

Stanislavsky and Neurodiversity

Section headings and navigation can be found by toggling the 'show tabs and outlines' button to the left of this document.

Stanislavsky and Neurodiversity is a symposium event, presented by The S Word, aiming to expand the conversation on neuroinclusion in acting practice and training. With a focus on Stanislavskian approaches, across the two days a range of performers, directors and teachers will share neurodivergent approaches to acting practice, and strategies for neuroinclusive pedagogy through workshops, talks and discussion.

The programme is split into 4 thematic sessions:

1. Neurodivergent Experience and Embodiment/Cross-Neurotype Working Relationships
2. 'Truth', Authenticity and Neurodivergent Representation
3. Stanislavsky and Accessible Teaching Practices
4. Neurodivergent Approaches to Stanislavsky

Throughout these, we will consider the topic from a range of angles, attending to diversity of neurodivergent experience throughout.

Stanislavsky and Neurodiversity is convened by Zoë Glen, Klara Hricik and Kira Morsley.

Access support on the Saturday sessions will be provided by Sarah Teale and Betty Williams Singh

Any questions can be directed to zoeelizabethglen@gmail.com, kiramorsley@hotmail.com and klarahricik@gmail.com

Acknowledgements

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About 'The S Word'

'The S Word' is a collaborative international research project with partners in the UK, Europe, USA and Australia. Founded by Bella Merlin and Paul Fryer, the project explores the legacy of Stanislavsky's work within a contemporary context. 'The S Word' is supported by The Stanislavsky Research Centre, co-hosted by the University of Leeds and the University of Malta.

Overview Friday 2nd May, 5.30pm - 9pm UK time (Online only)

Session 1 - Neurodivergent Experience and Embodiment/Cross Neurotype Working Relationships

5.30 - 5.50pm - Welcome and introduction - Zoë Glen, Klara Hricik, Kira Morsley, Paul Fryer

5.50 - 6.20pm - Student Perspectives of Stanislavskian Training - Ami Gray, Leo Beswick, Lou Fielding, discussion with neurodivergent students from Rose Bruford College and Performers College

6.20 - 6.35pm - Psychological Realism and Cross-Neurotype Communication, Zoë Glen, paper

6.35 - 6.50pm - 'How Do I Feel About This?' Alexithymia and Emotion Memory, Kira Morsley, paper

6.50 - 7.00pm - BREAK

7.00- 7.45pm - Neurodiversity and Embodiment in Stanislavsky's Use of Yoga, Monetta Wilson, Practical session

7.45 - 8pm - Using Active Analysis to Enhance Neuroinclusion, Klara Hricik, paper

8 - 8.30pm - Neurodivergent and neurotypical students talk acting at UC Riverside, Jocelyn Gordillo, Colin Loveland and Leonard Laninovich, with Bella Merlin

8.30 - 8.45pm - Acting Without a Mind's Eye: Inclusive Pedagogy for Performers with Aphantasia, Alexis Black and Rob Roznowski

8.45 - 9pm - General questions and discussion on session 1

Friday Session Summaries

Student Perspectives of Stanislavskian Training (*Ami Gray, Leo Beswick and Lou Fielding*)

This session will take the form of a facilitated discussion with three neurodivergent students currently training in UK drama school settings. The conversation will focus on their experience of learning Stanislavskian techniques within their training, the positives and challenges within this, and how practice may shift to better suit neurodivergent students.

Psychological Realism and Cross-Neurotype Communication (*Zoë Glen*)

This paper draws on my research into the experiences of autistic and neurodivergent acting students, whose access needs and ways-of-doing have been previously neglected within the literature on neurodiversity and performance-training. Conducted through participatory interviews and practice-based workshops, this research takes an in-depth look at autistic approaches to acting. In this paper, I focus on one key theme that emerged around neuronormativity in Stanislavskian actor training, and how this impacts students with differences in emotional expression and experience. Speaking in relation to Stanislavsky's writing (1936; 2013) and existing literature on normativity and realist conventions (Daly, 2023; Peck, 2021), in

this talk I build upon my previous work on the equating of truth with neurotypicality (Glen, 2025). I refer to theories of cross-neurotype communication (Stones, 2023) to suggest how we may combine different acting techniques to de-centre neuronormative expression in performer training spaces - resulting in an overall more 'true' to life performance.

'How Do I Feel About This?' Autism, Alexithymia and Emotion Memory (Kira Morsley)

This paper will explore the tension between experiencing Alexithymia and using Stanislavsky and his successors' ideas of Emotion Memory and related psychophysical techniques. 'Alexithymia is characterized by an impaired ability to be aware of, explicitly identify, and describe one's feelings' (Hogeveen and Grafman, 2021), and is commonly experienced by autistic people (Kinnaird, et al, 2020). Research also suggests that autistic actors' expressions of emotion are often deemed inauthentic (Glen, 2025).

As an autistic actor who experiences alexithymia, I investigate the disconnect between the knowledge of an actor's 'internal dialogue between what you feel inside and how you express it externally.' (Merlin, 2014, p.22, italics in original). I will also examine emerging research on the theories of predictive processing differences in autistic people (Vermeulen, 2022), and how this relates to both alexithymia and sensory responsiveness (Diepman and Brady, 2024), and consider ways in which this sensory bias can be maximised in the use of Michael Chekhov's idea of 'Receiving' (Rushe, 2019).

Neurodiversity and Embodiment in Stanislavsky's Use of Yoga (Monetta Wilson)

Using a combination of talk and movement, Monetta will draw on her experiences teaching yoga to diverse communities to share some ways

neurodivergent people experience embodiment and her strategies to help neurodivergent people enjoy and benefit from embodiment activities. Together, participants will explore the connections between movement and emotions, how understanding this connection ties to Stanislavsky's work, and how this connection can be used to enhance artistry in acting and other creative fields.

Using Active Analysis to Enhance Neuroinclusion (*Klara Hricik*)

Active Analysis, an improvisatory rehearsal technique developed by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Maria Knebel, emphasizes the importance of physical action and creative individuality in acting from the onset of rehearsals (Carnickie, 2023; Knebel, 1967). This was proposed in opposition to Stanislavsky's earlier techniques that focused on substantial table work and script analysis, which he later realised could 'weigh the actors down' with information and force them to become passive participants in the creative process (Knebel, 1967, p. 30). From my experience as a neurodivergent actor and director, I believe that the Active Analysis framework has the potential to be neuroinclusive. The method inherently allows for consideration of varying processing speeds and encourages embodied learning, which can be useful neuroinclusive pedagogical strategies (Hamilton and Perry, 2023; Hricik, 2024; Oliver and Majumadar, 2021). Using autoethnographic and practical research, I outline how I utilise Dr. Sharon Marie Carnickie's condensed Active Analysis framework (2023) in rehearsal and actor-training spaces as a neuroinclusive tool to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the work.

Neurodivergent and neurotypical students talk acting at UC Riverside (*Jocelyn Gordillo, Colin Loveland and Leonard Laninovich, with Bella Merlin*)

For nearly twenty years, Professor Bella Merlin has been teaching self-selecting student-actors within the University of California, primarily using Stanislavsky's toolkit. Classes emphasize *obshcheniye*: the kindly, loving relation between self and others that binds people together in work and play, and establishes communion (Maria Shevtsova), along with the foundational tools of relaxation, focus, observation, imagination, playfulness, and willing vulnerability. In this fifteen-minute pre-recorded conversation, two neurodivergent students and one neurotypical student springboard off the symposium's question, 'Where does Stanislavsky's work align with the principles of the neurodiversity paradigm? (e.g. demonstrating understanding of natural variation in cognitive function)'. Jocelyn Gordillo and Colin Loveland are currently students in Merlin's TFDP 110A: Acting: Fundamentals, structured around The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit, and Leonard Laninovich has taken Merlin's TFDP 109: Acting: The Process, which foregrounds each unique student's creative individuality and state of 'I am'. The students discuss how the neurodivergent world is structured differently, and share the frequency with which they have modified social interactions growing up, in order to 'fit in' and avoid bullying. Conversely, the safe atmosphere provided in acting classes renders 'everything a creative decision' (Gordillo), where 'vulnerability and creativity is allowed for everything to be open' (Laninovich). Loveland concludes the conversation with his observation that 'neurotypicality is a spectrum in itself' inviting the compassionate *obshcheniye* foregrounded by Stanislavsky to be extended throughout our daily lives to expand collective compassion and understanding.

Acting Without a Mind's Eye: Inclusive Pedagogy for Performers with Aphantasia (Alexis Black and Rob Roznowski)

Acting is a psychophysical process. However, the emphasis on embodied imagery in actor training presents special challenges for actors with Aphantasia. These neurodivergent students report challenges in their ability

to visualize, or “see with the mind’s eye,” rendering widely-used pedagogical tools ineffective and frustrating. This presentation will describe the possible effect of these common teaching methods on the progress and confidence level of students with Aphantasia and propose training techniques to better serve these actors. Based on the previous experiences of professional and student actors with visualization challenges, scientific understanding of Aphantasia, as well as expressions by students who participated in adjusted classroom exercises, this presentation will introduce ways educators can create a more inclusive and productive acting studio.

Overview - Saturday 3rd May, 10am - 6.30pm UK time (University of Notre-Dame London/Online)

Saturday 3rd May, 10am - 6.30pm UK time (University of Notre-Dame London/Online)

9.00 - 10.00am - Registration

10 - 10.25am - Welcome and introduction - Zoë Glen, Klara Hricik, Kira Morsley

Session 2 - ‘Truth’, Authenticity and Neurodivergent Representation

10.25 - 10.40am - The Illogical is Liberating: Finding Freedom in a Confined World - Dr Robert Lewis and Dan Graham, paper presentation, (presenters online)

10.40 - 11.25am - Phenomenographic Approaches to 'A sense of truth' in Acting - Dr Jessica Hartley, Practical Workshop

11.25 - 11.35am - BREAK

11.35 - 12.05pm - Staging Neurodivergent Representation - panel session with 2 papers

Paper 1: Simulation vs. Authenticity: Questioning what is 'natural' in Stanislavskian acting methodologies, in relation to neurodivergence, representation, and mind-body ethics, Connor McLennan

Paper 2: *Not F**kin Sorry* and the refusal to perform, Jack McIntosh

12.05 - 12.30pm - Discussion on session 2

Session 3 - Stanislavsky and Accessible Teaching Practices

12.30 - 12.45pm - Stanislavsky's System and ADHD: A Diametrical Hindrance Discovered, Cherise Silvestri, paper presentation

12.45 - 1.45pm - Practice Problem Solving - A Practice-based session for practitioners to share short exercises that raise questions related to neuro-inclusion and access, followed by discussion. Questions proposed by Caroline Ward and Dana Blackstone.

1.45 - 2.30pm - LUNCH BREAK

2.30 - 2.50pm - Discussion on session 3

Session 4 - Neurodivergent Approaches to Stanislavsky

2.50 - 3.35pm - Playing with the Senses to Embody Character Physicality and Emotional Expression, Emily Holt, practical session

3.35 - 3.40 - SHORT BREAK

3.40 - 4.25pm - The Body Remembers: Reimagining Psychophysical Practice for a Neurodiverse Rehearsal Room. Building rehearsal rooms where every body belongs. Inclusion Collective: Christina Fulcher (she/her) with Ruth Phillips (she/her), practical session.

4.25 - 4.35 - BREAK

4.35 - 5.20pm - Actors' Perspectives of Stanislavskian Practice - facilitated discussion with neurodivergent actors, Darcy Dixon, Jasmine Thien, Sarah Wendy Burman

5.20 - 5.30pm - Discussion on session 4

5.30 - 6.30pm - Wrap up/general discussion/reception with nibbles + soft drinks

Saturday Session Summaries

The Illogical is Liberating: Finding Freedom in a Confined World (*Dr Robert Lewis and Dan Graham*)

Dan Graham and Dr Robert Lewis will discuss unique approaches to directing and actor training as neurodivergent theatre practitioners. As society evolves, so too do perspectives on actor training. Understandings of acting and human traits and behaviours shift over time, influenced by broader social changes. Significant transformations in societal structures directly impact how actors are trained, with current priorities including

decolonisation, inclusion, diversity, identity politics, neurodiversity, and the well-being of performers. It is essential to respond to these developments with an actor or student-centred approach.

Training methods should explore both cultural identity and individuality, actively challenging the idea of a singular “default” in opposition to an “other.” Graham and Lewis have embarked on several research projects on acting and neurodiversity, and Stanislavsky has been a linchpin throughout their careers. Lewis will discuss how alternate perspectives primarily influenced by Butoh coupled with fundamental Stanislavsky systems have unlocked imaginations in neurodiverse students and actors, and Graham will continue with his approach as a director balancing inclusivity and individual needs of the actors, with a strong Stanislavsky base.

Butoh is important because it addresses the need for interior exploration as well as exploring symbolism, oppositional tension, ritual, and overall, a search for a new method of channelling actors’ energy, as opposed to the Stanislavsky method which is ‘based on an understanding of the way we behave in our daily lives, which [is then used] when creating a character’ (Benedetti 1998, p.2). Tatsumi Hijikata, one of the founders of Butoh, stated that in the ‘Stanislavski system...man [sic] finds himself in a narrow and constricted world’ (Masson-Sekine & Viala, 1988 p.185). How can we balance exploratory approaches that fosters individuality and freedom, and formal structure at the same time?

Questioning 'A sense of truth' in Acting (Dr Jessica Hartley, Practical Workshop)

21st Century actor training still largely utilises a very broad understanding of the early Stanislavskian method as foundations for practice. Within these approaches, the desire for an actor to affect a 'sense of truth' within their work is common. As Merlin articulates however, 'truth is a tricky word, and an even trickier concept' (2007, p114). Working reflectively, the participants will playfully redefine truth as both an experience and aesthetic, noticing

the conceptions and contradictions therein. In so-doing we will explore the neuronormative assumptions at the heart of many Stanislavsky-based teaching practices; identifying the pitfalls of what happens when trainers uncritically replicate or reduce truth to 'life as WE' know it (Merlin 2007). This workshop has three sections; the first, a pair task that playfully engages with our experiences of telling the truth, and telling lies, as well as the audiences 'belief' in them. Second, we will move onto using Merlin's breakdown of the 'action, reaction, decision' with a play text as a way of understanding how to break down Stanislavsky's search for truth, and reframing it as an enquiry; and finally, we will be reflecting in a group discussion upon the way neurotype impacts upon the personal and perceptual logic of a 'truthful' response.

Simulation vs. Authenticity: Questioning what is 'natural' in Stanislavskian acting methodologies, in relation to neurodivergence, representation, and mind-body ethics (*Connor McClenan*)

Stanislavsky developed his naturalistic acting methods within the context of the late 19th/ early 20th centuries, at a time where eugenics, psychiatry, and the medical model of disability grew ever more prominent in shaping the lives of disabled people on and off stage. Within this context, it can be argued that his work assumes the ability of a 'good' actor to effectively simulate any character authentically - this prioritises so-called 'neutral' (read neurotypical/able bodied) bodies & minds which can simulate divergences in performance. I argue that modern concepts of what 'good' acting is, which often reflect authentic neurotypical behaviour and praise simulation of neurodivergence, can trace their roots back to Stanislavsky, whose work additionally laid the groundwork for current debates & issues around casting in today's media industries, with non-disabled actors still earning awards for playing disabled characters while disabled actors struggle to get work even playing ourselves.

In this short presentation, I seek to start a conversation about these ideas, to hear what others think about these thoughts I've been grappling with for the last few years. How does Stanislavsky's practice approach engage with the issue of authenticity vs. simulation in acting? Has Stanislavskian performance practice been mutated by other neurotypical practitioners into its current form, or did it always assume a single ideal human cognition as a starting point? And how could Stanislavskian theory be adapted to reflect the diversity of human cognition, and find synergy between the authentic actor and the simulated character within neurodivergent contexts?

*Not F**kin Sorry and the Refusal to Perform* (Jack McIntosh)

The exclusion of many neurodivergent individuals from actor training, and the assumption of neurodivergent people's inability to perform in a naturalistic style has contributed to the mass exclusion of neurodivergent individuals from the theatre arts, placing limitations around how and in what context neurodivergent people are seen within the theatre, and restricting how much neurodivergent people can contribute to knowledge created about them. All too often, the inclusion of neurodivergent people in the performing arts is done for the purposes of therapy or seen as a kind of charitable act. The recent proliferation of disability-led theatre companies means that neurodivergent performers and artists are producing work that directly contests dominant perceptions of their lives and their capabilities.

My talk will focus on Access All Areas theatre company's production *Not F**kin Sorry*, featuring a cast of neurodivergent performers. I will discuss how this production humorously contests the limited and limiting ways neurodivergent people have previously been seen onstage, when they are seen at all, and the consequences this can have that extend far beyond the boundaries of the theatre.

Stanislavsky's System and ADHD: A Diametrical Hindrance Discovered (*Cherise Silvestri*)

Recently diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), I am examining the relationship between my creative path and this neurotype, aiming to enhance both pedagogical and creative approaches in actor training. Beginning with a critical reflection of my own artistic development, I explore the evolution of ADHD diagnoses alongside my own diagnosis - with a lens on gender differences - to consider its current relevance. This autoethnographic case study serves as a foundation for exploring the relationship between ADHD and embodied (movement-based) acting methodologies. The study advocates for a more integrated curriculum that synthesizes embodied and analytical approaches, thereby supporting actors in developing a more holistic understanding of their craft and cognitive processes.

Practice Problem Solving (*questions proposed by Caroline Ward and Dana Blackstone*)

This session is a workshop space for collaboratively 'problem-solving' questions, considerations or conundrums related to neuroinclusive practice. Two practitioners will each share a question or thought they have about access from their own practice, and as a collective we will work through discussion and practical exploration to find (some) answers.

Playing with the Senses to Embody Character Physicality and Emotional Expression (*Emily Holt*)

This is a practical session that draws on sensory experience to offer a playful practice for creating character physicality. An exploration through turning embodied knowledge into embodied character life.

The session will involve a gentle warm up, before exploring using our bodies 'truthful' sensory responses as a means to connect to character. This will then continue into working briefly with voice and text.

Participants can bring a line (or two) of text of their choosing - this might be from a character you are working on, a piece you enjoy or a line from a song or a poem. This is an individual practice that we will experience together as a group, with no need to share individually (unless you'd like to).

The Body Remembers: Reimagining Psychophysical Practice for a Neurodiverse Rehearsal Room. Building rehearsal rooms where every body belongs. (*Inclusion Collective: Christina Fulcher (she/her) with Ruth Phillips (she/her)*)

This practical workshop offers a supportive and creative space to explore how Stanislavski's psychophysical methods can be reimagined through feminist and neuroinclusive approaches. Led by a movement director and intimacy coordinator, the session will guide participants through a range of adaptable physical exercises, including breathwork, grounding (either seated or standing), and the use of self-care cues to build personal agency and awareness in rehearsal. We will look at ways to take up space and express emotion through movement, always with respect for individual access needs. Participants will also be introduced to consent-based practices and closure techniques to support safe derolling and emotional regulation. Throughout the workshop, we will use Stanislavski's idea of the "magic if" to inspire imaginative play and character embodiment. All activities are optional, with clear alternatives offered, so participants can engage in whatever way feels best for them.

'Actors' Perspectives of Stanislavskian Practice' - facilitated discussion with neurodivergent actors (Darcy Dixon, Jasmine Thien, Sarah Wendy Burman)

This session will take the format of a discussion panel focused on the experiences of neurodivergent actors. The conversation will focus on the panelists' different experiences of Stanislavskian techniques in their training or professional practice, and how this relates to and is informed by neurodivergence.

Convener Biographies

Zoë Glen

Zoë Glen (she/they) is an autistic and multiply-neurodivergent performance-maker, actor-trainer and researcher with a specialism in neuroinclusive practice. Zoë is currently completing a PhD at the University of Kent, focused on autistic experiences of performer training, and has previously published work on autism, empathy and acting; 'truth' and neuronormativity, and on neurocosmopolitan approaches to training.

Zoë regularly teaches at a range of drama schools, as well as working in a range of disability focused participatory settings. As a performance maker, their interests are in neuroqueer devising processes and staging cognitive difference, and they have worked with a range of venues including Camden People's Theatre, The Hope Theatre and The Young Vic. Zoë is an associate editor for Theatre, Dance and Performance Training's *Training Grounds*, and is co-convener for TAPRA's Performer Training working group.

Kira Morsley

Kira Morsley (she/her) is an autistic actor and actor trainer. She holds an MA in Actor Training and Coaching from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, with her thesis project, '*Be Yourself, But Not Like That*': *Autistic Masking, Representation and Identity in Actor Training* exploring her experiences as an autistic actor and actor trainer.

Kira teaches across a number of institutions including Mountview and Performers College, focusing on creating a student-centred, inclusive space for actors to explore their practice, and has presented her research on autistic actor training previously at AusAct.

Klara Hricik

Klara Hricik is a neuroqueer disabled actor-trainer, director, and academic. She is Principal Lecturer of Acting for Musical Theatre & Dance at Performers College, and a Visiting Lecturer on the MA Musical Theatre programme at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the American Theatre Arts programme at Rose Bruford College. They are a graduate of Central's MFA in Actor Training and Coaching and also hold a BA Theatre (Musical Theatre & Directing) from Point Park University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Klara's research focuses on neuroinclusion and accessibility in performance training spaces. They have shared these ideas internationally at conferences and through Theatre, Dance and Performance Training's [blog](#), the *Training Grounds* edition 'Training and Physical Education' and as a guest editor on the edition 'Training and Feeling'.

Contributor Biographies

Leo Beswick, Lou Fielding, and Ami Gray

Leo Beswick is a non-binary performance student, peer reviewed multiple times as autistic, and currently seeking a formal diagnosis. They have been in training using Stanislavski's techniques for almost 3 years, through the mediums of musical theatre and plays.

Lou Fielding is a BA student at Performers in Essex, he has autism and ADHD, the latter of which he has only learnt of this year. He's from Preston, up north, but has been living in Essex for the last 2 years whilst training on the BA in Musical Theatre & Dance. He's ginger, has 3 cats, and his party trick is that he can crush a can between his shoulder blades.

Ami Gray is a Jamaican actor, writer, and voice artist graduating with a BA (Hons) in American Theatre Arts from Rose Bruford College. She specializes in emotionally charged, genre-bending storytelling across stage, screen, and audio. Her work blends surreal horror, sharp comedy, and deep vulnerability to create bold, unforgettable characters.

Monetta Wilson

Since 2013 Monetta has been helping people find joy in their bodies and ease in their lives as a certified Yoga Instructor. In addition to teaching at resorts, gyms, her studio and private residences; Monetta has published two instructional yoga books. She is the winner of the 2015 St. Lucia Chamber of Commerce young entrepreneur of the year award for her innovation used in the establishment of her yoga business. Monetta is

passionate about social justice and finds the most joy when bringing yoga to under-served and marginalized communities such as children, senior citizens, the chronically ill and disabled.

Jocelyn Gordillo, Leonard Laninovich, Colin Loveland and Bella Merlin

Jocelyn Gordillo is a third year at UC Riverside, majoring in Theatre, Film and Digital Production, with an emphasis on Acting/Directing; Leonard Laninovich is a fourth year, majoring in Theatre, Film and Digital Production, on the General TFDP track; and Colin Loveland is a third year, double-majoring in Political Science and TFDP, with an emphasis on Creative Writing. Bella Merlin is an actor, writer, and Distinguished Professor of Acting and Directing; author of publications including *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*; and co-founder with Professor Paul Fryer of The S Word series of international symposia.

Alexis Black

Alexis Black is a fight, movement and intimacy director, performer and theatre educator. She is a certified intimacy director and teaching artist with *Intimacy Directors and Coordinators* and an Assistant Professor of Movement at Michigan State University. As a fight or intimacy director she has worked Off-Broadway, regionally, internationally and on Broadway. As a professional actor and member of AEA, she has worked with regional theaters, on international tours and Off-Broadway. She leads staged intimacy and staged violence workshops at universities across the U.S., and is the co-author of *Supporting Staged Intimacy: A Practical Guide for Theatre Creatives, Managers and Crew* for Routledge Publications (2022).

Rob Roznowski

Rob Roznowski is an award-winning actor, author, director, educator, and playwright. He is a Professor at Michigan State University in the

Department of Theatre. His publications include books— *Roadblocks in Acting*, *Inner Monologue in Acting*, *The Introverted Actor: Practical Approaches* and *Collaboration in Theatre: A Practical Guide for Designers and Directors*; his plays— *Arts or Crafts*, *Comfort Food*, *The Tail of Peter Rabbit*, *The Summer Circle*, *The Amazing America Road Trip*; and articles/chapters mostly about the intersection of acting & psychology.

Dr Robert Lewis

Robert is an academic, playwright, director, and teacher. A graduate of UTAS (Performing Arts, PhD), Monash (BA Hons), RMIT (Education) and NIDA (Voice Studies), Robert has led Acting and Creative Industries departments at several universities, and currently lectures in Performing Arts at Charles Sturt University. Since graduating from NIDA's Voice Studies, he has voice coached many productions, and teaches voice at the NIDA Open and Studio programs. He is a certified One Voice Integrative Practitioner (New York) and founded the AusAct: Australasian Actor Training Conference and is the author of 'The Third Space: body, Voice, and Imagination' (Routledge, 2024).

Dan Graham

Dan Graham is a Theatre Director and a Disability Advocate with a particular interest in access support for neurodiverse performing artists. Dan has engaged with companies across Australia such as Bell Shakespeare, Sydney Festival, and the Ensemble Theatre. Dan is a fellow of the Australia Council's Future Leaders Program, Ian Potter Foundation scholarship, and Create NSW fellowship. Dan studied BA (Communication) and MCA (Theatre) at UTAS and Honours in Performance Studies at the University of Sydney. He is co-chair of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance's (MEAA) artists with Disability Board and on the LGBTQIA+ disability advisory group for ACON.

Dr Jess Hartley

Dr. Jess Hartley is a senior lecturer in acting pedagogy at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London. She is proudly neurodivergent and seeks to unsettle the uncritical replication of marginalising narratives in actor training to advocate for access, visibility and joy in the performing arts.

Connor McLennan

Connor (he/they) is an autistic theatre practice researcher & director, and is based in Canterbury, Kent.

Hailing originally from rural Cumbria, he studied drama and theatre directing at Royal Holloway, UoL before embarking upon his current doctoral practice research at University of Kent.

His research interests include adaptation, disability studies & neuroqueer theory, Shakespeare, and Naturalism.

Jack Elliott McIntosh

Jack Elliott McIntosh is a third year CHASE funded PhD student at Birkbeck University. Their research deals with representations of autism within performances in the UK from 2011-2024., combining performance analysis with ethnographic writing about their own experience as an AuDHD person. Their article 'Autism and Reduced Humanity in All In

A Row' was published in the journal Brief Encounters earlier this year, and they have an article due to be published in Contemporary Theatre Review in August 2025.

Cherise Silvestri

Cherise is currently working towards her masters in Actor Training and Coaching at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Having previously graduated with her BFA in acting at University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, she subsequently joined fellow graduates as a member of Defiant Theatre in Chicago. Her life in Europe and the UK began after working as an actor / director / instructor on board Crystal Cruises.

In addition to acting work, Cherise has taught acting courses and workshops in London and Brussels. She believes in ongoing studies and practice, to ensure that her teaching and acting continue to evolve.

Dana Blackstone

Dana Blackstone is a researcher, performer, and Module/Year Coordinator for BA American Theatre Arts at Rose Bruford College. She is a graduate of Royal Central School's MA Actor Training and Coaching and completed her PhD exploring compassion-based practices and multi-representation in a feminist actor training at Canterbury Christ Church University on their University Scholarship.

Dana has presented her research in a number of academic communities and authored multiple articles that investigate/explore/critique intersectional feminist practice/pedagogy, agency, community, compassion-based practices, actor training and self/social development, and the celebration of

overlooked, historically marginalised contributors to the actor training canon.

Caroline Ward

Caroline (she/her) is an actor trainer, currently working as Acting Tutor for BA Musical Theatre students at Wilkes Academy of Performing Arts and as a private acting coach. She also coaches presentation skills, public speaking and confidence building to a range of corporate clients. She recently graduated with an MA (distinction) in Actor Training and Coaching from The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, where her final dissertation explored the experiences of actors in menopause and the potential for Communities of Practice. She has a particular interest in inclusive practice, especially in relation to classical text, where her work foregrounds student identity and self-expression.

Emily Holt

Emily has over 20 years experience working as a dancer and then actor (having trained professionally in both disciplines). Overlapping this, she has 15 years experience as a Movement Director and Choreographer, as well as a movement tutor/workshop facilitator. Emily is also a certified Life-Coach.

Venues Emily has worked with include: Soho Place, Soho Theatre, The Arts Theatre, The Watermill, The Theatre Chipping Norton, The Curve, StoryHouse, Queens Hornchurch. Teaching/facilitation includes: LAMDA, Mountview, Shakespeare's Globe, RSC.

Christina Fulcher

Christina Fulcher (she/her) is a neurodivergent movement director, certified intimacy director and coordinator on the BECTU Intimacy Coordinator Registry, and educator working across theatre, dance, opera, film/TV. Her practice is grounded in feminist, trauma-informed, intersectional methodologies, focusing on inclusive, consent-based training and rehearsal processes. Christina co-founded the Inclusion Collective, an initiative dedicated to reimagining performance training through the lenses of neurodiversity, embodiment, and access. She holds an MFA in Movement Directing and Teaching from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and a BA in Dance and Communication from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Christina lectures on movement, intimacy, and inclusive practice at institutions including LAMDA, Mountview, and Leeds Conservatoire. Her research explores the intersections of embodied actor training and neurodivergence, with recent contributions including a co-authored book review on *Stanislavsky and Intimacy* in *Stanislavski Studies* (Vol. 12, Issue 2, 2024) and presentations at conferences such as the Royal Court's 'Institutional Transformation: Growth and Change in Post-Pandemic Theatre' and the International Conference for Intimacy Coordination in Berlin. Christina and Ruth were recipients of the Ivor Guest Research Grant from the Society for Dance Research. For more information on Christina's current projects: linktr.ee/fulchermovement

Ruth Phillips

Ruth Phillips (she/her) is a distinguished movement director, educator, and theatre-maker dedicated to reimagining actor training through an inclusive and intersectional framework. Holding an MA in Movement: Directing and Teaching from The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Ruth has collaborated with esteemed institutions such as the Almeida Theatre, National Youth Theatre, and Guildhall School of Music & Drama. As the founder of the Size-Inclusivity Organisation, Ruth pioneers training programs that challenge conventional movement pedagogies, advocating

for body diversity and accessibility in rehearsal spaces. Her work emphasises the importance of creating environments where all bodies are represented and respected, addressing systemic biases within the arts. Co-founder of the Inclusion Collective, Ruth's practice intersects with neurodiversity, fat activism, and creative well-being. She has contributed to numerous workshops and discussions, including presentations at the Leeds Conservatoire, Spotlight Casting, and collaborations with Norwich Theatre. Ruth's commitment to fostering inclusive spaces continues to influence contemporary theatre practices. For more information on Ruth's work, please visit www.ruthannaphillips.com or www.sizeinclusivity.org.

Darcy Dixon

Darcy Dixon (she her) is a multidisciplinary creative: she is an actor, singer and movement artist born and based in South East London. Darcy is currently training at RADA on their BA Acting Course. She recently won the Luke Westlake Scholarship (2024). Darcy has also trained with Siobhan Davies Studios in an explorative practice of choreography, somaticism and movement and is part of the NEXT Artist Collective.

Alongside performing, Darcy is heavily involved in charity work in the sector that supports creatives from underrepresented communities. Darcy is a young advisor to The Harvey Parker Trust and a Trustee of Go Live Theatre Projects, a charity committed to making theatre accessible for all young people; namely those with disabilities or additional needs. She is passionate about the industry being accessible for all, regardless of intersection.

Previously, Darcy graduated from the University of Oxford in 2022 with a BA in Philosophy & Theology. From April 2023-24, Darcy joined City, University of London as a Creative In Residence. Currently an alumni, she continues to support their creative students and discover sustainable

creative practices. She is thrilled to be joining for this panel and Symposium.

Jasmine Thien

Jasmine Thien (she/her) is a fully blind, neurodivergent actor, writer, poet, comedian, and workshop facilitator of Southeast Asian Chinese descent. She earned her undergraduate degree in Education, English, Drama, and the Arts from the University of Cambridge, and she trained at East 15 Acting School on their MA Acting programme. She was shortlisted for the Outstanding Visually Impaired Creative Award in 2022, and her semi-autobiographical, one-woman show *I Dream in Colour* was shortlisted from the Charlie Hartill Award for Global Majority Artists in 2025. She was an associate artist with Extant in 2023, and an artist in residence with Apples and Snakes in 2023 and 2024. She is passionate about narratives centring what it means to occupy the space between intersecting margins, to explore the raw, the messy, and the painful, while celebrating the joyous and absurd thing it can be.

Sarah Wendy Burman

Sarah Wendy Burman (they/she) is an actor and theatre maker based in London. Originally from Southeast Alaska, they hold a BA in Theatre Studies from Wellesley College and an MFA in Professional Acting from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. They strive for truthful, embodied storytelling that is rooted in passion, collaboration, and joy. Sarah Wendy's other skills include making excellent soup and frighteningly accurate chicken noises.