

What Is Acting?

Acting is defined as the art or practice of representing a character on a stage or before cameras and derives from the Latin word *agere*, meaning “to do.” When someone is acting, they are performing an action: thus, something is being done as a character. Generally an actor is someone who takes on another character by altering parts of their body, voice, or personality in order to share a story with an audience. Ironically, or perhaps appropriately for this book, an obsolete meaning for the word acting is *to animate*.

In regard to CG animation and your work in this book, the definition seems perfect: If actors are animating a character, then CG animators are acting as they create. What exactly actors do and how they do it has changed over time. What was acceptable and what was preferred has varied radically throughout history.

This chapter discusses:

- **A brief history of acting**
- **How acting has changed over time**
- **The work of an actor**
- **How an actor trains**
- **How acting relates to the animator**
- **Exercises to begin your journey of exploring the training of an actor**

A Brief History of Acting

Similar to many noted animated tales, the history of acting begins with a legend. During the sixth century in ancient Greece, a man named Thespis stepped out of a chorus of performers to utter several solo lines, and thus acting was born. Prior to this time, if you went to a dramatic festival in Greece you would see a group of 50 performers singing or chanting in unison the tales of Greek gods or heroes. When Thespis first spoke, he assumed a character and told the story from the character's point of view, not from a third person as was done by the chorus. Although this is only a legend, Thespis has been granted a special place in the history of acting, and to this day actors are called thespians.

Jon Lovitz brought the word thespian to the forefront of popular culture with his character, Master Thespian, on *Saturday Night Live*.

Eventually, in ancient Greece the number of actors grew to three and were accompanied by a chorus. Although often more than three characters took part in a play, only three of the characters could appear on the stage at any one time, as there were only three actors. Thus one actor would often play more than one role in any given production. They would change characters with a change of costume and mask.

Given the nature of the large, outdoor amphitheatres that the Greeks performed in, and the emphasis placed on the ritual of theatre, the work of the first actors was predominately voice and gesture work (see Figure 1.1). The actors, all men, were dressed in large robes that covered their bodies and oversized masks that hid their faces so that the actor/character could be seen at a great distance. They communicated character and emotion through changes in the voice and in the physical stature of their bodies.

Unlike actors in ancient Greece, who were revered, it is believed the actors in ancient Rome were slaves owned by company managers. The performances were still outdoors and masks were still used, so much of the work of actors remained focused on the voice and gesture. There was no restriction on the numbers of actors in Roman theatre, but they still were all men. The dramatic material also went through a great transformation in Rome. The stories of the Greeks were of their heroes and gods. The stories of ancient Rome were often of everyday life and could be quite licentious.

The late Roman empire was the first period where Christianity began to target theater, and actors in particular. Theater was associated with pagan festivals and could often be vulgar. Mimes of the time even went so far as ridiculing Christian practices such as baptism and communion. By AD 300, Christians were told not to attend the theater, and any Christian who went to the theater instead of the church on a holy day was excommunicated. Actors were not allowed to partake of the sacraments or be buried in church cemeteries. During the rise of the Christian period, theaters declined and almost completely disappeared. Traveling jugglers, mimes, storytellers, and acrobats who could be seen at fairs carried on the performance traditions.



Figure 1.1

Amy Roeder plays Hecuba in a scene from *Trojan Women* at the University of Georgia Department of Theatre and Film Studies, directed by George Contini

The Middle Ages

It is ironic that after all the opposition by the church to theater, the church is the very place where theater was revived during the Middle Ages. During an Easter service in AD 925, a performance that was probably sung depicted the three Marys looking for Jesus at his tomb and encountering angels that proclaim him to be risen from the dead. This was the beginning of liturgical drama where clergy and choirboys performed biblical stories and moral lessons as part of the church services. There was no real emphasis on acting here; the importance of the event was the didactic lessons that were learned, not artistic merit.

Eventually the popularity of these performances led to the development of theater outside the church. Although the scripts were still approved by the church, trade and craft guilds took over the production of plays. Actors for these productions were local townspeople. Sometimes they received their roles by auditioning, and sometimes they merely volunteered. The scripts were stereotypical with one-dimensional characters and thus did not require any subtlety of acting. Once again the most important aspect of the performance was the voice and stylized gesture.

Commedia dell'Arte

During the Renaissance, most theatrical productions moved to the court and were performed by courtiers. This theater was more for showing off than any real acting. The development of a professional, public theater happened in Italy with the rise of Commedia dell'Arte, an improvised form of theater based on stock characters and scenarios. Each member of an acting troupe had a specific character they performed. The scripts were completely improvised from plot synopses developed by the troupe in rehearsal. Commedia was at its height between 1570 and 1650.

A Commedia actor would take on a character and perform this character for her or his entire life. All of the stock characters had masks that were specifically designed to show the qualities of the character, and the performers had certain physical gestures or comic bits called *lazzi* that were associated with the mask and character (see Figure 1.2). The work was highly physical and demanded a great deal of vocal and physical control, power, and stamina. Commedia also introduced women to the stage. However, the characters were stock types and the situations were stereotypical, so there still was no need for subtlety of acting. Instead, the emphasis was placed on the physical and vocal work as well as a quick wit to be able to improvise the scenarios.

Figure 1.2

The University of
Georgia Commedia
troupe



Commedia laid the groundwork for characters that we still use today in theater, film, and animation. The “dirty old man,” the “braggart soldier,” the “sneaky servant,” the “empty-headed young lover,” and the “licentious servant” are all character types that we recognize in our comedies. These and almost all stock types can be traced back to Commedia. (For more on Commedia, see Chapter 4, “Commedia dell’Arte.”)

Acting in Shakespeare’s Day

In 1570, the Queen of England sanctioned daily theatrical performances, and consequently many acting troupes were formed in England. Actors were shareholders in their companies and were paid by a member of the royal family who served as their patron. A shareholding actor had to invest a sum of money in the company and then shared in any profits that were made from the performances. One of the most famous troupes was The King’s Men—William Shakespeare himself was a member of this company. (See Figure 1.3.)

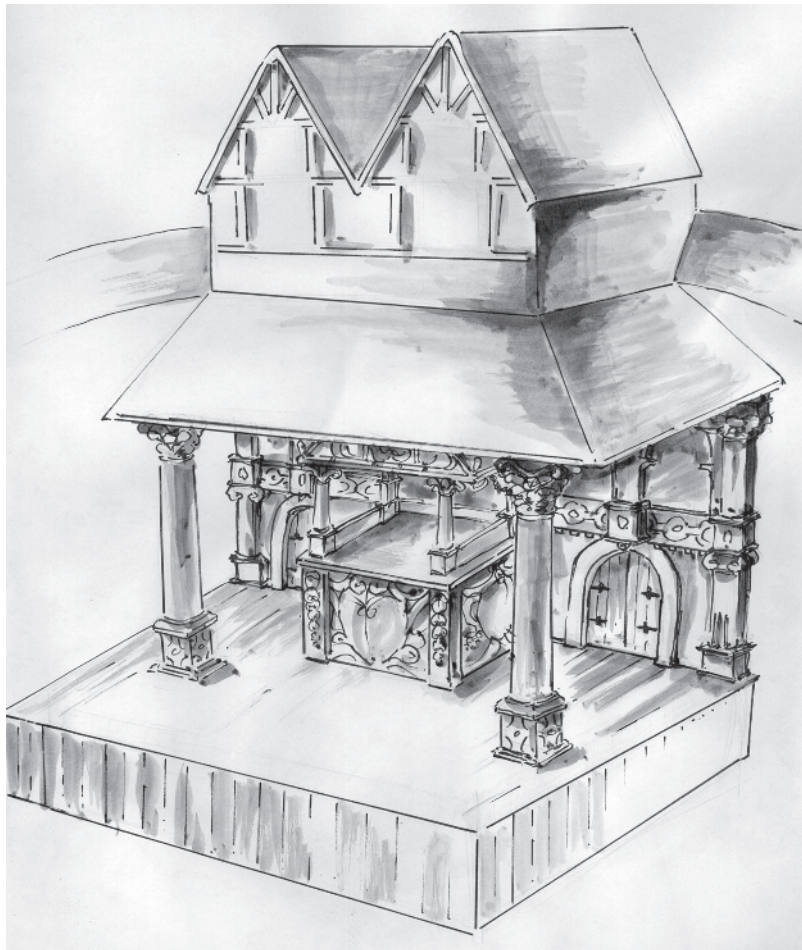


Figure 1.3
Drawing of
the stage of
Shakespeare’s
Globe Theatre

There are many different opinions concerning the acting style of the Elizabethan performer. Some descriptions of performances have called them realistic. Hamlet's advice to the players would suggest that the Elizabethan actors understood the ground rules for producing a psychologically realistic character on the stage. On the other hand, men playing women, stylized stage backgrounds, and the unrealistic nature of many of the scripts suggest that the actor was still focused on the external voice and gesture of the character. In either case, audience members have written accounts of the actors moving audiences emotionally by the power of their performances.

Hamlet: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounc'd it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings.... Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature; to show Virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

— HAMLET ACT III, SCENE II

During the 1640s, England was embroiled in a civil war between the Royalists and the Puritans. The Puritans attempted to end all theatrical activity because they had returned to the early Christians' beliefs concerning the theater and actors. In 1642, a law was passed suspending all performances, and five years later another law was passed that ordered all actors to be apprehended as rogues. Theater did carry on, but it went underground, and there are few records concerning the work of the time.

Presentational Acting

In 1660, Charles II was restored to the throne in England, ending the reign of the Puritans. Theater once again began to grow and flourish, and some respect for the actor returned. Women were introduced to the English stage, and companies were set up. Many companies had training or apprentice programs that took on young actors and taught them singing and dancing, but most actors learned from trial and error. Company apprentices would spend their first few years playing small roles. From this they would discover just what characters and types they were best suited for and would spend the rest of their careers playing those types.

The majority of acting for the next two hundred years was what is called presentational acting (see Figure 1.4), which is the mere presenting of the character from an external perspective. The goal for the actor is to look or appear as if the character is genuinely feeling or experiencing emotions by the proper adaptations of the body and voice. The actor would never experience any emotions or connect psychologically with the character. The work was purely external, and the style was oratorical. Actors always played the front of the stage and never turned their backs to the audience. This formal style persisted for years and was well received by audiences.



COSTUMES BY IVAN INGERMANN. LIGHTS BY RACHEL KONIECZNY. SET BY BEN PHILIPPS. DIRECTED BY KRISTIN KUNDERT-GIBBS.

Figure 1.4

Norman Ferguson and Jacqueline Carey as Oberon and Puck in a presentation model production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the University of Georgia's Department of Theatre and Film Studies

A good example of the presentational ideology is the work of François Delsarte (1811–1871). Delsarte developed a system by which every part of the body could be used to communicate emotions, attitudes, characters, and ideas. Thus all characterization was based on a precise formula of stances, postures, and gestures.

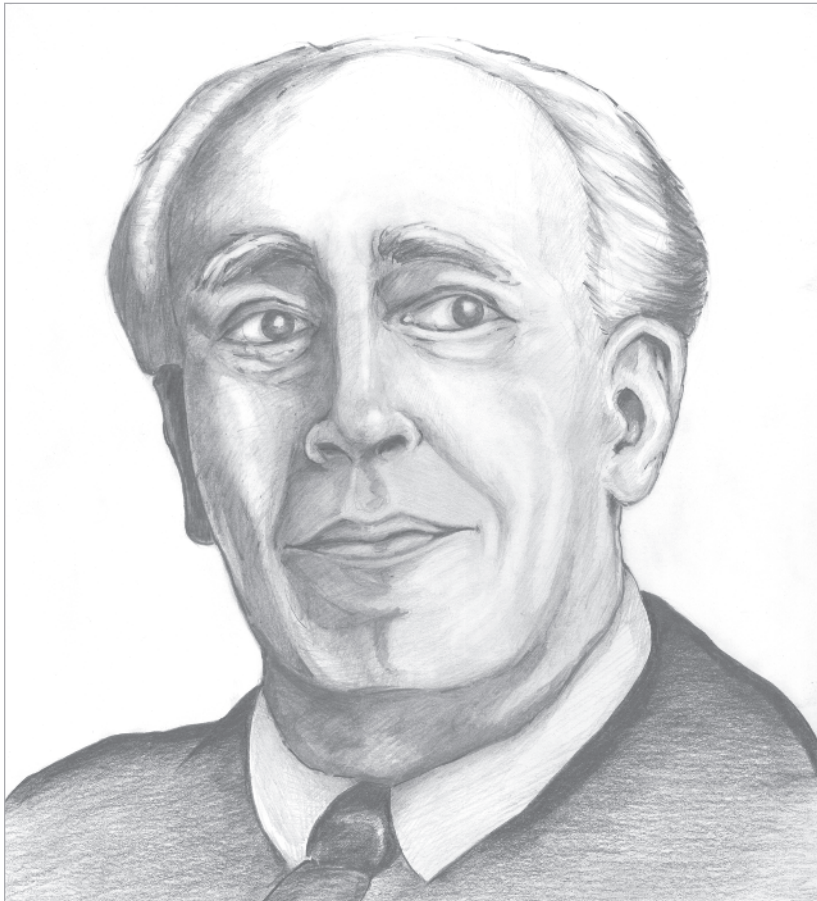
Although the formal style of oration was the dominant mode of performance, certain actors began to change or adapt their personal acting styles for a more realistic approach. As early as 1750, actor David Garrick urged that characterizations should be based on direct observations of life and not a distanced formalistic approach. These ideas concerning realistic acting continued to grow and gain acceptance throughout the next two hundred years.

Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre

The major turning point from presentational to representational or realistic acting came with the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897. The theater, under the direction of Constantin Stanislavski (shown in Figure 1.5), revolutionized acting. It threw out the old star system and opted for an ensemble style of acting. Stanislavski, an actor himself, set out to perfect an approach to acting. The results of his work led to the first fully realistic productions. His company was world renowned, and their work was studied by theater artists across the globe.

The heart of Stanislavski's work is based on the "method of physical actions." The actor must determine the "objective" or primary desire of the character, which leads to a through line of physical actions for the role. The actor then performs a series of actions to help him or her achieve this objective. Stanislavski discovered that acting becomes truthful by truly doing something to achieve an objective. The work of the actors in the Moscow Art Theatre was simple, honest, and emotionally realistic.

Figure 1.5
Constantin
Stanislavski



DRAWING BY JASON ALLEN

Stanislavski established a training program for young actors. He stressed that actors needed to start by training their bodies and voices but then needed to focus their attentions to learning to analyze and study a text in order to determine the through line of actions for the character. He also urged actors to observe themselves and others to learn what truthful behavior was. He wrote about his techniques and ideas in three books about the work of an actor and one autobiography of his life in art.

The Group Theatre

Acting in America was revolutionized by the Group Theatre in the 1930s. Founded in New York by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford, the Group Theatre sought to emulate the methods and ensemble approach of the Moscow Art Theatre. The group would cloister themselves away in upstate New York to train and rehearse a script for months before presenting their ensemble work in the city. Their productions were known for their theatrical realism, which moved audiences to their feet and set a new standard for truth in performance.

The acting was based in a psychological truth that was rooted in the inner motivations of the character. In the course of rehearsing a script, Strasberg led the actors through exercises that emphasized emotional memory as the key to truth in acting. Strasberg believed that this was the heart of Stanislavski's work in Russia, but unfortunately Strasberg's knowledge and understanding of Stanislavski was incomplete. Strasberg's bastardization of Stanislavski's work became known as the "Method." Countless famous actors have trained in the Method. One of the most famous performances attributed to method training is that of Marlon Brando playing Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Many founding members of the Group Theatre went on to establish themselves as major theatrical artists. The director Elia Kazan started with the Group Theatre, as did playwrights Paul Green, Maxwell Anderson, Sidney Kingsley, and most notably Clifford Odets. Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner, arguably the three most influential acting teachers in the history of America, were founding members of the Group Theatre.

For an inspirational look at the Group Theatre, read *The Fervent Years* by founding member Harold Clurman (Da Capo Press, 1983).

Acting in America Today

Acting in America today is based on the realistic mode established by Stanislavski and introduced to America by the Group Theatre. Actors attempt to uncover the inner, psychological workings of a human being and present a truthful character to an audience (see Figure 1.6). All acting training today uses Stanislavski as a touchstone. A few

theorists have rebelled against his work, but without Stanislavski there would be nothing to rebel against. Modern audiences have come to expect the truthful depictions of life on the stage that Stanislavski established as the height of the art.

Film and television have furthered the need for subtle, psychological honesty. With a camera only inches from an actor's face, there is no room for broad playing. An actor needs only to think the thoughts of the character for the camera to identify what she or he is feeling and thinking.

Figure 1.6

Psychological realism in a scene from *Balm in Gilead* at the University of Georgia Department of Theatre and Film Studies



SET BY JASON ALLEN. LIGHTS BY MICHAEL O'CONNELL. COSTUMES BY LINDSEY GOODSON. DIRECTION BY KRISTIN KUNDERT-GIBBS.

Most actors develop their own method of acting. Many of them (especially stage actors) have gone through formal training and take bits and pieces from different teachers and different techniques that they have studied. Film and television actors who aren't as likely to have formally studied the art often learn by trial and error as well as by watching other actors work. Ultimately every actor is an individual and will discover his or her own process for creating his or her art.

How an Actor Works

It is an actor's job to create a real, living breathing character, which is usually human but sometimes not. She does this by using her entire being: her breath, body, voice, mind, heart, and soul. When creating a character, the actor always starts with the script. She devours the script, looking for clues to who her character is. She looks for what is said about her, what is said to her, and what she says. She attends rehearsals, analyzes the

script, learns her lines, does research, memorizes her blocking, all while working to create this new life. Ultimately every actor comes to her own process for doing this. Some of these processes are instinctual, some come from training, and some come from experience with the craft.

You may have heard that a great actor never needs to train or study acting because real talent is something that cannot be taught. This couldn't be further from the truth. Esoteric directors who have no understanding of the acting process, lazy actors who don't want to do their homework, or pretender movie stars who just got lucky by relying on their looks usually utter the comment.

What is talent anyway? This debate has raged since the time Thespis stepped from the chorus and uttered his first lines. Talent, in regard to the actor, has been said to include many things:

Sensitivity A great actor needs an enormous amount of sensitivity to just about everything. She needs to be sensitive to her environment, to her thoughts, to her feelings, and to those around her. She must allow herself to see, hear, touch, taste, and feel everything in her surroundings, and, more importantly, she needs to allow these sensations to affect her. Her sensory skills should be heightened and finely tuned.

Vulnerability It does an actor not one ounce of good to have heightened sensitivity if she doesn't allow all of the stimuli just mentioned to affect her. She needs to have an open heart and mind so that the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches of the world move her. She must freely weep, rage, scream, howl, laugh, and love. She must be fearless in her willingness to make herself open to others and to her own emotions.

It is often said that actors are bleeding hearts and jump to the aid of every cause from saving the environment to stopping the death penalty. Well, of course they are and certainly they do. If they have talent, they will not only sympathize and empathize with every living and imagined creature, they will also eagerly walk in their shoes. This vulnerability to others is a necessary aspect of talent.

Imagination and willingness to suspend disbelief Perhaps your parents once told you not to let your imagination run away with you. Well a talented actor will freely skip the country with her imagination. Actors believe. Anything. Their imaginations are vivid and all consuming. They approach every moment with childlike innocence as if experiencing life for the first time. Actors live in their imaginations far more than in the "real world." They willingly, freely, and with abandon will embrace a whole imaginary set of circumstances and accept them as reality.

The need to share and exhibitionism Another aspect of talent revolves around the need to share. One can be sensitive and vulnerable but unless she possesses an undying need to share her discoveries about humankind, she will never be an actor—a writer or painter

possibly, but never an actor. Additionally, talent takes a certain amount of exhibitionism. An actor must be free and fearless in sharing in front of a group of total strangers.

A responsive body and voice To share all of the sensations to which an actor has made herself vulnerable, her body and voice must respond freely. Her body must be free from tension and be able to mold and morph into new and unique characters. Her voice also must be free from tension and able to carry the nuances of emotion in pitch, rhythm, and tempo. You may have heard the phrase that an actor's instrument is her body, so she must be relaxed, strong, and flexible to play her instrument with the virtuosity of a maestro.

Determination and self-motivation Acting is perhaps the most difficult business in the world to enter. At any given point in time the majority of professional actors are unemployed. To survive as an actor, one must be incredibly self-motivated. An actor is a salesperson selling herself. No one else can do this for her. Even an agent can't get an actor the job. He can help the actor get the interview, but ultimately it is up to the actor, through strength of determination, to persevere in the field. I have often advised aspiring actors, "If there is any other profession or job that you can do, you should."

These are some of the many qualities that have been ascribed to talent within the acting profession. There are arguably others, but these six cover most of the bases. Many "talented" actors possess several of these qualities, and a few great actors are lucky enough to be endowed with them all.

If you study this list, you might come to the realization that most of these characteristics can be developed. Yes, acting can be taught. And it is. Universities across the country offer training programs designed to help aspiring actors learn their art. In any major city in the world, there are conservatories, schools, and private acting coaches that will instruct and develop the craft of the actor. The quality of training and instructors vary greatly from location to location and the exact techniques and styles that are espoused are wildly different, but the core of acting training is essentially the same anywhere you go. Actors train their inner resources, their outer techniques, and their business skills.

Inner Resources

The inner resources of the actor include sensitivity, vulnerability, and imagination. Additionally and very importantly, an actor trains to analyze and dissect a script. He learns how to use this knowledge to develop the psychology of a character (see Figure 1.7). There are many different means of developing your inner resources, and most modern acting teachers have focused on developing these inner resources.

As mentioned earlier, Constantin Stanislavski focused on developing the inner life of a character through physical action. Through studying the script, an actor learns what the character is doing and what the character wants to achieve. Many famous acting teachers have based their inner life training on the work of Stanislavski, including Stella Adler, Sonya Moore, and the famous Lee Strasberg of the Actor's Studio.

Figure 1.7

George Contini, in *Put It in the Scrapbook*, develops inner resources.



COSTUMES BY JENNIE ALVERNAZ. LIGHTS BY RICH DUNHAM. DIRECTION BY KRISTIN KUNDERT-GIBBS.

For more reading on Constantin Stanislavski, look to three books written by him: *An Actor Prepares*, *Building a Character*, and *Creating a Role* (all from Theatre Arts Books, 1989).

Childlike games and play are wonderful ways of developing or reawakening the imagination; the leading proponent of this technique is Viola Spolin, who has a whole series of books on games for the theater. Additionally, improvisation is used to develop the imagination and sensitivity to others and the environment. There are entire programs across the country devoted to improvisational training, including the famous Second City in Chicago.

Check out Viola Spolin's *Theater Game File* for handy index cards of theater games for the actor (Northwestern University Press, 1989).

Two of the greatest acting teachers of the 20th century, Uta Hagen and Sanford Meisner, focused their techniques on the training of these inner resources. Hagan emphasized training the imagination and sensitivity, while Meisner focused on developing impulse and vulnerability. All of their work was highly personal and intimate.

You can learn more about Uta Hagen and her work in her two books: *Respect for Acting* (Wiley, 1973) and *A Challenge for the Actor* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991). Sanford Meisner's book, *Sanford Meisner on Acting* (Vintage, 1987), will teach you his techniques for creating truth in the moment.

The training of the inner resources is twofold, affecting the head and the heart. It encompasses an intellectual understanding and analysis of character as well as the development and expansion of the imagination and senses.

Outer Techniques

There are two types of outer techniques: completely external techniques and external techniques that move to internal techniques. Completely external techniques are ones that focus on the external training and development of the actor's instrument—her body and voice—while external techniques that move to internal techniques are acting methodologies that focus on the external creation of character in order to awaken the inner life of the character.

Actors must train their body and voice. They need to have the flexibility, strength, and stamina of an athlete in order to physically create characters and sustain their energy during a performance. Their voices need to be free from tension to express the intricacies of emotion. They need to be able to run through a range of pitches and of course must learn the skills of vocal power and articulation in order to be heard and understood.

Actors train their bodies in many ways. Classes are designed especially for stage movement. They cover finding alignment, ridding oneself from tension, finding a neutral body, mask of character, expression of character, and even specialty components of period dance and combat. Actors also train by studying dance, gymnastics, and the martial arts. Additionally, most actors have some sort of personal physical regimen that they participate in to keep their bodies strong, fit, and responsive.

Actors also train their voices in specially designed classes for stage voice. Many actors study singing voice and voiceover techniques.

The outer/external to inner techniques comprise the majority of the content of this book. These techniques are acting theories, which are designed to externally create a character. They deal with molding, morphing, or changing the body physically. Ideally

the external presentation of character awakens the inner life, desires, and emotions of the character. Change the body, and you change the way thought and emotions are expressed. Generally these types of techniques are learned in more advanced acting classes.

Business Skills

Any successful actor became that way by developing sound business skills. Since actors are salespeople selling themselves, they need to train in marketing and networking. They should develop sound interview and audition techniques to continue to land jobs. Actors can study these techniques through classes, but often these skills are learned on the job through trial and error.

How Acting Relates to the Animator

As an animator, you are basically doing the job of an actor. You are creating a living, breathing character that tells a story, shares an experience, and moves an audience. Your character becomes “animated” with the body, voice, and emotions that you breathe into it. So you need to understand the process of creating a real, living, breathing character on the screen from the actor’s perspective as well as from the perspective of the CG artist.

In some ways, the animator’s process is actually twofold. First you must create the character, and then you must transfer it to the computer. Perhaps you could argue that you are actually creating the character directly on the screen. But in either case your instrument is not the same as an actor who uses his own body, voice, and emotions to create the character. Your instrument is the hardware and software available to you. Nevertheless, your character still has a body, voice, and emotions as with the actor’s character, so understanding and employing the techniques of an actor can only aid in your artistry.

We contend that it is virtually impossible to understand and internalize the work and process of an actor without participating in it. Reading about it will only increase your intellectual understanding. Doing it will allow you to viscerally experience the creation of a new life. In most theater programs across the United States, acting is a required element of a degree in theater. Even if an individual never intends to set foot on the stage but wants to design, write, or direct, he must fully participate in an acting class to understand the art of acting that is central to the creation of character. As you, the animator, are also creating characters, you too must participate in training as an actor.

Just as you began your work as an animator with elementary exercises to understand the hardware, software, and language of the discipline, actors begin their training and work with exercises designed to help them understand their instrument. The actors’ exercises help them connect with their body, voice, and imagination. We will begin your exploration of the art of acting with basic exercises used by beginning actors.

Beginning Acting Exercises

As an animator hoping to grow in your ability to understand and communicate character, you will gain invaluable information and experience from training as an actor does. Although you are not attempting to become an actor, you will be best served by following the same training routine as the actor. The beginning exercises will help you develop a language and prepare you for the advanced work of character creation. The following exercises are often done in beginning acting classes. They might remind you of your games from childhood or even gym class, and that analysis would be correct. For the purposes of this book, the focus is on the physical self. The first exercises are designed to help you relax, warm up, and center yourself.

Actors are similar to musicians and athletes in their need to warm up. Since their body is their instrument, they need to relax, stretch, and start moving slowly to avoid injury. The warm-up also allows the actor to center herself and switch her focus to the work at hand, and free and limber her body to express character and emotion. Many actors study Eastern movement pedagogies such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong. All of these serve the purposes of warming up and centering very well. Although we will not discuss these topics in this text, feel free to use them as part of your warm-up if you have already studied the techniques.

It is helpful to start actor training with a childlike hunger of the imagination and freedom of inhibitions. We need to knock the editor that sits on our shoulder and screens and controls everything that we do into oblivion. This editor has grown from years of our parents and society telling us what is appropriate behavior and what we can and cannot do. While it may be useful to have an editor on your shoulder for polite society, it is detrimental for an artist to have anyone screen his impulses. So let's warm up and have some fun.

Solo Exercises for Relaxation

This is the preparation for the relaxation exercises. Read through all of the instructions first so that you can stay relaxed and do not need to refer back to the book during the course of the exercise. You may want to record yourself reading the instructions so you can listen and respond.

Start by lying on your back on the floor, as shown in Figure 1.8. If you have a hard floor, you might want to lie on a blanket or a towel. Stretch out very long and yawn, relaxing back into the floor as you exhale. You should end lying with your arms about 45 degrees from your sides and your palms facing the ceiling. Your legs should be extended and should not be crossed. If you have a troublesome lower back, you might want to bend your knees and place your feet on the floor.



Figure 1.8
 Proper position for
 lying on the floor

Think about letting your back lengthen out long from the tip of your tailbone to the top of your head. Don't try to flatten the curve in your lower back or in your neck; they belong there. Just let the spine lengthen out. Then try to let your back spread out wide, letting the shoulder blades slip apart. (It sometimes helps to give yourself a bear hug to get your shoulder blades to spread.)

Relax your lower abdomen and let your breath drop deep into your belly. Inhale through your nose, then relax your jaw and let the breath fall out of the small opening in your mouth. Send your attention to your breath. Let it be relaxed and deep in your body. Allow the inhalation and the exhalation to become equal. Count the length of time it takes to inhale and the length of time it takes to exhale. An example would be to inhale for six counts and then exhale for six counts. Don't try to lengthen or change your breath just yet. Simply count the most natural pattern. Count your breath for several minutes.

Then send your attention away from your breath and the center of your body to the outside of your body by focusing on your sense of touch. While lying on the floor, with your stomach and jaw relaxed, send your attention to everything that is touching you. In your mind's eye, identify all of the things that you feel touching the outside of your body. It could be a ring, a watch, the hair on your forehead or the back of your neck, the waistband of your pants, the cuff of a sleeve, your socks, the floor under your body, or the air on your skin. Take about a minute to do this.

Then send your attention even farther away from your breathing center by focusing on what you hear. Listen for all of the sounds around you. In your mind's eye, identify what you are hearing. Listen for sounds within sounds or layers of sounds. Do this for about a minute.

Then send your attention back to your breathing center. Make sure that your lower belly rises and lowers as the breath drops in and out of you. It might help to flop a relaxed hand onto your lower belly (below the belly button) to feel it rise and fall. Make sure that your jaw is relaxed so that there is a small opening between your lips for the breath to fall out. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Go back to counting your breath. Do this for several more minutes.

This exercise is a start to deeper relaxation. It can be used by itself when you are pressed for time, but if you have ample time, try it with one of the following exercises.

Mandala

Progress around the outside of your body using your mind to tell each area to relax. (If you don't have a partner to talk you through this, record the directions and play them back to yourself.)

1. Starting with the right side:
 - a. Relax your right thumb.
 - b. Relax your right index finger.
 - c. Relax your right middle finger.
 - d. Relax your right ring finger.
 - e. Relax your right pinky finger.
 - f. Relax the palm of your hand.
 - g. Relax the back of your hand.
 - h. Relax your right wrist.
 - i. Relax your right forearm.
 - j. Relax your right elbow.
 - k. Relax your right upper arm.
 - l. Relax your right shoulder.
 - m. Relax your right armpit.
 - n. Relax your right side from your armpit to your hip socket.
 - o. Relax your right hip.
 - p. Relax your right upper leg.
 - q. Relax your right knee.
 - r. Relax your right lower leg.
 - s. Relax your right ankle.
 - t. Relax the top of your right foot.
 - u. Relax your right big toe.

- v. Relax your right second toe.
 - w. Relax your right third toe.
 - x. Relax your right fourth toe.
 - y. Relax your right fifth toe.
 - z. Relax the bottom of your right foot.
 - aa. Relax your whole right side, from the tips of your fingers to the tips of your toes.
2. Repeat all of these steps for your left side.
 3. Relax your belly.
 4. Relax your chest.
 5. Relax your throat and neck.
 6. Relax your scalp and skull.
 7. Relax your forehead.
 8. Relax the space between your eyebrows.
 9. Relax your right eye.
 10. Relax your left eye.
 11. Relax your right cheek.
 12. Relax your left cheek.
 13. Relax your upper lip.
 14. Relax your lower lip.
 15. Relax your jaw.
 16. Send your attention back to your breath. Relax. Rest. Breathe.

Tense and Release

This is an alternative relaxation exercise to the mandala. Instead of using your imagination to relax the muscles, you will tense a muscle or muscle group and then relax the tension as you exhale. Some people find this method easier to find relaxation than a mere command from the mind.

1. Squeeze your feet into a ball tensing all of the muscles in your feet. Hold for a beat. Release on an exhale.
2. Isolate and tense only the muscles in your lower legs. Hold. Release.
3. Isolate and tense only the muscles in your upper legs. Hold. Release.
4. Isolate and tense only the muscles in pelvis and bottom. Hold. Release.
5. Isolate and tense only the muscles in your abdomen. Hold. Release.
6. Isolate and tense only the muscles in your chest and shoulders. Hold. Release.

7. Isolate and tense only the muscles in your neck, face, and scalp. Hold. Release.
8. Tense all of the muscles in your entire body, allowing yourself to curl into a ball. Hold. Release, uncurling.
9. Relax. Rest. Breathe.

Group Exercise for Relaxation



Start by pairing up. Allow one partner (let's call this person A) to lie on the floor and go through the first general relaxation process. After A has started to relax and find his natural breathing rhythm, Partner B will gently work around his body, stretching out all of his limbs. (These exercises are demonstrated in movie files available on the book's accompanying DVD.)

1. Start with the head. Partner B will gently take Partner A's head in her hands and lift it about an inch off the floor. Partner B will then start to gently turn the head left to right while gently pulling or extending the head from the neck, as shown in Figure 1.9. The neck is gently being lengthened here. It is important that the rock and pull of the head is gentle and slight. Partner A must relax his head and allow it to drop fully into Partner B's hands. Do this for about a minute and then gently place the head back on the floor. (See *RotatingHead.mov* on the DVD.)
2. Move to the right arm. Partner B will gently take Partner A's right arm and pull it from the shoulder while gently twisting or rotating it side to side, as shown in Figure 1.10. Again this is a slight pull and twist. Do this for about a minute (*RotatingShoulder.mov*).

Figure 1.9
An actor rotating
the head



Figure 1.10
An actor stretching
the shoulder



3. Partner B will then place Partner A's upper-right arm on the floor and work on the elbow joint. Partner B should hold Partner A's upper-right arm in place on the floor with one hand and then gently pull and rotate the elbow, as Figure 1.11 shows. Do this for about a minute (RotatingElbow.mov).

Figure 1.11
An actor stretching
the elbow



4. Partner B will then place Partner A's lower-right arm on the ground and work on the right wrist. Partner B should hold Partner A's lower-right arm in place with one hand and gently pull on and rotate the wrist, as shown in Figure 1.12. Do this for about a minute (*RotatingWristandFingers.mov*).
5. Partner B will then work on all the fingers on the right hand of Partner A. Partner B will hold Partner A's wrist on the ground with one hand and with the other gently stretch and twist every joint on every finger on the right hand, as shown in Figure 1.13. Take several minutes to do this.

Figure 1.12
An actor rotating
the wrist



Figure 1.13
An actor stretching
the fingers



6. Now move on to the right leg. Partner B will need to stand up and take Partner A's right leg in her hands. Partner B will gently pull, twist, and stretch the leg from the hip joint, as shown in Figure 1.14. Be careful not to twist the knee. Do this for about a minute and then gently place the leg back on the ground (RotatingHip.mov).



Figure 1.14
An actor rotating
the hip

7. Partner B will now hold the stretched out leg of Partner A in place with one hand and with the other gently rotate and stretch the ankle, as shown in Figure 1.15. Do this for about a minute (RotatingAnkle.mov).



Figure 1.15
An actor rotating
the ankle

- Partner B will then work through rotating and stretching all of the joints on all of the toes of Partner A's right foot, as Figure 1.16 shows. Take several minutes to do this. If Partner A is extremely ticklish, you might need to skip this step (*RotatingToes.mov*).

Figure 1.16
An actor stretching
the toes



- Repeat for the left side of the body.
- End by returning to the head and gently rocking and stretching it one last time. Allow the fully stretched out and relaxed partner to rest for several minutes and then switch.

Exercises for Warming Up

These exercises can be done solo or with a group.

Stretch, Rotate, and Bounce

- Start by standing with feet hip width apart, feet parallel to each other, and knees soft. Let your spine lengthen from the tip of your tailbone, which is pointing between your heels, to the top of your head. Imagine that your head is floating on top of your spine.
- Allow your wrists to float toward the ceiling, taking your whole arm with them. Keep your hands relaxed as your wrists float up, as shown in Figure 1.17.



Figure 1.17
Floating to
the ceiling

3. When your wrists float your arms as high up as they can go, allow your fingers to start to float up to the ceiling, as you can see in Figure 1.18. Imagine there are strings on the ends of all of your fingers that are pulling your arms up to the ceiling.
4. Stretch through your sides. Gently raise your right hand higher, stretching your right side, and then raise your left hand higher, stretching your left side, as shown in Figure 1.19. Come back to center so that both sides are stretched.



Figure 1.18
Fingers stretched
to the ceiling

Figure 1.19
Stretching the sides



5. Let your wrists collapse so that your hands are hanging from the wrists, free from tension. Then let your elbows collapse so that your lower arms and hands are hanging free from tension. Then let your shoulders collapse so that your arms are hanging heavy and relaxed from your shoulder girdle. Then let your head and neck collapse forward so that your head is hanging heavy and relaxed from the top thoracic vertebra. Look at Figure 1.20 for examples.

Figure 1.20
Dropping down
the spine



6. Let the weight of your head gently start to pull your spine forward so that you are releasing one vertebra at a time down the front of your body. At some point as you drop down your spine to the front of your body, the weight of your head will become so heavy that you collapse all the way down. You will now be dropped, over hanging upside down, as shown in Figure 1.21. You should release all the way from your tailbone. Make sure that your knees are not locked and are soft. Your head and arms should be heavy and dangling. Your hands might even be brushing the floor. Hang there for about 20 seconds, sort of bobbing up and down. Think about floating like a jellyfish.



Figure 1.21
Floating like
a jellyfish

7. Slowly start to move to an upright position, stacking one vertebra on top of another. Go slowly, trying to imagine each vertebra stacking on the next. Your shoulders, arms, neck, and head should be loose and hanging until they take their place on the spine. Your head will be the last thing to come into place. Imagine it floating on top of your spine. Look to Figure 1.22 for guidance (*Spi network.mov*).

Figure 1.22
Stacking the
vertebrae



8. Imagine that you are a rag doll and everything in your body is loose and floppy. Then imagine that you have springs under your feet. Allow yourself to start to spring around the room, with your loose rag doll body flopping all over the place. Stop and shake all over like a dog shaking off water.
9. Stand on one foot and rotate the ankle of the other foot around in a circle. Change the direction of the rotation. Now rotate the knee around in both directions. Then rotate the hip around in both directions. This requires good balance and focus. It often helps to pick a spot on the floor far in front of you or on the wall in front of you to focus on. Then shake out the whole leg. Repeat on the other leg.
10. Rotate your wrists around in both directions. Then rotate your elbows in both directions. Then make great big arm circles in both directions. Shake your arms out.
11. Go back to the rag doll image and spring and bounce and flop all over the room once more.

Shake Out

This exercise has many purposes. It helps to relax and release tension while it builds energy in the body and focus for the mind. It also aids in a vocal warm-up.

1. Shake your right hand for eight beats, counting out loud: one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight.
2. Shake your left hand for eight beats, counting out loud.
3. Shake your right foot for eight beats, counting out loud.
4. Shake your left foot for eight beats, counting out loud.
5. Repeat with your right hand, left hand, right foot, and left foot, counting out loud for *seven* beats.
6. Repeat with your right hand, left hand, right foot, and left foot, counting out loud for *six* beats.

7. Repeat with your right hand, left hand, right foot, and left foot, counting out loud for *five* beats.
8. Repeat with your right hand, left hand, right foot, and left foot, counting out loud for *four* beats.
9. Repeat with your right hand, left hand, right foot, and left foot, counting out loud for *three* beats.
10. Repeat with your right hand, left hand, right foot, and left foot, counting out loud for *two* beats.
11. Repeat with your right hand, left hand, right foot, and left foot, counting out loud for *one* beat.

Exercises for the Imagination and Play

These exercises can be done solo or with a group.

Walks

If you are working with a group, you need to expand your awareness so that you don't run into other people. If you do happen to run into someone, just make contact and move on. Don't make a big deal out of it.

As you explore these different types of walks, see if any interesting patterns come to you that could be used in the development of a CG character.

EXPLORE SPACE WITH TEMPO, DIRECTIONS, AND LEVELS

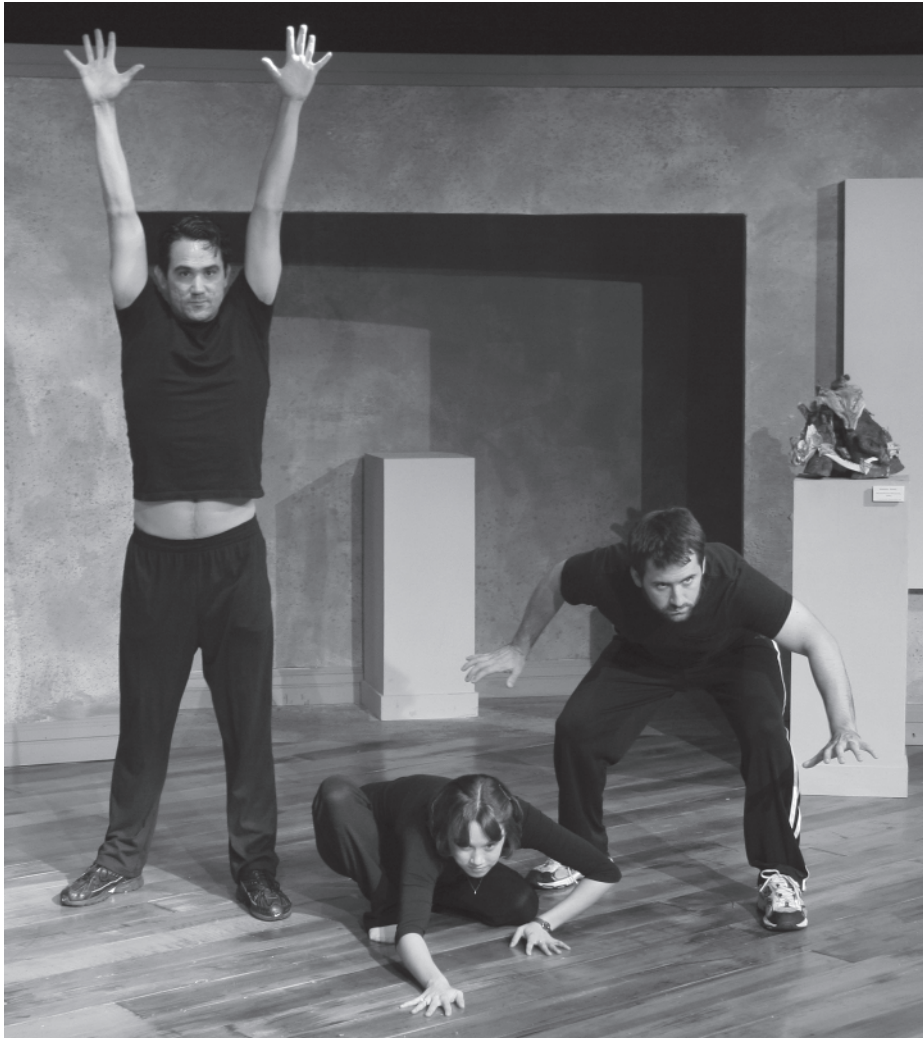
Begin by walking around the room. Walk randomly. Don't fall into patterns or circles. Look to the horizon. Don't look to the ceiling or floor. Let your arms swing freely at your sides. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth.

1. Continue walking around the room randomly, but now start to explore tempos and rhythms. See how slow, and then how fast, you can go. What happens when you vary slow and fast? Do any of these changes in tempo and rhythm suggest a type of person to you? Do any of these changes suggest a certain mood or emotion? If so, try to become that person or indulge in that feeling and continue to walk randomly around the room.
2. Go back to walking around the room randomly in a moderate tempo and start to explore your walking in terms of direction. Intentionally move from an imaginary point A to a point B. Explore direction to move between the two points. Try straight lines, curves, circles, zigzags, serpentine, and backward. Do any of these directionalities suggest a certain type of person or character to you or a particular mood or feeling? If so, continue to explore within the character or emotion.
3. Once again, go back to moving randomly around the room, but this time explore levels. How many different levels can you find within your space? Are there steps or

furniture? How many different levels can you create with your body? How close can you get to the ground? How high in the air? What about moving in every plane in between? How quickly can you change levels? Does moving at any certain level suggest a certain type of person or mood or feeling? If so, continue to move and explore within this type of person or emotion.

4. Put on some music and explore the space, tempo, directions, and levels as influenced by the music. Does the music lend itself to a certain direction or level? Is it possible to choose a different tempo or rhythm than what the music provides for you? Does the music suggest any mood or emotion? If so, continue to explore your space within that mood or emotion. Do this with many different types and styles of music and see how it affects your movement, body, and feelings. Figure 1.23 shows actors exploring levels.

Figure 1.23
Exploring levels



MEDIUMS AND ATMOSPHERES

After you have begun to explore your space and your body in space with the previous exercise, work on your imagination for this exercise.

1. Go back to randomly walking through the room. Now imagine that the floor of the room is coated with thick tar. Try to walk across the room while your feet are sticking to the floor. You must work to pull your feet free from the tar with each step.
2. Allow that tar to evaporate and imagine you are walking across a trampoline or one of those children's jumpers from a fair. Allow your weight to shift and throw you off balance with each step. Try to stay upright.
3. Let the trampoline become hot sand. Try to walk across the sand without burning your feet. Imagine that you are in the desert and the temperature is 110 degrees. Allow the heat under your feet and around your body to affect your movement.
4. Imagine that you are moving through a vat of Jell-O. It is surrounding you all the way up to your waist. Push and jiggle your way through the cool gelatin.
5. Imagine that you are underwater breathing with the aid of a SCUBA apparatus. You have been weighted so that you are walking across the bottom of the ocean. Feel the water surrounding you. You have weights around your waist but your arms and legs move freely and float in the water. Work your way around a sunken ship to view the fish.
6. Use your imagination to put your body on the moon. Try to move and explore the space as if you were completely free from gravity.
7. What if the room became the North Pole? You are freezing cold. The wind is whipping against your skin. You need to get to shelter but your feet are sinking in the snow, and the wind is pressing against your body. Continue to move, exploring these conditions.
8. Finally, place yourself on Jupiter. Here gravity is extreme because of the size of the planet. Don't get bogged down in the fact that there would be no oxygen; just try to move with the immense force of gravity pulling down on you. Every single movement will take great energy to pull you up from the ground.

CENTERS

For an actor, a center is the place in the body where energy comes from. It is usually found in the torso, hence the word *center*. This center leads or initiates movement. It is easy to see in some people where their center lies. A woman who is extremely pregnant often has her center in her pelvis and actually walks with pelvis thrust forward and leading the way. On the other extreme, a ballet dancer will often have a high center residing in her upper chest or even clavicle. She seems to lift and float as her movement is led from this place.

Training can affect the center. Athletes who train in wrestling, football, or the martial arts often have low centers as they are taught to drop their energy down to anchor themselves. Dancers, on the other hand, often have higher centers so they can jump, lift, and float with ease. For most people the center is somewhere between several inches below the belly button and the upper chest. Every once in a while you will find someone with their center in their forehead. It is usually someone with a very high intellect. You can actually see them pull their body through space by their brow.

Different centers suggest various types of characters and personalities, so trying out different centers in your walk can help you see and feel the differences. With all of the steps that follow, begin at an extreme and unrealistic exploration of the center. For example, with the pelvis center, really push your pelvis forward in an “inhuman” sort of way. Then slowly, as you move around the space, allow the center to become subtler and more naturalistic. Notice the difference between the extreme and the subtle.

If you are working with a group, at this point you can begin to interact with other members of the group. Different centers suggest different characters and might draw you toward or away from other people. At the end of each different center exploration, feel free to allow your energy and movement to be drawn toward another person.



Some of you may have difficulty exploring a certain center. If your own personal center is either very low or very high, you may not be able to change your center to the opposite extreme. Those of you whose center is more “central” will probably have an easier time switching your center around. Don’t worry about it. Just do the best you can.

1. Once again start by walking around the space with your arms dropped and swinging naturally at your sides. Look to the horizon. Let your jaw relax so that it is dropped slightly and inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Let your belly relax and allow the breath to drop deep inside. Now start to pay attention to where you believe your center lies. What part of your body is leading your movement? Where is your energy coming from? Does this suggest anything about you?
2. Shift your center down to several inches below your belly button. (If this is your natural center, skip to the next step.) You can do this by thinking about dropping your weight down into your body. Explore your space, moving from this center. How does this change in center affect your movement? Does it make you feel different? Does it suggest a certain type of character? If so, continue to explore the space within this character or feeling.
3. Shift your center even lower to your pelvis. (If this is your natural center, skip to the next step.) Allow energy to come from your pelvis and allow the pelvis to lead your movement. This usually suggests certain character traits. Explore the space with the pelvis leading. If a character or feeling emerges from this exploration, continue moving within the character. Figure 1.24 shows an actor leading from the pelvis (PelvisCenter.mov).

4. Shift your center up very high in your body to your clavicle. (If this is your natural center, skip to the next step.) You will feel light and lifted, perhaps as if your feet are barely touching the floor. Explore your space with this high center of energy leading the movement. Notice whether this movement brings up certain feelings or suggests a certain character. If so, explore the space within these emotions or character. Figure 1.25 shows an actor leading from the clavicle (ClavicleCenter.mov).
5. Drop your center down a bit toward your sternum and explore your space with the energy in this area leading the movement. (If this is your natural center, skip to the next step.) How does this movement make you feel? If it suggests any character or feelings, explore within these emotions or character.



Figure 1.24
Pelvis center



Figure 1.25
Clavicle center

6. Drop your center down one more time to around your belly button. (If this is your natural center, skip to the next step.) Explore the space, allowing the energy of this center to lead your movement. Does it suggest a certain character to you? Does this center bring up any feelings or sensations? If so, continue to explore within these emotions or character.
7. Finally, try exploring with some unique and rarely seen centers. First allow your center to reside in your forehead. Allow the energy of the forehead to lead your movement through space. This could change the tempo or pace at which you move as well as the quality of your movement. Does it suggest a character? If so, go for it, and explore within this character. Figure 1.26 shows an actor with her center in her forehead (ForeheadCenter.mov).

Figure 1.26

Forehead center



8. Try moving your center to a place that could be interesting for an animated character. Try leading with a knee, a toe, your right side, your rear end, or your left shoulder. While you wouldn't usually find these centers in daily human life, they have been seen in animated figures. Explore what it feels like to move within one or all of these centers. Observe what happens to the rest of your body when you change your center. Notice what type of character this might suggest. Figure 1.27 shows actors leading from many different centers.



Figure 1.27
Actors leading from
many different
centers

Alien Spirit

Assume a relaxed position on the floor, as described in the first exercise. Now imagine that you are an alien being that has never had a physical body. You have only existed in spirit form. But now, due to some strange space phenomenon, your spirit form has suddenly been placed in a human body. (Of course it must be yours.) As this alien spirit, and from a place of total innocence, begin to explore what this human body can do. Remember that you have never experienced gravity. You don't know how muscles work. You don't know how joints bend, flex, or rotate. You don't know how to stand, sit, crawl, or even lift a finger. You don't know how you hear or see. Slowly start to figure it out. Don't take anything for granted. Don't be afraid to make sound if something occurs that inspires sound. Give yourself 20 to 30 minutes for this exploration.

Then, if you have a class, discuss what you discovered, noticed, or learned from this experience. If you don't have a class, journaling helps you process your experience. This exercise can be emotional for some people, so don't be surprised if you experience some frustration, fear, anger, or joy. On the flip side, don't worry about it if no feelings come up for you. (If, however, in the future you find that you never feel anything for any exercise that you participate in, you may not be fully committing to and giving yourself up to the exercises.) The intricacies of the movement of the human body are quite extraordinary, and we often take our body for granted. This exercise can help you get back in touch with just how miraculous you are.

Exercises for Freeing the Body and Voice While Releasing Inhibitions

Learning to act is easier when done with a group than solo. Since acting involves communication, it makes sense that working with other people aids the process. Most acting classes have 10–20 students. Although these are ideal numbers, you can do these exercises with as few as four people. Working with others will help you listen and respond. Plus, it is just plain fun.

Sound and Movement

There are many reasons for doing sound and movement exercises. First, they help to free the body and voice by forcing a response quickly and without thought. Second, they force you to let go of your inhibitions because you are going to look silly. Everyone will look equally silly. In fact, if you don't look silly you aren't doing the exercise correctly. Third, and most importantly, it forces you to stop thinking and screening your impulses. You have to kick your editor off your shoulder and do something in the moment without thought. So let go with these exercises and just have fun.

PASS IT AROUND

This is a good sound and movement exercise to begin with for your group exercises. You will need to let go of your inhibitions and respond to your group.

1. Start by forming a circle. One member of the circle will then do a sound and movement. They should move their whole body into some position at the same time that they are making a vocal sound. The sound and movement should not be human. Don't try to assume a character or tell a story. Just throw your body and voice. The bigger and wilder, the better. Do not say words, just sounds. This is supposed to be preverbal, primal sound and movement. Try to move your spine as well as your limbs.
2. After the first member of the circle does his sound and movement, each successive member of the circle will repeat it as exactly as they can one at a time all around the circle, ending with the person who created the sound and movement repeating it one more time. This should move very quickly from one person to the next just like the wave at a basketball game.
3. Immediately after the sound and movement has completed the circle, the next person in line will do a new sound and movement and then it should whip around the circle like the wave. When it gets all the way around, the next person in the circle will start a new sound and movement, and so forth.

Keep in mind that speed is essential. You must go fast. Do not allow time to think. Just do it. Sheer speed can help to short-circuit your editor or screener that screams, "You are looking silly." Also, try to receive the sound and movement from the person ahead of you and try to pass it on to the next person in the circle. In this way you are communicating the sound and movement from one person to the next. Finally, even though you are going quickly, do not anticipate the sound and movement. Allow it to be passed to you before you receive it and pass it along to the next person.

SOUND AND MOVEMENT REPEAT

This exercise is essentially the same as the previous one with a slight variation. Instead of passing the sound around the circle, everyone in the circle will repeat the sound and movement in unison.

1. Start by forming a circle. One member of the circle will then perform a sound and movement as described earlier.
2. Immediately after this, the entire circle repeats that sound and movement in unison.
3. Very quickly, without leaving even one second for thinking, the next member of the circle will perform a new sound and movement and then the whole circle will repeat it in unison.
4. Do this all the way around the circle. Go fast. You should be out of breath.

Rhythm Jam

This exercise requires you to listen to other members of your group while you explore your own body and voice. It helps to grow an ensemble spirit within your group of actors.

1. Start by forming a circle.
2. Pick one member of the circle to lay down a beat. They should vocally establish a rhythm. It could be a sound like a beat box or a drum line.
3. Go around the circle and each member will add a vocal sound to this rhythm. Add only one sound at a time until each member of the circle is vocalizing. Just like the sound and movement, there should not be words, only sounds. The sound could be anything from animals to man-made sounds, to more rhythms, to things that are more musical. The only thing that is important is that all of the sounds keep within the rhythm established at the beginning.
4. When every member of the circle has added their sound, dance around the room continuing to make your sound. Dance and move around different people so you can hear different sounds next to each other.
5. Eventually reform the circle. See if, as a group, you can pick up the tempo of your rhythm jam and let it go faster. Then see if you can all slow down the rhythm jam. See if, as a group, you can slowly let it fade out and disappear.