will make your face a resonance box.

Release.

Lick a fluffy mat. Put out your tongue and stretch all your other facial muscles. Be ugly!

Step 2. Exercises to train the tongue:

Take a song you all know and start playing it with a *mandolin*, reproducing the sound of the mandolin with your tongue;

Release.

Checkecheckeche. Alternating the sound of *tch* and *k* with this pattern, making a song out of it;

Step 3. Exercises to stretch the face:

Stretch the upper lip, making a deep sound. When I do it with the students, I make up a story out of it, giving some characters for these positions, like *Voldemort* or *the bad guy*;

Release.

The southern mom: open mouth with the distance of a finger, open mouth and eyes. Don't forget the sound: it is the first step to warming up the voice, and these different positions will change the sounds you're going to make;

Release.

Chicken mouth. Flex the mouth and all its other muscles very tight;

Release.

The zombie. Stretch your mouth and all the other muscles by opening them very much.

You can also make, at this point, some tongue twisters in your language.

Clip reference: "Articulation warm-up".

- **Voice;**

Start by making the *m* sound on a comfortable note. You might feel your lips vibrating.

Try to move the sound towards the nose, adding a little *n* to the sound.

Move the vibration to the top of your head; you can help yourself by choosing a higher note.

Chest voice. Going back to the first *m*, choosing a lower note, we can start adding a sound, opening the mouth and pronouncing an *e*. The position of the lips helps the sound to be more projected. You can go on making all the vowels.

Nose voice. Starting from the *n*, we move the sound in the nose; it is like a meowing. There is no sound going out of the mouth.

Head voice. Taking a higher note, we think of an operatic singer; it is easier than it looks. The head voice is the one we use while yawning. Yawning is very useful during voice to warm up.

Lip roll. Use the air to let your lips roll. You can use this technique also with musical scales.

Clip reference: “Vocal warm-up”.

4.3 Rehearsing

Rehearsing can seem repetitive or boring, but it’s none of those things. This is the only way we can feel comfortable on stage, where we can find new things, and that can be aware of what we’re doing so that we can enjoy and feel free when we’re on stage.

Sometimes, when we have a text, we can also start from *the table*.

We sit around the table and read the text in order to understand what happens and find interesting directions and actions for the stage.

Often, if we suddenly go on stage, we can be confused or in a hurry, worried not knowing what to do. The *table* step can help to know and explore the text better, before getting worried about being on stage and trying to remember my text by heart. It's the time that you can use to *play* and discover the meanings and the possibilities of the text and your own lines.

If you don't have text, you can take this time also to understand the role and the meaning of your actions, what's their aim and importance.

Treat the theatre space as a holy space; while in it there's an in and an out. Theatre has to be a space where everything is possible, an *extraordinary* space and time, a space where, at the moment I get in, everything changes. You, and the people around you. That's a wonderful possibility to get rid of everyday life. Theatre space is magic and therefore needs respect. Also because this helps concentration and makes the creative space a safe place.

That is why, when we make rehearsals, we try to stay focused and, once we've started, we try not to interrupt in the middle of a scene.

Of course, if you have a doubt, if you need to give directions, or ask questions, or if you have a memory gap, you can stop but always keep your concentration. It can become a meditative job, very useful to our creativity too.

For students, especially teenagers, this is a *mission impossible*. But, at the same time, they can finally see themselves enjoying it. Often, teenagers are deeper than what we may think.

Define the space for your performance. Each performance can have its own space. Is that in a theatre space? Is that in a classroom? Is that a place outside? Is it little or big? What's the best place for your performance to happen?

4.4 Directing

If you already know where you have to perform, then stage your scenes in consequence. But, if you're free to choose where to perform, choose the most meaningful space.

The structure of traditional theatre – a room where actors and audience are separated – is no longer the only option. According to the content of your performance, the space can help you to convey the messages. Are you going to make a street performance, installing your performance in the most public of places, or are you looking for an intimate situation, staging the performance in a small space?

You are also free to decide what's the place for the audience. Is that in front, as usually, or maybe all around? In a circle, in a square? And why?

Deciding the structure of the play is not only about content but also about form. Especially since the 20th century, the theatre has taken many different, unconventional, non-traditional forms, that make us free to find the one that best expresses our purpose.

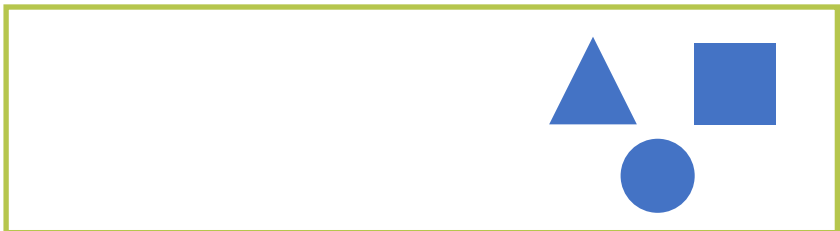
4.4.1 Organizing space

You can choose to have one director, to make a collective direction, to have a group of directors, it's up to you; anyway, I suggest you to find, or even become, one person who coordinates the whole picture, especially for a matter of time and unity of the show.

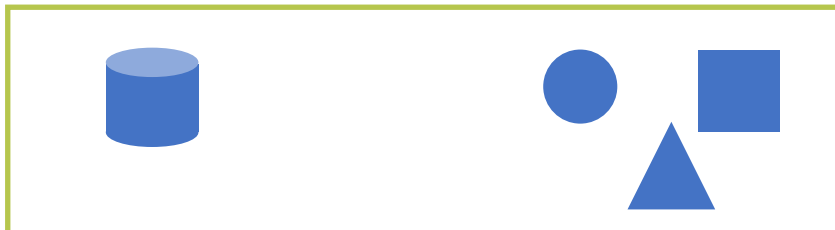
There is not *one* single way to direct a scene. Directors are supposed to be *the first spectator and* direct the scenes according to their experiences, tastes and esthetic. They have to be the ones who give the first feedback in order to organize the scenes better; they have to feel and understand what can or can't work, what's understandable or not, because, from the inside of the scenes, this is something you are not able to tell. Also, performers need to feel free to play without judging and observing themselves, that's why it is better for someone else to take this role for them.

- **Composition.**

Like all the images, a theatre scene must be built following logic, balance and rhythm. The balancing of a scene will tell us stories, relationships of power, desires, and conflicts.



You can start following the raft's rule, giving some air to the space and taking care of the distribution of objects and people on stage. The picture underneath, for example, can give a better feeling of balance of the stage than the picture above.



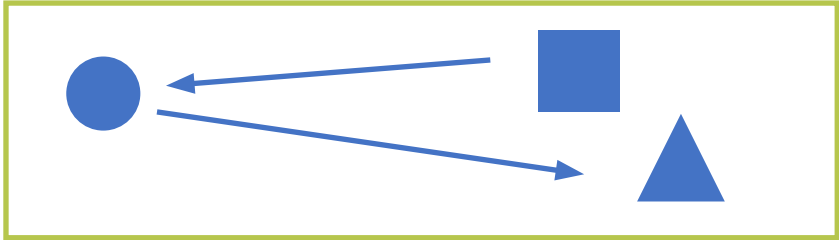
Theatre spaces also communicate meaning based on how they are organized. Space is a field of energy that can be used to create tension, where you can play with balancing to tell stories. Let's imagine that *circle* is trying to get something from a *triangle* and a *square*.



In the first situation, the *circle* is trying to press the other two, squeezing the space. Soon, he will not have any space anymore, his voice and action will become smaller, and he will lose power over the others.

In the following situation, the *circle's* strategy is to use a wider space, creating tension between the three. He will have the space to move, talk and use and to let the other two become *interested* in him.

Using distance in theatre means also becoming stronger: we have a wider vision of the space and of the others, and vision means control and power.



Watching movies, we have become used to close distances: for the small stage of the camera, everything has to be very close, little and minimal. In theatre, instead, space needs air and more energy in order to be communicative.

- **Image;**

Directors are often visual artists: their task is to create a world on stage, deciding what's the visual impact of the show, the colours, and the moods. Often, and with the help of the set and costume designers, they can start working from an element of the script, from the main theme of the performance, or just a general mood that goes along with the message.

- **Building a scene;**

Directing a scene is not only about organizing a space. It is about giving stage directions to the actors to find actions, reactions, movements, and various elements for the scene to have rhythm and be comprehensible and enjoyable.

Directors are – or, at least, can be – acting coaches. There are some directors who take care only of the images, hiring an actor coach to direct the scenes instead, but most of the time a director can do both. It means that they take care not only about the organization of the scene but they give acting directions to the actors, getting them closer to the aim of a scene. This is not about telling them what to do, but helping them understand, with an exterior look, what would be better for the scene.

When we build a scene, we need to remember that theatre is made for an audience. The audience is the recipient of your communication. It is part of the scene, so my work is to make everything *understandable*. The gestures will be bigger, for example, so that the last row will be able to see, and the whispering will be louder so that everybody can listen.

Usually, directors take care of the various elements composing the scenes, like music, light, sounds or videos.

I suggest following the *opposition* principle.

A common misunderstanding makes us think that the best way to make the audience understand or feel a certain emotion, is to underline it with several effects. Also, we think that if actors want to move the audience, they will have to feel real pain and show off their emotions. Instead, in theatre, it is the whole composition that will provoke a certain feeling, by creating contrast, and opposition, between the context and the actions.

A popular example: in the film *La vita è bella* of Roberto Benigni (1997), a family ends up in a Nazi concentration camp. In order to make his son's experience less traumatizing, the father, performed by Roberto Benigni tells his son that they're taking part in a game and starts making jokes about it. In a very sad situation, the effort of this father protecting his son, acting in contrast with what we expect from the situation, makes the scenes moving.

Creativity, sometimes, demands loss. Often, in the “big picture”, you will have to give up on an element that you truly like. For this exercise of the week, ask your students to renounce something they love, in their private life. They don't have to tell it, just do it.

4.5 Exercise of the week

Then, try to see what's superficial in your play and say goodbye to it.

actV Finalizing your work

As we already told, lights and sound can be used to create space and time.

Often, they're used to produce some *effects*. It would be better not to use sounds and lights in a manner of "commentary" to create effects or give emphasis. Sometimes, music for example is used to cover some "empty" space or to give a certain *mood* during a scene. In school theatre, especially, it would be more interesting to avoid those effects and find some creative ways to overcome difficult moments.

5.1 Technical aspects: light and sound

Very often – especially in school theatre – we don't have much technical equipment, so we need to adapt to the given conditions. This is the best way to find more interesting ideas for the scene.

For example, if my set is a busy town with a lot of tourists, what's the cheapest way to make the sound of a city? What is, also, the most *interesting* choice according to the show and the topic?

Are you going to play *live* or *recorded* sound? *Analogue* or *digital*?

What will be the relationship between sound and stage? There has to be a dialogue between the two of them. We can choose whether the characters on stage *hear* the sounds or not; if the character can decide, the actor definitely hears it and creates a relationship with it. They have to feel the accents, the flow, the rhythm of the sound and move and talk according to it, and not pretend as if it wasn't there.

About sounds and music, a contrasting application is a very interesting and efficient tool.

If, for example, in a sad scene I put a sad song, that would immediately underline the

sadness and it would be like repeating the same word twice. So, there are two choices: I can decide not to put the music or I can choose a sound with an opposite mood, that may give some contrast to the scene. During a sad speech, a piece of “lighter” music can contribute to provoking the emotions we are looking for.

Lights can drive the audience’s attention toward what is important. You can play with colour and intensity to suggest moods.

Lights too can be easily used as an effect, which is not very useful for our artistic work. One of the easiest ways, for example, to connect from one scene to another, is to turn off and turn on the lights. What if we don’t have this option. What if, even if we do, we try to find an artistic way to connect the scenes?

5.2 Objects and costumes

What is really *necessary*? Maybe, I don’t need every single object I think I need. The less I use, the better.

That’s for two reasons: sometimes we think we need a lot of objects that are not necessary, and that causes us more trouble than helping us.

My suggestion is: make it simpler. Objects are important and have to be used as characters. They need to carry a role, importance, a *story*. A connection to the play that has its dramatic merit). For example, the *handkerchief* in Shakespeare’s *Othello*.

Othello is a General, and Iago, one of his knights, is furious with Othello for not giving him a promotion and decides to take revenge by making him jealous of his wife, Desdemona. To prove that Desdemona cheats on him, he uses Desdemona’s handkerchief putting it on Cassio’s hands.

As you can see, the role of the handkerchief is crucial. To play Othello we can spare dishes, paintings, swords, jewels, and horses, but not the handkerchief.

The objects need to be played with and used with this importance.

Something interesting that we can do in theatre, especially in school theatre, is to give an imaginative power to the objects.

We can decide, for example, to make swords with pens. We can use everyday objects and give them a new importance and role. What is it that makes a pen a sword? The way we use it. This can be a great opportunity for imagination and creativity to blow up.

Same for costumes. Sometimes you don't need to have realistic costumes, you may need just some details, that refer symbolically to the one thing you've chosen to tell with costumes.

Costumes tell immediately to the audience something about the show. Mood, ambience, style, period.

If, for example, my play is set in 6th/sixth century, instead of buying dozens of historical costumes, I can choose only one element that refers to that age; perukes for example. Or, maybe – if we think “cheaper” – just a characteristic make-up.

Use costumes and sets following the rhetorical figure of the synecdoche. Single elements that refer to the whole.

The most important thing is that everybody's costumes share a common mood. Even if we use an “epical” situation, we still can choose a neutral costume for everybody and with one special element of the play. For example, we can choose a white t-shirt and jeans, and sunglasses for everyone. Why sunglasses? Because my play, for example, is about seaside tourism in 2070, when the sun will be burning much more than now.

Every object, costume, music and light have been set.

Rehearsals have been done and a few days are missing for your premiere. Now it's time to make a run-through. To put everything together and make the whole show from the first scene 'til the last one without stopping. It will be difficult the first time, there will be problems, especially to set technical aspects. Don't forget that technicians need their time to rehearse too. They have lines, and they interact with the stage, managing lights and music. Trying, on their side, to find the right timing, and, on the actors' side, to take into consideration lights and music just like they take into consideration lines and actions from the other actors.

Ask your students not to worry and not to stop at any accident, but try to find a way to go over it, on stage and outside.

5.3 Run-through

Accidents can always occur and theatre becomes more interesting in those moments. In fact, actors need to find a creative way to go over it and to stay concentrated in order not to make the audience believe that the “mistake” was part of the show. Forgetting a line, or getting lost during the show can give you the opportunity to find something new in your performance.

You can run some non-costumed run-throughs for some days before the show. I generally suggest using the costumes at the very end in order not to damage them. You can find some substitutes to “play” the role of the final objects and costumes and to get used to using them and not wasting them.

Use the run-through to find the breath, and the rhythm, of the performance. Work on the connections from one scene to another. Try to make connections part of the show, not something that has to be done and hidden, but a chance to create. Try to create a relationship between the in and outside of the stage. Actors can also be visible all the time, showing the “backstage” to the audience.

Clip reference: “Example of the final scene”.

5.4 Dress rehearsal

In theatre, we use to make a dress rehearsal the day before the premiere. It means that we do the show as if it was the day of the premiere. We can also have some audience, some “friend audience”, supporting us during this last run-through before going on stage.

The presence of the audience changes everything. This is a new actor coming inside the work, the most important one.

Theatre is made for the audience, and very often, when the audience is there, the actors start to shine and nobody can understand the reason.

During the dress rehearsal, we’re supposed to make everything as if we were on the day of the premiere, so costumes, objects, make-up, everything has to be there. Absolutely forbidden to stop! Act just like you were making the show, in front of a paying audience: you cannot stop and do it again, so it’s time to practice that “going over accidents” that we’ve experienced.

Don't forget to rehearse greetings too!

In theatre tradition, there was an etiquette for greetings, where the main character and the oldest actors came first to take the applause. Hopefully, in contemporary theatre, we think about theatre as a collective work, so: come to the front of the stage all together, take your hands and make a bow all together. We usually make three, lifting our hands up.

Decide who leads the bows, to make a choral movement; normally it is the one who is in the middle.

And watch out not to make a great dress rehearsal! They say that brings bad luck.

Good luck is brought, on the other hand, by the rituals we use to do before going on stage.

In Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal, for example, we say “merda/ merde/ mucha mierda/ muita mierda”, means “shit” to wish each other good luck. This is not meant to be a bad word: this tradition refers to the times when having a lot of horse excrements outside the theatre meant that a lot of audiences were there to see the show.

“Toi, toi, toi” is another spell to wish good luck, mostly in England and Germany. The company also makes some little gifts for one another, on the day of the premiere.

The stage director, the one who is supposed to check that everything on stage is all right, to ensure the communication between the technical field and the stage, to be sure that everybody is on time and has their own objects, is also the one who tells the company how close they are to the beginning. There are 4 signals: half of an hour, a quarter, five minutes and “everybody on stage”, when the audience is in, and everybody has to be in position.

What happens from here 'til the end of the show, it's not on me to tell.

The one thing I can say is: have fun. Rehearsals have the specific mission to let your body know what to do; get on stage and just have fun!

5.5 Everybody on stage

5.6. Exercise of the week

The last days of rehearsals can be very tense. Before getting into rehearsals, take a moment all together to get focused and remember that this job can be done only if we are together, holding the same boat, leading it to the river.

You can make a game all together, or just take some breaths, or sing a song that everybody knows. It has to become your ritual, that you will repeat until the last day, before going on stage.

It will help you get concentrated, to feel the group, like a sort of gate to another dimension.

Theatre is a community ritual.

Epilogue: the importance of theatre-making in school

When I make a theatre project in a school, it happens very often that teachers come to me surprised by the reaction of some students. “In class, he never speaks”; “she has big problems in reading or writing and now, she remembers everything”; “he’s the one who talks all the time during classes, I never see him so concentrated”. Theatre can be a place where students can experience new ways of interacting and learning. They may have some difficulties in the standard learning methods and they can discover they have other talents or that there are other ways of learning; the standards do not take into account the special needs of everyone, and students can be very frustrated by a rating system that put them always under judgment.

Theatre can be a place where they can feel free to explore their possibilities, their qualities, without thinking about success.

Also, their relationship with their own bodies can take advantage of these activities. A relationship that is missing, except from an aesthetic point of view that brings up frustration and a sense of inadequacy.

They have a very judgmental relationship with themselves. Every action has to be *performative*, good-looking, and appealing. They’re worried about how they look and, especially with social media, they can develop a strong anxiety about their personal rating and their appearance.

Theatre can be the place where to inspire *life* and *human* relationships based on respect, acceptance, and freedom. Where they can finally understand that their thoughts and their words are important and meaningful. It will be our job to make them feel that way.

F.A.Q.

1) I don't have any ideas: where do I start from?

I suggest taking inspiration from what other people have done. Choose a theatre play, a film or a book that you really enjoyed, or go look for it. You will find some inspiration and ideas. Don't be afraid to copy: you're allowed to get inspired to do whatever you like. Then, listen to the students. If they feel they're involved in the creative process, they will become creative and you will feel free only to guide them. Let them feel that their ideas and points of view matter: they will feel responsible and become generous to the work.

2) One or more of my students prefers to watch only and not participate in some exercise.

Some students can be very interested but also shy, and would prefer to watch before taking part to the exercises. That can be very delicate because if they're allowed to stay outside, the others who make the effort to go over the discomfort could feel a sense of unfairness. The exercises work only if everybody takes the challenge. So, in the first place, I suggest pushing them a bit. If their resistance is strong, and for the group it is ok, I suggest starting after a while, they would probably feel the desire to join the group and will do it spontaneously.

3) Some of my students bother during theatre classes: what do I do?

Theatre can be a great opportunity for students to become less shy and find a way to interact and express themselves. On the other hand, it is also a place where fragilities come to the surface, and for some of them can be very difficult to join.

Some students, especially if they are obligated to join this activity, can have a strong reaction of rejection.

They might be scared of judgment and they could feel very embarrassed. If they bother the group, making noises, distracting, or disturbing the others on purpose, I suggest to let them choose not to take part in the class: they can get back whenever they want, but following the theatre rule of *respecting the others*. The group must feel in a safe place, and if someone is volunteering to break this rule, looking for attention, so ignoring this behaviour would not be a good reaction. Theatre can be the place for learning how to take responsibility for oneself and also for others.

Sometimes, theatre can be perceived as a game, and sometimes it can be a useful perception. But this game is very serious and necessitates that everybody shares the same conditions.

4) My students are not energetic; they are bored and I can't involve them in the process.

If during rehearsals, or before starting even, you realize that the students have very low energy, and are tired or bored, you can organize a game. Something challenging where they can have fun, like a ball game, or some children's games like "capture the flag".

5) One of my students freaks out during the dress rehearsal or the show. What do I do?

Going on stage can be very traumatic for students, especially for the shyer ones. That's what rehearsals are for. They need to rehearse in the place where they're going to perform and have some friend audience during some run-through in order to get used to it. If one or some of my students freaks out during a dress rehearsal, you can, of course, reassure them, by telling them that theatre is a non-judgmental place, and also that this is supposed to be fun process and that all the group is here to support them. Also, if you see that they're too scared to go on stage, they may do something smaller, or ask someone else to be with them, so that they won't feel alone, and in case of trouble, there will be someone at their side.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITA DI BOLOGNA

June 2022