

# Becoming an Actor

Thomasina Unsworth



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# Part One

# First Year



# You Are Enough

When you first arrive at drama school you may well feel the need to establish yourself within the group. It is natural that you will want to justify your place on the course to the other students and the teachers. You may feel competitive and want to demonstrate that you are the best actor that ever walked through the door. Or you may be ambushed by self-doubt and seek to compensate for this by proving that you are actually really really good. You might even feel paralysed by the whole experience.

Early classes are designed with all this in mind. The desire to impress or the onslaught of fear will only succeed in blocking you as an actor. They are barriers that prevent you from being 'open'. If you are not open then how can you respond honestly to another human being or to a piece of text? How can you communicate a story so that it reaches an audience and affects them? No matter how skilled you are, *you* will always get in the way. The purpose of the following section is not to teach you to act; I would argue that no one can really do that. Instead, these exercises should work on the things that block you, they should chip away at whatever it is that prevents you from being the best actor that you are capable of being.

## *Aims*

- To introduce you to key questions, such as what is theatre? What is acting? What is performance?
- To encourage you to think about your own behaviour and that of those you are watching.

- To introduce you to some useful vocabulary.
- To introduce you to the concept of being ‘private’ in public.
- To begin to tackle the issue of self-consciousness for you as an actor.
- To encourage you to think about *what* you are doing rather than *how* you are doing it.
- To encourage you to watch other people work closely, and to analyse what you see in relation to your own practice.

### **You Are Enough**

Divide the space into two sections, marking them out clearly with a line.

Stand with the rest of the actors on one side of this line. This then becomes the ‘offstage space’. Across the divide is the ‘onstage space’.

You will be called one by one to enter the onstage space. Those remaining behind the line keep observing.

There is only one rule that you must remember when you cross the line and that is: *if you think of something interesting to do, don't do it!* In other words, don't plan what you are going to do in the space. Don't think of funny or engaging ways to entertain the audience. Resist the temptation to perform, just allow things to happen in that moment. For example, if you feel like lying down, lie down, if you want to look at the wall, look at it, if your head is itching, scratch it. There is no



need to make any eye contact with those watching, or to acknowledge them at all.

This is a non-verbal exercise. If relationships occur between those in the onstage space, then these must not be expressed through words. For example, you may want to touch someone, or sit with them, or even walk away from them. Respond to each other in any way that feels appropriate, but not through speech.

After some time, objects will be handed to the actors in the onstage space. For example, you might be given a tape measure, a pack of cards or a bouncy ball. Do what you want with these objects but remember the rule: *if you think of something interesting to do, don't do it!* In other words, use the object in any way that you want to, but do so without considering the effect that your actions will have on the audience.

Eventually, everyone will be in the onstage space, except one person who is still observing. When you are given the instruction, those being observed will turn to watch this remaining individual. So the observer becomes the observed, and vice versa.

# Character

You will have seen previously that the word ‘character’ has cropped up regularly. All the exercises have in fact been working to engage your imagination, chip away at blocks and offer tools so that, ultimately, you will be able to create a character more effectively. This section focuses directly on exercises that relate to a role that you might be playing.

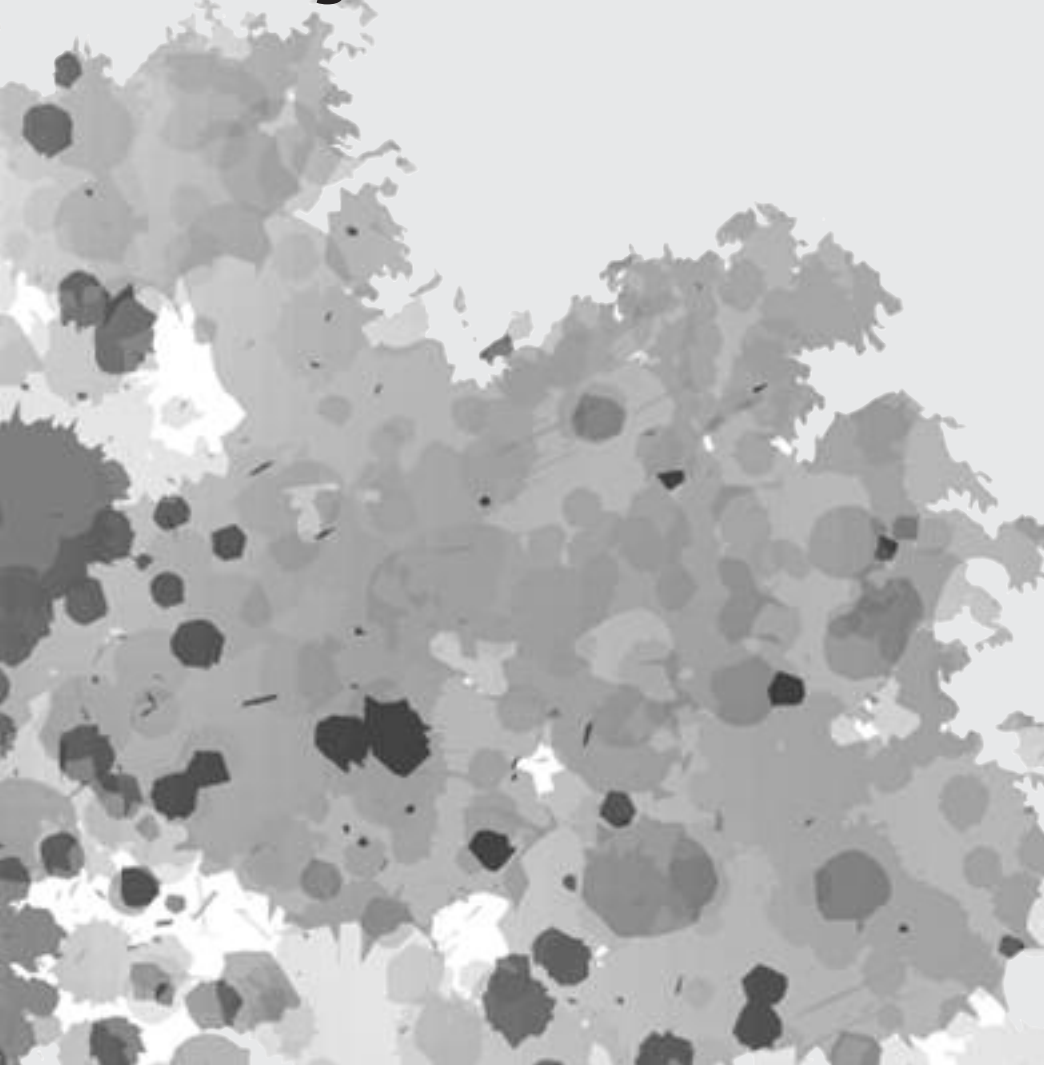
## *Aims*

- To recognise the complex and often contradictory forces that exist within a character.
- To consider the character in a context that is not explored directly during the play itself.
- To explore ways of gaining a deeper understanding of the character.
- To engage your imagination.
- To consider some of the physical properties of your character.

## **Multiple Personalities**

Write a list of qualities that you think the character you are playing possesses. In order to do this, look at what your character says, but also how he behaves. Similarly, look at what the other characters say about him and also how they behave around him. You might find it useful to write the three lists as you did earlier in the ‘Free Association’ exercise, detailing what you say

**Part Two**  
**Second Year:**  
*Beyond the Self*



# Beyond the Self

If your training is working for you, then you should enter the second year not only armed with tools to help you approach the work, but also from a position of greater confidence than when you began your course. Now you are about to embark on the next chapter of your training, but before you go on to look at the exercises outlined in the following pages, it is important that you understand something fundamental: the work that you have done to release you, to open you, to ignite your imaginations and allow access to your emotional resources should never leave you. You should always work responsively, you should always be specific and active in your choices, and you should always be open to the demands of the project.

Many of the exercises outlined in Part One will be applied to the texts that you are likely to come across in the second year of your training; they do not become irrelevant because the nature of the plays you are working on might change. It may be that you choose to ignore some exercises and adapt others, but the foundation that the first year provides you with, as an actor, should remain firm as you continue to use and develop the tools that it offered you.

I am reminding you of this because I have seen actors become almost schizophrenic as they take on the challenges of the second year. As they begin to work on texts that are less naturalistic than they are used to, they split themselves in two: one part of them is instinctive and emotionally responsive, and the other is intellectually active and technical. Joining these elements up lies at the heart of your training. A good actor is responsive, open

and alive to the moment, but needs also to have technique and control as well as an understanding of the wider implications of the text.

Although some students initially feel constricted by the demands made on them by texts that are not naturalistic, feeling unable to use the spontaneous and responsive approach that they had found in the first year, some are liberated by the opportunity to explore other forms of expression. Either way, the training that you experience in your second year should follow on from previous ideas, as well as extend and expand your thinking. Part Two does not necessarily provide you with any solutions; rather it attempts to show you some of the questions that will arise as you continue your exploration of different texts. It will give you a sense of some of the issues that may confront you, and even confuse you, as you enter your second year of drama-school training.



**Part Three  
from Second  
to Third Year:**

*Professional  
Preparation*

# Professional Preparation

Having spent two years watching the final-year students perform, it is now your turn. This year marks a further transition in your training. Of course you will continue to learn and to explore, just as you will throughout your career, but now there is a new emphasis, now you will have your sights set on the years beyond drama school. You will need to be as prepared as possible.

During your third year you will perform in a series of public shows, or 'showcases'. This means that not only will your loved ones get a chance to see your work, but so will casting directors and agents. These productions have more than one function. Through them your training continues, but they also serve as a showcase for your work. The knowledge of this can cause you to become anxious, as you compare the parts you are cast in to other people's, worrying whether you are being shown in the best light or not. You may find that the atmosphere becomes rather more competitive than previously, and you must redouble your efforts to resist comparing yourself with anyone else. Focus on the play and your job within it instead.

Alongside the productions, there will be a series of sessions where you will work on acting for camera and radio. You will be given classes on audition techniques and sight-reading. You will be advised on getting great headshots. You will experience mock auditions. You will hear talks from people from the industry, including individuals who can tell you about things like paying your taxes when you leave. There will be competitions and festivals that you

might be entered into. You will also be helped to prepare for a separate showing of speeches and duologues to a specifically invited audience of industry people.

In short, the aim of the year is to continue to develop you as actors, whilst preparing you for an industry that is renowned for its toughness. This is often the year when resentments can build up and anxieties become more pronounced. It is also the year in which you can begin to test the waters as an independent actor working with a range of directors and discovering more about your process. It is an exciting time!

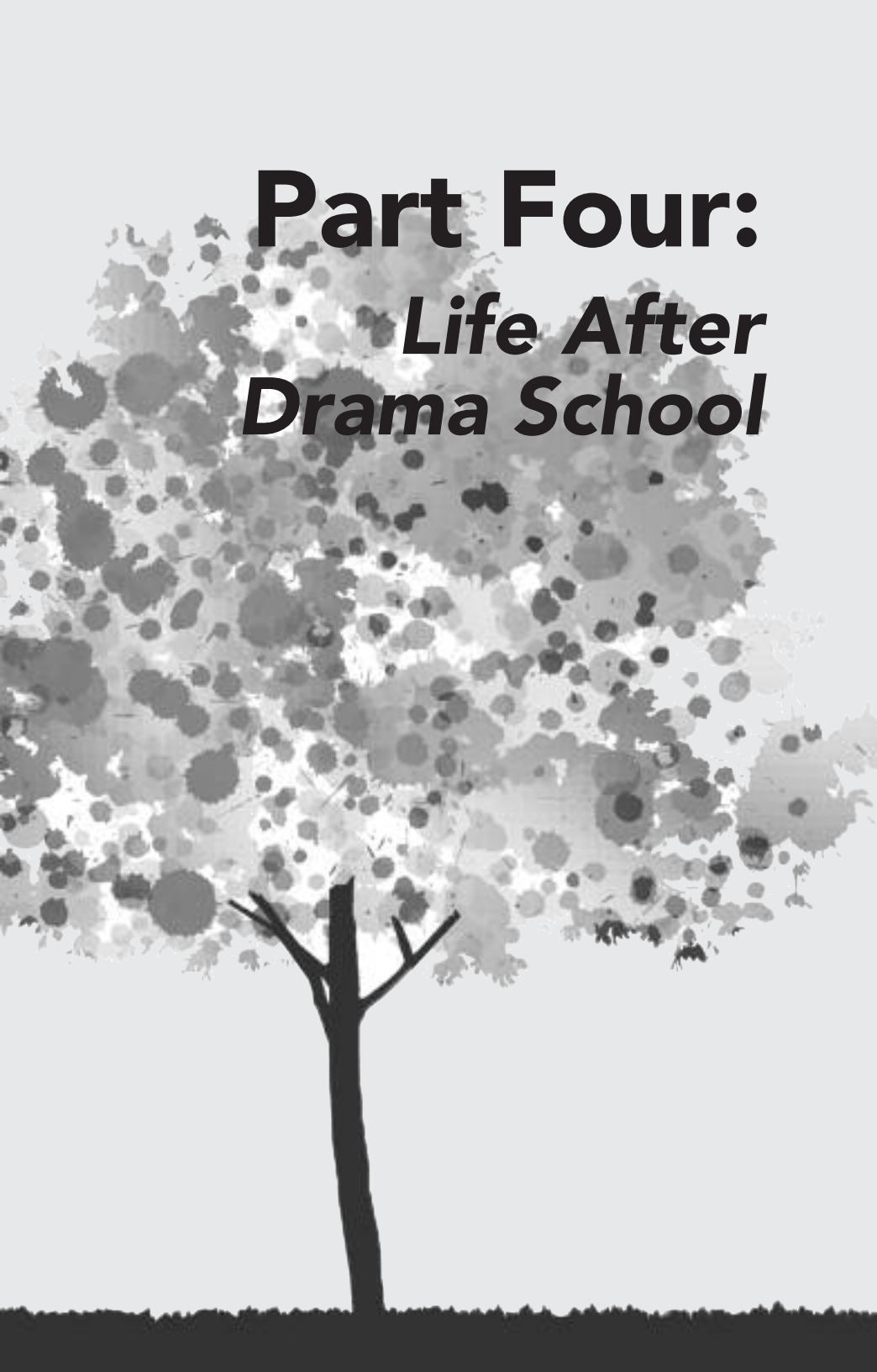
Part Three has been divided into a series of questions and answers. Obviously, you are an individual and one answer doesn't necessarily fit all askers. However, these answers are the result of consulting various industry professionals, students and teachers, with the aim of making them as comprehensive as possible.

### *Aims*

- To provide you with information about the industry.
- To tell you what you will need in order to approach agents and casting directors.
- To offer you advice for any meetings or auditions you might get called to. (Sometimes you won't be required to audition, but simply to meet a casting director, so that they can get an idea of who you are, and what sort of role you might be suitable for.)
- To address the issue of acting for television and radio as opposed to theatre.



- To encourage you to focus on what you are doing without comparing yourself to others.
- To prepare you for the showcase.
- To alert you to the fact that there may well be a written component to your final year.



# **Part Four:** *Life After Drama School*

# Life After Drama School

When you think about the year ahead, you probably either feel terrified of the future, or nostalgic for the past. Ex-students tell me that they feel a mixture of relief, excitement, hope, terror and sadness, and a lot more besides – sometimes simultaneously! Hopefully you view your time at drama school in a positive light, and see it as a place which fostered your confidence and gave you tools to use in your work, and where you forged strong and lasting friendships. But nothing goes on for ever and you are now embarking on the career that you have been training for and anticipating for the last three years.

The aim of this final section is to provide you with some guidance as to what you can expect over the coming year, and how you can give yourself the best possible chance of succeeding. This is an unpredictable profession – you could be working in Pizza Hut one moment and in the new Tim Burton movie the next. You could face months out of work or hop from one job to another. I cannot possibly give you advice that covers every eventuality, but I hope that the information contained here proves useful. As in Part Three, this section is made up of frequently asked questions and answers that come from my many conversations with industry professionals.

## *Aims*

- To offer advice concerning agents.
- To encourage you to market yourself.
- To offer you advice on auditioning.

- To provide you with practical information about the business.
- To help you to work out ways to make money between acting jobs.
- To encourage you to keep creatively fulfilled and in control of your life during potentially difficult times.